

**Meaning and Sensemaking in High Performance Sport: Managing Change in the High
Performance Unit of a National Sport Organisation**

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ABSTRACT

Creating and regulating high performing cultures has emerged as a critical function of high performance sport management, however there is limited theoretical or practical clarity surrounding these organisational phenomena and processes (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Frontiera, 2010; Sotiriadou, 2013). This research investigated how a National Sport Organisation (NSO) could effectively promote a high performing culture within their high performance unit (HPU; CEO, performance leaders, players, coaches, and support staff of the national team) as they prepared for and competed in their pinnacle event, the world cup. To investigate how people worked with, interpreted, made sense of, and acted during manager-led change, this research used a theoretical framework derived from the organisational behaviour literature (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Rosso et al., 2010; Weick et al., 2005), and adopted the perspective that organisational culture and change involves a process of sensemaking and subsequent meaning construction (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008).

Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the research used an ethnographic action research (EAR) methodology to draw upon the experiences of living through change, and offer a rich, contextual narrative of a change effort with a national sport team. Using EAR, the research followed an entire attempted change process in depth from intentions and aspirations to responses and outcomes from multiple stakeholders and in real time. With an intended outcome of improving on and off-field performance, I collaborated with HPU leaders to identify specific issues, design interventions, action steps, and reflect upon outcomes, as the research passed through a series of intervention-action phases. As a qualitative inquiry spanning almost two and half years, the research employed varied methods including participant observation, informal and formal interviewing, artefact analysis and reflexive journaling to capture an interpretation sensitive to both local context and the participants.

Outcomes of the research highlighted the highly complex, multifaceted and situational nature of change in high performance sport, where changing the deeply embedded meanings of a national sport team proved to be a challenging task. Findings reported the importance of personal and shared experience, and identity and identification in meaning construction and change. Prevailing discourses and flows of power framed and frustrated change, and subsequently highlighted the importance of change interventions engaging stakeholders in constructing a meaningful local interpretation of organisational reality. Finally, the research revealed ten factors that contributed to the ability of the NSO to act as agents of change in the HPU. While the desired performance impacting change did not occur, there was evidence of personal and interpersonal change in discourse and thinking amongst HPU leaders. The findings inform management practice by promoting the role of meaning and sensemaking and reframing traditional paradigms of culture change in high performance sport.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
ETHICAL APPROVAL.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background and Rationale for the Research.....	1
Practical and Theoretical Justification.....	2
Establishing the Context: The High Performance Unit as ‘The Loosely Coupled’ Organisation.....	2
Organisational Culture Theory.....	3
Culture Change Theory.....	4
Meaning and Sensemaking Theory.....	5
Significance of This Research.....	6
Focus and Approach.....	7
Research Question.....	7
Research Assumptions and Method.....	8
Locating my voice.....	9
Thesis Structure.....	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Chapter Introduction.....	14
Managed Change and High Performance Sport Cultures.....	14
High Performance Sport Context.....	15
Organisational Culture, Meaning and Making Meaning.....	18
Processes for Making Meaning.....	21
Agents of Change.....	26
Change Models.....	27
Sensegiving and the Management of Meaning.....	28
Change Research in Sport Organisations and High Performance Sport.....	30
Synthesis and Implications.....	33
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	35
Chapter Introduction.....	35
Research Site and Participants.....	35
The Research Paradigm.....	36
Theoretical Perspective.....	36
Ontology and Epistemology.....	38
Postmodernism.....	39
Methodology: Ethnographic Action Research.....	40
Historical Traditions of Action Research and Ethnography.....	41
Ethnographic Action Research.....	43
Philosophies and Principles of Ethnographic Action Research.....	43
Designing the Ethnographic Action Research Model.....	46
Ethnographic Action Research Cycles and Phases.....	48
Undertaking the Fieldwork.....	51
Negotiating and Maintaining Access.....	52
Methods.....	55
Data Analysis.....	59
Time in the Field and Action Research Timeframe.....	61
Considerations of the Approach.....	61

Validity in Method and Establishing Trustworthiness	61
Ethical Considerations.....	63
Chapter Summary.....	64
CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION	65
Context and Issue Identification.....	65
Historical Context of the Research Site	66
The HPU at the NZRL	69
Sources of Meaning and Meaning Construction	75
Sensemaking Issues in the HPU at NZRL	82
Meaning Construction and Sensemaking Within a High Performance Sport Team	90
Framing the Action: Issues of Philosophical Alignment.....	92
Evaluation of Context and Issue Identification (Phase One and Two)	93
Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning.....	94
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH INTERVENTION 'MAKING MEANING: WHERE DO WE START?'	97
Strategies for Managed Change to Align Philosophies Amongst the HPU	97
Intervention One: The Professional Development (PD) Visit	97
Action Steps for NZRL	98
Engaging Cultural Advisor and the Emergence of an Idea	98
Cultural Presentation: Sound Boarding with HPU Management	100
<i>Te Iwi Kiwi</i> : Making and Refining New Meanings	101
Monitoring and Evaluating the PD Visit Intervention and Action	104
Conditions for Leader Sensemaking and Change	104
<i>Te Iwi Kiwi</i> : Leader Sense and Making Meaning	110
Evaluation of First Intervention-Action Phase (Phase Three)	118
Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning.....	118
CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH INTERVENTION ' <i>TE IWI KIWI</i> : SENSEGIVING, SENSEMAKING AND INFLUENCE IN CONTEXT'	123
Intervention Two: <i>Te Iwi Kiwi</i>	123
World Cup Action Steps.....	123
Composing the Haka.....	123
Whaikorero	125
Haka Practice	127
Poua & Tainui.....	128
Week to Week Preparation and 'Game Focuses' [sic].....	129
World Cup Final Week and 'Who do you play for?'	134
Post World Cup Final and Team Meeting	135
Monitoring and Evaluating <i>Te Iwi Kiwi</i> Intervention and Action.....	137
Sensegiving Practices	137
Extant Meaning Systems	145
Power Flows and Player Agency	148
The Success Illusion (A Cultural Snowball)	151
Evaluation of Second Action-Intervention Phase (Phase Three)	153
Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning.....	153
CHAPTER 7: EVALUATION OF INTERVENTIONS AND ACTION	158
Evaluating Cultural Change and Learning Within NZRL	158
Verifying the Issue and Solution	159
Time.....	160
Campaign Team.....	160
Authenticity.....	161
Content over Process.....	161

Researcher Reflection on the Issue and Solution	162
Identifying Change and Learning	163
Impact on Philosophical Alignment	163
Re-Building: Dismantle the ‘Brotherhood’	164
Collective Learning, Long-term Planning and Collaborative Leadership	165
Leadership.....	166
Selection: ‘The Right Blokes on the Bus’	168
Researcher Reflection On Change	169
Learning About Change, Culture and Meaning Construction	169
Importance of People	170
Ideological and Standards Driven Leadership	171
Daily Practices and Sensegiving	172
Importance of Collaboration	173
Researcher Reflection on Learning.....	174
Evaluation of Phase Four (Evaluation of Intervention and Action)	176
Research Reflection: Process, Premise and Content Learning.....	176
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	182
Chapter Introduction	182
Review of Research Aims and Main Findings	182
Implications for High Performance Sport Organisation Change Theory	188
Implications of the Ethnographic Action Research Method	189
Implications for Practice in High Performance Sport	192
Limitations.....	194
Future Research	196
Final Thoughts	201
REFERENCES.....	203
LIST OF APPENDICES	228

LIST OF FIGURES


Figure 1: Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991)	29
Figure 2. Research philosophies	41
Figure 3. Action research model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 564).....	43
Figure 4. Action research model (Cardno, 2003, p. 13).....	46
Figure 5. The EAR process model adopted for the research	49
Figure 6. Summary of research outcomes for phase one and two	96
Figure 7. Summary of research outcomes for phase one, two, and the first intervention-action cycle (phase 3).....	122
Figure 8. Summary of research outcomes for phase one, two and three.....	157
Figure 9. Summary of research outcomes for phase one, two, three and four	180
Figure 10. Summary of research outcomes in relation to research questions	183
Figure 11. Ten factors contributing to the NSO's ability to act as an agent of change.....	185
Figure 12. Summary of research outcomes for phase one through four and final research outcomes.....	201

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Research Phases and Timeframe	61
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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Student's Signature: 

Date: 23rd November 2015

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

Two ethics applications were made to AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEC) to complete this research thesis. The first ethical approval was submitted to and granted on 18th June 2012 (12/116), the findings can be found in Chapter Four (see Appendices A, B). The second ethical approval was sought and granted on the 26th July 2013 (13/163) and the findings for this can be found in Chapters' Five, Six and Seven. Approval letters from AUTEC can be found in Appendix E.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale for the Research

In recent years high performance sport has firmly established itself as one of the world's premier contemporary industries. Defined as "sport engaged in by elite athletes who achieve, or who aspire to achieve, or who have been identified as having the potential to achieve excellence in world class competition" (Bloom, Hughes, & Gagnon, 2006, p. ii), success in high performance sport competition is highly prized and lucrative, whether it is in domestic professional leagues or international events such as the Olympics or World Cups. Subsequently, managers in this high performance sport industry are required to produce world-class performance from those who aspire or show potential for such performance. For this reason, practitioners are continually pursuing new ways to ascertain and sustain success. Traditionally, the sport sciences have been the major contributor to excellence in performance. However, as nations are becoming more strategic in the way they produce elite athletes and teams for international performance (De Bosscher, Bingham, Shibli, Bottenburg, & Knop, 2008), they are looking beyond the simple application of sport sciences and coaching as the only bases for successful performance (Sotiriadou, 2013).

In the last 15 years global sport has professionalised and the performance environment has grown in size, sophistication and complexity (Sotiriadou, 2013). As a result, there has been a shift from practitioners 'on the grass' to managers who focus on establishing and maintaining a performance environment (Kellett, 1999). Researchers have started to examine the management and organisational factors impacting performance excellence (Arnold, Fletcher, & Molyneux, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Frontiera, 2010). Such research highlights the emerging and central role of culture as a competitive point of difference and the significance of its management-led creation and maintenance of a 'high performing' culture (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012). Indeed in the media, New Zealand teams such the Waikato Chiefs (Hale, 2013), New Zealand Breakers (Ng, 2013) and the All Blacks (Kerr, 2013) have all been lauded for their culture, which reportedly acts as the competitive advantage behind their sustained success. Conversely, culture has also been linked with performance failure and cited as underpinning a number of undesirable 'off-field' incidents (Bluestone Edge Ltd, 2013; Johannsen, 2014; Souster, 2011).

The reported link between culture and performance enhancement has seen the creation and regulation of high performing cultures emerge as a key contemporary function of high performance sport management (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). It has therefore become increasingly unlikely to find performance leaders, coaches and managers who are not concerned with the development, maintenance or change of culture (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014; Frontiera, 2010), as demonstrated by Super Bowl winning coach Pete Carroll:

In essence, what we are creating here is a culture...I see us connected, as one. So they have to function that way, and to do that, they have to think alike, talk alike, and act alike so they can support and reinforce the best in one another...Culture is just the mind-set that you allow to reside here. Cultural forces are the 'ghosts' that haunt your halls, locker rooms, fields and sidelines. (Voight & Carroll, 2006, pp. 324 - 330)

While there is no universally accepted definition of culture (Cavallaro, 2000; Hall, 1997), there is consensus that culture is the shared belief system of a particular group, produced by the complex social interactions and (sub)cultural socialisation that in turn shape individual and group behaviour, and arguably success (Berson, Oreg, & Dvir, 2008; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014; Frontiera, 2010; Kidman, 2005; Schroeder, 2010a). Schein (2004) recognised that while

culture is an abstraction, the forces that are created in social and organisational situations that originate from culture are powerful. It is clear that “elite athletes do not live in a vacuum; they function within a highly complex social and organisational environment, which exerts major influences on them and their performances” (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996, pp. 239 - 240). It is perhaps this acknowledgement, and the potential for shaping behaviour and resultant performance that has seen culture and cultural change gain so much interest.

The sharp interest in behavioural change and mediums for change, such as culture, has come about because of the challenging and pressured environment in which those leading high performance sport programmes find themselves. Indeed, performance leaders face immense internal and external pressures, and are required to deliver instantaneous and lasting high performance (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). For those in national sport organisations (NSO), as a result of performance outcome driven funding from governments (High Performance Sport New Zealand, 2013), future performance sustainability is often entirely dependent upon immediate performance. Further compounding the issue, the drive to attain the exponential prestige and rewards linked to on-field success (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007) means that “management turnover has firmly established itself as the elite sport organisation’s reflex to results which fail to meet (often less than rational) expectations” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b, pp. 338 - 339). The consequence is that high performance sport organisations are regularly involved in searches for performance leaders whose culture change programmes can “perpetuate beliefs, expectations and behaviours in players and support staff that support sustained optimal performance; in short, a high-performing culture” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a, p. 210).

The need for practitioners to understand culture and culture change and the potential performance benefits is clear in the literature (Arnold et al., 2012; Frontiera, 2010; Lee, Shaw, Chesterfield, & Woodward, 2009; Schroeder, 2010a; Voight & Carroll, 2006), however, there is limited theory on which to base practice. Underpinned by functionalist thinking, research within high performance sport to date has largely focused on the systematic development of the athletic individual (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, & Guinan, 2002; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001), the mechanistic processes and practices that reportedly foster elite performance (Green & Houlihan, 2008; Pain & Harwood, 2008), and the administrative aspects of leadership (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Little attention has been given to the position of the athletes and management as social actors in the performance culture of a group. Whilst some sport management (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a) and sport psychology (Murray, 2006; Sénécal, Loughhead, & Bloom, 2008) research has investigated these social influences, the broader social, cultural and contextual dynamics have been comparatively underexplored from a cultural perspective (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Given the recent identification of creating and regulating high performing cultures as central to contemporary performance leadership in sport (Arnold et al., 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Sotiriadou, 2013), this research explored a manager-led change initiative with a national sport team from an organisational behaviour perspective. Having located the thrust of this research, it is now necessary to explore the theoretical and practical justification beginning with defining the scope of the research.

Practical and Theoretical Justification

Establishing the Context: The High Performance Unit as ‘The Loosely Coupled’ Organisation

High performance sport teams exist within a wider organisational context (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). As Frontiera (2010) articulated, “professional sport is simply a business with a

unique product – a team” (p. 74). Short and long-term aspirations (and in many instances survival) are dependent upon organisations delivering a consistently marketable product, a winning team full of star players, who deliver entertaining performances to a highly demanding set of external stakeholders in fans, media, sponsors and the board (Mielke, 2007). The organisational context is reflected in the reported relationships between the performance and business domains of the organisation where effective change in the culture of the high performance (on-field) team has been linked to enhanced organisational-level decision making (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b), optimum coherency between performance and business faculties (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), and an enhanced organisation-wide performance culture (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

For the purposes of this research about culture and change, the ‘on-field’ team (and those responsible for team performance), termed the High Performance Unit (HPU) is treated as a distinct construct (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013). I have adopted the postmodern view of organisations as “loosely-coupled” with three key characteristics, “(1) they have smaller, autonomous units (2) that are innovative, proactive and market-orientated, and (3) are led by a lean corporate headquarters (Limerick, 1990, p. 24). These characteristics are seen in a national team HPU within a NSO, which traditionally consists of ‘contracted’ employees (management and players), and in some instances, part time coaches, all of whom are employed full-time at clubs or other organisations. These groups assemble sporadically for intense periods of time led from a lean organisational headquarters in the form of a CEO and a High Performance Director and act largely autonomously from the NSO. Finally, the distinct goals of any national sport team HPU are likely to be quite different to community, commercial or administrative equivalents.

With these considerations in mind, this research examined attempts to change or optimise the performance culture of a HPU¹ and did not address or evaluate the whole organisation’s culture (i.e., whole sport governance, community development, sponsorship or marketing and financial sustainability). In line with the complex nature of culture and change, the theoretical foundation for the research is derived from multiple domains, including organisational culture and sensemaking theory, to understand manager-led change in a national sport team.

Organisational Culture Theory

This research takes place against the backdrop of culture and cultural change theory. Over the last 25 years, with roots in anthropology and sociology, the concept of culture has become popular in organisations (Martin, 2002), sport organisations (Colyer, 2000; Scott, 1997; Weese, 1996), and more recently high performance sport (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014; Frontiera, 2010). Colloquially defined as, “the way we do things round here” (Deal & Kennedy, 2000, p. 4), organisational culture is viewed as the pattern of basic assumptions that guides organisational behaviour (Schroeder, 2010b), and is often referred to as the underlying glue that holds organisations together. In the high performance sport context, culture has been defined as “the shared values, beliefs, expectations, and practices across the members and generations of a defined group” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b, p. 340).

¹ Defined as anyone with direct responsibility for performance of the team and includes the CEO, high performance director, head coach, coaches, support personnel, and players.

Schein's (2004) organisational culture perspective posits that sport organisations are ambiguous, unpredictable and exist in open, complex environments. Culture forms as people search for and construct meaning from their lived experiences and social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bruner, 1990). The social interactions that take place within groups, including organisations and sports teams, shape the formation and content of the meanings that guides behaviour (Barker, 2008; Fine, 1979; Schein, 2004). Schein (2004) contended:

Culture is both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behaviour and a set of structures, routines, rules and norms that guide and constrain behaviour. (p. 1)

It is important at this stage to differentiate between a high performance sport culture and the hopeful destination for most change initiatives, the high performing culture. Cruickshank and Collins (2012b) highlighted the subtle difference between the two, and that whilst by definition an elite team exists within the domain of high performance sport and may achieve some levels of success, they may not necessarily be high performing, that is, they achieve regular underperformance relative to their resources. Considering the earlier definition of culture, Cruickshank and Collins (2012b) recognised that in sport, 'high performing' cultures prevail when the shared belief system and subsequent behaviour of members enables sustained optimal performance which is consistent over time (despite variable results). Voight and Carroll (2006) emphasised the motivation and autonomy of team members in a high performing culture viewing high performing as, "a 'want-to culture as opposed to a 'have-to' culture" (p. 325).

Despite recent interests in culture in high performance sport, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) argued that within high performance sport literature, "the tendency has been to overlook the climatic and cultural factors associated with the optimal development of athletes" (p. 428). Sport psychology's traditional focus upon micro-level interventions and sport management's macro-level focus upon issues such as governance have led to a blind spot within which climatic and cultural issues are located. This "twilight zone...envelops the organisational culture and climate in elite sport, together with how personnel and the environment are managed" (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009, p. 428).

Culture Change Theory

As organisations exist in open environments, the shared meanings that underpin an organisation's culture are changeable and dynamic and therefore culture too is changeable (Frontiera, 2010; Trice & Beyer, 1993). An agent (or agents) of change, using a variety of strategies, could either achieve hegemony where disparity exists, or change the dominant meanings of a team to the values and ideologies that would enhance performance. The essence of cultural change is defined by Cruickshank and Collins (2013) as "the management-led establishment of shared and group-regulated values, perceptions and behaviours across the performance department which facilitate enduring high performance" (p. 8).

Given the reported functional similarities between leading performance teams and leading businesses (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002), it is not surprising to find application of organisational culture change theory and models to team culture in elite sport (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a). However, Cruickshank and Collins (2013) were critical of the literature's macro level focus, persistent search for generalizability and anecdotal prescriptions and, as a result, question the applicability to culture change in high performance sport. Furthermore, many of the existing organisational change models portray change as a linear, technocratic, sequentialised and systematic process that can easily be interpreted and rationalised, where success is achieved in a series of 'steps'. This over simplifies the complexity of cultural change,

particularly in the performance sport arena (Frontiera, 2010). With successful change reported at less than 30% (Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2004), this challenges the efficacy of current understanding of culture change. In a different study only 19% of managers were reported as happy with the impact of their culture change efforts (Smith, 2003). As Cruickshank and Collins (2013) noted, the actual process of change in organisations appears to be considered superficially. Little seems to be known about the actual mechanisms for change, for example, exactly how managers create a shared vision.

The direct application of theory which has been developed and tested away from the context of high performance sport has left the “culture change practitioner facing educated guesswork rather than solid, evidence-based consultancy” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b, p. 343). The literature alludes to an increase in requests from the managers of elite teams for cultural advice from third party consultants who can lead and deliver cultural change programmes (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Gould et al., 2002; Timson, 2006), implying that performance leaders lack the skill, experience and learning to implement these themselves. Cruickshank and Collins (2012b) argued that in such a pressured environment, performance managers and leaders need greater support and education to negotiate and establish a culture that enables enduring high performance to enhance the longevity of individual careers and the success of their teams, performers and wider organisations. Therefore, the academic community should support the leadership and management within these institutions by examining and advancing effectiveness of culture (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

Cruickshank and Collins (2012a) identified some unique contextual complexities demarking high performance sport from its corporate cousins by way of the decentred power relations between and amongst a variety of stakeholder groups that are pivotal in shaping and constraining culture and change efforts. As a result, recommendations which are drawn from the organisational literature lack ecologically valid knowledge upon which practitioners can base their work (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Research is required to unearth the process through which performance director-led culture change can be practically delivered in the high performance sport context and theoretically understood (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

While recent work by Andrew Cruickshank and colleagues have broken new ground in challenging and critiquing traditional notions, the theoretical foundations of culture change in high performance sport are still in their infancy and require further investigation. The authors noted “the profession has almost no parallel understanding of contextually appropriate processes and mechanisms which can elicit robust, performance-facilitating values and beliefs in the members of the elite performance team environment” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b, p. 347). If practice is to advance and better equip performance managers and leaders with the knowledge and skills required to identify, manage and change culture in a complex, challenging and pressured environment, robust and varied research is required to build applied theory to support this industry. When considering culture and change, the very essence of culture is meaning (Schein, 2004). While Schein’s perspective offers a broad analysis, this research has adopted a view of organisational culture and change that focuses on sensemaking and the construction of meaning.

Meaning and Sensemaking Theory

As meaning is inextricably linked with culture, and culture shapes behaviour (Barker, 2008), the key to understanding change in any group context, including high performance sport, involves exploring how people interpret their experiences and how experiences come to be

viewed as important or meaningful (Bruner, 1990). Martin (2002) suggested that the meaning systems that underpin culture, those that shape the values and assumptions and cultural artefacts (stories, rituals and language, for example) are shaped by a process of sensemaking. Surprisingly few studies have explored the meanings that athletes (and management) construct and co-construct with respect to high performance sport competition (Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008; Tuck & Maguire, 1999), nor the features of the environment which trigger or inhibit sensemaking and meaning construction. Weick's (1995) perspective of organisational sensemaking describes the process of social construction as one whereby people negotiate their lives (with others) and confront events and then endeavour to interpret and explain salient cues based on their experience. In other words, to make sense of their experiences, people construct meaning that allows them to comprehend the world, act collectively and guide future behaviour (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick, 1995; 2009; Weick et al., 2005). Following this logic, it is through sensemaking that organisations are constructed and interpreted (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007); issues are noticed, shaped, interpreted and sold by some members to others (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Rubino, 2002).

For managers, sensemaking activities, such as scanning and identifying issues, significantly influence decisions and strategic change initiatives (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993). For other stakeholders, sensemaking powerfully influences how they construct their identities (Pratt, 2000), preserve their organisation's image (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991) and respond to organisational crisis (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1993; 1995; 2009). Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) highlighted that sensemaking activities are particularly critical in dynamic and turbulent contexts, such as high performance sport, where the need to create and maintain coherent understandings that sustain relationships and enable collective action is especially important and challenging (Weick, 1993). However, because sensemaking is a subtle, socially located process that is easily taken for granted, "the transient nature of sensemaking belies its central role in cultivating meaning and determining human behaviour (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). This perspective recognises socially discursive and educative practices in negotiating and cultivating meaning (Lesser & Storck, 2001) and how important it is for the manager who is leading change to create 'sensible environments' by identifying and understanding the sensegiving triggers of leaders and members (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

Significance of This Research

While sensemaking has been utilised to explore organisational experience and managed change in a variety of settings, few studies have explored the sensemaking process of meaning construction in sport. This lens of change enabled the examination of how research participants constructed meaning that consequently guided behaviour in the context of a managed change effort. Given the highly contextual nature of culture change in high performance sport (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013), meaning and sensemaking offered a theoretical foundation from which to explore culture construction in high performance sport, while also inductively building new theory of sensemaking specific to this context.

This research sought to extend current understanding of processes of culture change by investigating a manager-led change effort in the HPU at a NSO. While this research targeted the construct of culture, it encompassed aspects that were seen to impact directly on the effectiveness of the change initiative and the ability of leaders to 'manage meaning'. Clear gaps are evident in the body of empirical knowledge on cultural phenomena in high performance sport, especially as it applies to the effectiveness of planned change initiatives.

However, this lack of academic endeavour is not representative of the escalating interest from practitioners.

The findings from this research will contribute to this nascent body of high performance sport management literature a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of this subfield of management. This research presented a unique opportunity to follow culture and change in high performance sport within a New Zealand context. Finally, this research is also significant because ethnographic action research (EAR) was used to enable this research process to directly benefit the participating sport organisation in an attempt to create change and enhance performance. This novel approach to the topic and context generated rich data from which improved and contextually grounded approaches to culture and change were revealed. The practical implications of this study will directly benefit those in high performance director-style roles and since successful performance is the product of leadership influences in multiple directions (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012), the findings will also benefit head coaches, performance managers, disciplinary leaders, player leaders and organisational leaders, CEOs and boards.

Focus and Approach

Research Question

Understanding the factors that shape, constrain, inhibit and grow high performing cultures provided a theoretical basis for this research. The general purpose was to explore the phenomena of culture and change in the context of a NSO HPU, with the intended outcome being improved on-field and off-field performance as a result of enhanced understanding. Within the broader topic of cultural and change management, the project focused on the role of meaning to guide beliefs and behaviour, and explored key decisions and actions taken to enable key actors and agents of change within the team's culture to cultivate shared meaning and purpose.

The central research question "*How does the organisation act as an agent of change to effectively promote a high performing culture within the high performance unit?*" guided the direction of the research and was underpinned by five sub questions:

- *What are the players' sources of meaning when playing for New Zealand?*
- *How were/are these meanings constructed?*
- *What actions can be taken to foster meaning and purpose?*
- *What are the implications of these actions?*
- *What factors constrain or enable the ability of people to construct meaning?*

The term organisation was chosen for the main research question to acknowledge the lean leadership and loosely coupled relationships that exist in post-modern organisations like an NSO and its HPU (Douglas & Weick, 1990; Limerick, 1990), and in doing so keep open to all possibilities and not restrict or limit the research. The sub-questions had a particular focus upon the players' perceptions to better understand not only the intended messages from managers, but the meaning that had been actually been conveyed through the attempted change process. As the deliverers of the on-field product (performance) and considering theoretical and knowledge gaps in the literature, understanding change from the 'bottom up' by focusing upon the players perspectives sought to play emphasis on all actors in the culture and not just the traditional 'management' perspective.

Research Assumptions and Method

The paradigm chosen for this research was the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The characteristics of this paradigm include a relativist ontology (the presence of multiple realities), a transactional and subjectivist epistemology (investigator and 'object' of investigation co-construct meaning) and a hermeneutical, dialectical and naturalist methodology (research undertaken in the authentic, natural setting). Given these assumptions, the research product was intended to be an organic and authentic representation of localised phenomena.

The research question was designed to be both theory building and action orientated to offer practical solutions to a real world problem. Embedded in the question and chosen paradigm were a number of key assumptions. First, culture and change in high performance sport is context shaped and context specific (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013). Second, prevailing meanings and solutions are complex, hold multiple meanings for different participants, and are situational and context specific. Third, culture is complex, existing as an 'ecology' consisting of loosely coupled relationships where change is non-linear (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Douglas & Weick, 1990; Limerick, 1990; Weick, 1995; 2009).

Therefore this research did not attempt to prove empirical theory or seek explicit causal relationships between the behaviour of participants in response to action. Instead, the intention was to ask what is the prevailing cultural belief system and how do we change those meanings to promote a high performing culture. To do this, culture was studied within an organic and localised setting, that of a NSO HPU, with an appropriate methodology that considered multiple data sources and participant perspectives. Furthermore, both the researcher and participants were viewed as key participants and contributors in the research process (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010).

To best answer the research question and cater for the assumptions, the use of an ethnographic action research (EAR) methodology was chosen. EAR combines an ethnographic approach in an action research framework to "immerse and map a culture for the purpose of enacting an appropriate intervention" (Bath, 2009, p. 218) and to "address the identified gap between research and the ability to implement its findings" (Tacchi, Foth, & Hearn, 2009, p. 35). Tacchi, Slater and Lewis (2003) define ethnography as "a research approach that has traditionally been used to understand different cultures" (p. 3), making it a legitimate methodology for understanding communities like high performance sports teams and organisations. Being practice and change centric, this action research framework is particularly relevant to those involved in high performance sport and driven by performance and outcomes.

The EAR methodology uncovered cultural meanings and determined how a NSO can act an agent of change to promote a high performing culture within their high performance unit. The focus for study was the HPU at New Zealand Rugby League (NZRL). As discussed earlier, the absence of an understanding of the climatic and cultural phenomena influencing athletic performance (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; 2013; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009) established a clear rationale to adopt interpretive approaches in this research. Proceeding from an interpretive perspective, the meaning creating activities and cultural context were the central focus to gain a richer understanding of participants' lived experiences. Enacting Geertz's (1974) position that anthropologists do not conduct studies *on* villages but *in* villages, this research focused upon what was happening in and with, rather than on and to the NZRL. To achieve this I was embedded in all areas of high performance operations for a total of two years and four months, holding the position of 'High Performance Support' within the HPU. I was

responsible for performance analysis support to management and players (scouting and selection reports, video, statistics, GPS and wellness monitoring).

In the last fifteen years there has been a steady rise in the use of action research methodologies in sport related enquiries, particularly in the fields of sport psychology (Evans, Hardy, & Fleming, 2000; Hill, Hanton, Matthews, & Fleming, 2011), coaching (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; 2004; Kidman, 2005) and sport management (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; 2015; Skinner, Edwards, & Corbett, 2014). This can be attributed to an increasing demand to generate both scientific and practical knowledge (Sparkes, 1992) to improve sporting performance, rather than merely observe it.

Reflecting the highly context-specific nature of change, the value of an action research approach in high performance sport is potentially immeasurable as it facilitates real-time tracking of change, while ethnographic methods enhance research efficacy through researcher immersion in an unfolding change initiative (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b). This research presented a unique opportunity for inquiry with an often protected or silent group, to explore athletes' and managements' negotiated reality and to generate valuable practical action grounded in participant's lived experience. Despite a huge volume of research on organisational change, few studies follow a change process from conception to outcomes in real time (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). The EAR approach through its ethnographic immersion in a social system prior to and through a collaborative change initiative supported a more thorough understanding of the change experience (Bath, 2009). The collection of in-depth data and rich narratives of lived experience will help develop valuable, local and most importantly, practical theory as well as provide a better understanding of the ways in which a NSO can act as agents of change to promote a high performing culture within the high performance unit.

van den Hoonaard (2002, p. 123) commented that in postmodern self-reflexive research, "we must recognise that we are always producing two works – a research biography and an autobiography" (p. 123). Doucet (2008) highlighted the way researchers construct knowledge is in part the product of the set of relations they have with themselves and is deeply rooted in past experience in the sense our memories and versions of ourselves can emerge to shape the stories we tell and the knowledge we create. To mediate this influence on our research, Doucet (2008) argued there is a need to recognise and acknowledge our personal perspectives and the subconscious residual memories and social experiences that shape our research lens and to reveal them explicitly to the reader. Given the interpretive and postmodern nature of this research and its associated theoretical and epistemological underpinnings, it is important that I expressly reveal my personal and socially constructed cultural lens, my background as a practitioner and consequentially my interest for conducting this research.

Locating my voice.

The following represents a brief narrative about my lived experience and social construction. It explores the unique interpretations of the voices at play during my upbringing and how they have shaped my beliefs, values and perspectives to date. Particular attention is given to discourses of achievement, status, validation and acceptance. My intention is to overtly acknowledge to the reader my voice as the author in constructing the research text and subsequently how the cultural interpretations presented in this research are underpinned by my view of the world.

The role of achievement and status is a profound and dominant discourse for my perspective of the world; indeed achievement is a powerful shaper of my beliefs and behaviour.

British society places great emphasis on social class and social status, whether as a birth right or through personal achievement. My parents grew up in working class families in an industrial town that was struggling to find its place in a post-industrial era. For me, despite being born into a comfortable, middle class family, my early socialisation centred on what would be perceived as 'working class (capitalist) values'. Those are values that emphasised work ethic, loyalty, resilience, determination, humility and non-entitlement. My father was an embodiment of the capitalist ideal, the 'working class boy done good'. While this socialisation had reinforced some noble values, it also reinforced a resentment of those who do not share these values, or who display traits such as entitlement and arrogance. Working class values continue to frame my personal and professional lens as I interpret people's behaviours and actions, and negotiate social interactions.

In our household and our town (Gloucester, UK), rugby, and in particular Gloucester rugby club ruled supreme. The myths, legends and stories at play in my early childhood were that of my father's sporting and academic success in school, and how he was the first one in the family to get into a grammar school. The other hero in my childhood was my uncle, who was somewhat of a 'local legend' on the rugby scene, although he would never talk about it. I wanted to be 'just like them' (my Dad and Uncle). I vividly remember as a child, standing on the terraces or in the players' bar amongst the pipes and the beer, listening attentively to stories of Gloucester's working class heroes taking on and beating rugby's finest at the bourgeois London clubs. For me, rugby union as a sport, and Gloucester rugby club in particular acted as vehicles that served two purposes. First, they reinforced and perpetuated the values discussed above, those about the importance of loyalty to teammates, subordinating my needs for the team and the perpetual underdog. Second and, perhaps more significantly, they highlighted to my young self that if I was good at rugby in Gloucester that would give me great social status, and that if I was not good at rugby, I was unlikely to hold a significant social position.

The role of social status was reinforced through my experience of school, whereby the playground and the sports field were highly contested places of labels and categories. School centred on measurement, assessment, reporting and consequently formal and informal social comparison with peers. If the classroom was academic social comparison, the sports field compared physical prowess and sporting ability. For boys, reproducing masculine discourse, it was all about physical confrontation and athletic ability (Light, 2008), who was the biggest, fastest, and toughest, who had the most attention from girls and who was selected to represent the school in sport. Whilst my social order was constructed along lines of achievement, this achievement-driven ideology de-personalised me to a certain extent. People were labelled based on what people did and were good at, rather than according to who they were.

Failure made me more acutely aware of the value of achievement and the attendant rewards from teachers, peers and significant others. If you were deemed good (or 'talented'), you were better than your peers, you held status and were accepted. I was subconsciously conditioned to desire this acceptance and validation of my worth, and it in turn shaped my beliefs about achievement. I failed to make any sports teams at my primary school, and was not validated with the 'talented' label I craved. Against a backdrop of discourses of working class (masculine) values emphasising work ethic as well as well-meaning motivational support from my parents such as "as long as you work as hard as you can, no-one can ask anymore of you", I worked tirelessly at things I thought would validate my worth and give me acceptance, namely rugby and academic work. I found that, as I became quite good, I was rewarded with the social acceptance that I craved from my parents, teachers and peers. In light of my earlier

failures, I began to associate success with work ethic, and held a deeply learned belief that if you work hard enough at something you will achieve.

From the labels and resultant dichotomies that existed in my society, I was positioned, both by my peers and myself, in the hard work/talent dichotomy; that is if you have to work hard it is because you are not talented and vice-versa. I was an embodiment of this belief. I viewed my life as a lived narrative of the underdog story with me as a lead character battling away against the odds. My negative early experiences of non-selection and the placement of myself in the work/talent category meant I had a distain for the talented who did not or refused to work hard, and this surfaced in my professional life too, as a coach, teacher and academic. Here, I have subconsciously favoured the underdog who works tirelessly to achieve.

As a product of my socially constructed British upbringing, my cultural lens has been significantly scripted by Western capitalist societal values and ideologies, namely the performance principle, social status, and constructed masculinities. In this, I acknowledge the voices that inform my research lens, namely 'working class values', a personal need for acceptance and validation, and a distain for the talented, but lazy. This narrative and exploration of self is an ongoing process, one that permeated throughout the research and the construction of this research. This appropriately locates my voice as the researcher in this postmodern research project. Narrowing the reflexive focus, I will now locate my voice in academia and the research field.

Locating my voice in the field. As I have grown as a practitioner and an academic, my theoretical orientation has evolved over time, as have my views of research and myself as a researcher. It became clear to me that my educational experience was bound by power-ridden discourse privileging particular forms of knowledge, namely that of traditional scientific knowledge. Reflecting upon my high school education, the sciences and maths occupied a privileged position, and university places were offered based upon results in these 'academic' subjects. Consequently, my early socialisation ensured I vigorously pursued these academic disciplines at the expense of perceived non-intellectual subjects, such as the arts and languages. As for sport and music, they were merely forms of recreation. With that came what I now know as an objective, realist interpretation of the world.

I chose to study exercise and sport science at undergraduate level, which also reflected this objectivist scientific hegemony. Despite exposure to some introductory qualitative research, science dominated as I studied quantitative methods and the bodies of knowledge underpinned by such understandings, including biomechanics, physiology, social psychology and psychometrics. Indoctrinated into a scientific approach, I pursued an interest in strength and conditioning and undertook my honours research using a traditional positivist research design to 'test' strength training methods. This educational experience was primarily driven by 'natural' science and instilled in me a positivist and objective worldview; a belief in conventional, singular approaches, and black and white solutions to professional problems.

However, as a schoolteacher, sports coach and practitioner, I soon discovered that the 'real world' is far more grey. Athletes (and students) are all different and are unpredictable. Therefore my diligently applied (and somewhat) abstract scientific theories failed to improve the rugby team's poor performances. Through these experiences, my own perceived 'expert' authority was challenged. I was educated, understood the game, and had played the game to a reasonable level, yet people were wondering why my teams were performing particularly poorly. I questioned and reflected on my own practice in an attempt to find a solution. I became more

aware of the complex human and interpersonal factors involved in achieving sport performance, and sought to understand more about my role as coach.

A time of enlightenment for me as a researcher was when I embarked on a Masters degree in Sports Coaching. Studying alternative epistemologies added meaning to my experiences as a practitioner. Despite my desire to be perceived as a scientist (because a scientist is smart) and years of applying my science knowledge with relatively limited success, it made sense. While I had always understood and achieved well in the compulsory undergraduate sociology papers and had always been drawn to people's stories and experiences, I down played these achievements so as not to feel 'non-masculine'. Discussions and questions posed by my Masters lecturers exposed me to alternative worldviews, forced me to reflect in a new way on my 'real world' and lived experiences and, in so doing, I uncovered and questioned the subconscious views of the world that I held. Through this newfound awareness, I came to realise I was a square peg trying to fit in a round hole; traditional science was not the only way. I came to appreciate that while 'natural' science is integral in our understanding of the world, it failed to provide all the answers I thought it could. I took an educational 'leap of faith' and considered different ontologies and epistemologies, and the world became full of complex colour. I shifted my own systematic views of learning, performance and subsequent practice, and became acutely aware of the central role of people as the critical success factor in sport performance, and as a result, became fascinated by what I had once perceived as the 'touchy feely stuff'.

As a team sports coach, I focused on the interpersonal dynamics of group performance and so culture and its effect upon performance became a pertinent construct, coupled with cultural change processes. As a practitioner I reflected on my own positive and negative experiences of 'team culture' and change, and also listened intently to a close friend working for a professional sport team as he lived through a failed culture change initiative. I came to view successful sporting performance as a socially and culturally negotiated process as much as it is a bio-physical product (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009). Performance sport has been slow to embrace these particular theoretical and epistemological perspectives both in research and practice (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). In my epistemology, I became critical of what I termed a 'reliance on science', and began to consider this reliance in the quest for human performance.

My evolution, both academically and personally has continued throughout my doctoral journey. And while I have embraced the interpretive philosophies with great enthusiasm, I have also come to recognise that successful performance management requires one to maintain a somewhat pragmatic position, holding empathy for other epistemological and paradigmatic positions. This section has critiqued my role as researcher and participant and highlighted my socially constructed history that has both shaped the motivations for the research, but also the 'lens' through which the culture of the HPU at the NZRL was observed and interpreted by me. In doing so, I acknowledged my voice, so that the reader can be aware of its critical place when he or she is interpreting the forthcoming chapters, the stories (the data), the emergent theory, and the conclusions.

Thesis Structure

This introduction chapter has established a sound rationale for conducting the research. Next is the literature review, which establishes the theoretical framework that has guided the project. Chapter Two locates the research within organisational literature and moves from the broad idea of change and culture to the context of high performance sport, and offers a critical discussion of relevant applied concepts such as meaning, sensemaking and change in culture. Chapter Three establishes how the research question was answered, rationalising the chosen

research paradigm, discussing methodological considerations, and explaining the method, data collection tools and analysis. Chapters Four to Seven present the story, taking the reader on a cultural journey through the stages of the EAR model. The story is presented in chronological order to maintain authenticity and coherency. Finally, Chapter Eight offers a theoretical synthesis, as well as theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the findings along with research limitations and recommendations for future research in the field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents a background to the research of manager-led culture change within high performance sport environments. With a limited understanding of change and culture in high performance sport and as a consequence of the perspective that a high performance sport team exists as an organisational sub-unit, this literature review connects organisational behaviour theory with change efforts that take place frequently within high performance sport contexts. In terms of a theoretical framework I draw upon literature rooted in cultural thinking which focuses on meanings, symbols and social constructions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Garfinkel, 1967; Geertz, 1974; Martin, 2002; Vermeulen & van Slobbe, 2005; Weick, 1995) and has informed the social-psychology of organising.

The stage is set by locating the research as a study of change and focusing on issues in high performance sport and culture that require investigation. From the position that meaning exists at the heart of collective organising (Weick et al., 2005) and culture (Martin, 2002; Schein, 2004), relevant concepts, key issues, and frameworks associated with sensemaking and meaning construction in organisational settings are explored. This is followed by a discussion of various perspectives of change and change agency. The chapter highlights the predominant methods and approaches used to explore phenomena of meaning, culture and change in organisational settings and gives a sound research rationale by discussing gaps in present theory.

The literature review establishes that while culture is an important, intangible regulator of behaviour and that managing cultures and cultural change is a central activity for high performance leaders, an understanding of meaning, how it is constructed and the role of key agents within this process is underdeveloped in sport management and organisational behaviour research. To summarise, the research question is developed from the need to build knowledge around the social and psychological processes through which the cultural meanings that guide beliefs and behaviour are constructed and reconstructed during manager-led change.

Managed Change and High Performance Sport Cultures

A central tension driving discussions of organisational change is that “it would not be necessary if people had done their jobs right in the first place” (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Postmodern times are turbulent and imbued with radical change, where organisations must learn to adapt or risk failure (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Indeed, it is argued that not since the industrial revolution has dealing with change been of such importance (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Planned organisational change typically occurs in the context of some sort of failure where people have not created continuously adaptive organisations (Weick & Quinn, 1999) or, as Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) argued, “first there were losses, then there was a plan of change, and then there was an implementation, which led to unexpected results” (p. 20). Such is the growing popularity of understanding change in organisational contexts that it has become a distinct genre of organisational analysis (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

In reference to organisations, change is a shift “in how an organisation functions, who its members and leaders are, what form it takes or how it allocates its resources” (Huber, Sutcliffe, Miller, & Glick, 1993, p. 216). Organisational change has also been framed as confronting persistent behavioural patterns that block an organisation from higher performance, establishing its consequences and exposing the underlying values and assumptions that

shaped it (Beer, 2003). Gioia, Thomas, Clark, and Chittipeddi (1994) defined organisational change as “either a redefinition of organisational mission and purpose or a substantial shift in overall priorities and goals to reflect new emphases or direction” (p. 364).

The contemporary literature on organisational change reports on the importance of culture, where culture is either viewed as the central issue to be changed or something that requires serious consideration to facilitate effective change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012; Schein, 2004; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003). Specifically, within the high performance sport literature, culture is described as “a key driver of high performance” (Collins, Trower, & Cruickshank, 2013, p. 207).

The appeal of culture to those concerned with change in performance sport is its reported relationship with performance. An effective culture has often been used to explain extraordinary organisational performance (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003), organisational competitiveness (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008) and has been identified as a major factor that differentiates extraordinarily successful firms from their competition (Berson et al., 2008; Smith, 2003; Sorenson, 2002). Culture enables sustained, collective action by providing members with a similarity of outlook, priorities and approach (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003).

Cultural beliefs and assumptions can also impair performance, blinding the collective to the vital issues that lie outside the framework of organisational perception established by culture (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003). Such collective (cultural) blindness can lead organisations down paths often with dire performance consequences (Brooks & Bate, 1994; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003). Given this reported relationship between culture and performance it is of no surprise that culture and more importantly, the process of managed-culture change to promote or cultivate ‘high performing cultures’ has become such a popular concept in the performance sport industry (Arnold et al., 2012; Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Wagstaff et al., 2012). Before further discussing organisational culture and change, it is necessary to locate this research within the emerging, yet limited literature on high performance sport and offer a rationale for the application of organisational behaviour theory to the high performance sport context.

High Performance Sport Context

Cultural management and change is a pressing issue and core activity of performance leaders in high performance sport (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Sotiriadou, 2013). The need to quickly develop sustained performance impacting change and the cultivation of a high performing culture is an urgent concern for the profession, indeed career survival of those in high performance sport coaching and management is dependent upon it (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). While manager-led change efforts are almost commonplace, there is a scarcity of literature on managing change in high performance sport (Cruickshank et al., 2014). Organisations as cultures is not a new concept to the sporting industry, however much of the literature investigating culture and cultural change in sport has been largely undertaken at the organisational or company levels (Colyer, 2000; Lewis, 2003; MacIntosh & Doherty, 2010; Scott, 1997; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Weese, 1996). Culture has certainly emerged as a central construct in studies of high performance sport management, however it was not the explicit focus of those studies and the theory generated from those studies was from the perspective of organisational performance leadership (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Wagstaff et al., 2012).

Professionalisation and subsequent commodification of sport have driven high performance sport to adopt corporate models, where athletes are employees accountable to contracts and line managers, the team manager, coaches or CEO (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). Therefore, given the philosophical similarities between sport and business, it is of no surprise that research has come to recognise not only functional similarities between business managers and performance sport managers (Jones, 2002; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002) but also the value of high performing cultures to both domains of the corporate world (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Such linkages offer penetrating and pertinent reciprocal learning for both organisational behaviour and sport performance management research and practice.

Research which has used sports teams to study organisational constructs and theory (Carey, 2013; Frontiera, 2010; Goosby-Smith, 2009) has reported similarities between high performance sport managers and their business counterparts (Hughes, Hughes, Mellahi, & Guermat, 2010; Jones, 2002; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002) and has indicated the usefulness of mutual knowledge exchange between business and sport (Aoyagi, Cox, & McGuire, 2008; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2012). Using interpretivist approaches, two studies utilised organisational culture to explore cultural and change phenomena in the performance sport setting (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a) and both reported similarities and some homogeneity between the performance sport context and the organisational behaviour and culture in the corporate setting. Frontiera (2010) interviewed six general managers across three professional sports in the USA who had successfully brought their organisations through an organisational culture change process as evidenced by their respective team's on-field performance. Frontiera's findings made reference to common perceptions in organisational culture, for example, establishing values, reinforcing values through action, aligning decision making with values and being consistent. In a unique multiple case research study using organisational culture as a lens through which to explore the elite sport team context, Schroeder (2010a) investigated ten intercollegiate head coaches and their perceptions of how they brought about cultural change within their respective team to achieve on-field success. Schroeder's (2010a) conclusions were also consistent with features of and performance relationships found within the organisational culture literature (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Sorenson, 2002).

Despite similarities between corporate and performance sport management practices and the espoused potential for collaboration and exchange between the sport and business sectors (Jones, 2002; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002), recent applied work in culture and change management in high performance sport is critical of the direct application of business or non-sport organisational change literature to sport. Authors cite theoretical ambivalence, macro focuses that ignore process, and methodological shortcomings that fail to uncover or evaluate actual change mechanisms and which hold assumptions about direct application of organisational or sport management literature to the on-field team without rigorous testing (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; 2012b; 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2014).

High performance sport is distinguishable from its corporate cousins in a number of areas. In contrast to managers in contemporary organisations, high performance sport managers lead far smaller, highly interactive groups and are highly dependent on players and support staff to achieve on-field success (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Furthermore, the unique nature of those delivering the 'product', the on-field performers, are acknowledged as highly ego-orientated (Kingston & Hardy, 1997), extremely dedicated (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002) and in many instances, very highly paid (Sporting Intelligence, 2014). For this reason organisational theories have limited direct application to understanding and informing the practices of those leading high performance sport teams, where management practice that "fails

to identify then shape the perceptions of those delivering the product is a strategic, political and tactical faux pas” (Collins et al., 2013, p. 207). The literature points to a need for sport performance focused change research that acknowledges the unique context of performance sport (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2014), an ideal setting for exploring the impact of manager-led change, and the interplay and impact of change mechanisms (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014).

Literature related to the on-field high performance team has traditionally examined the dynamics of groups and teams through a sport psychology driven positivist paradigm, using popular, measurable concepts such as group cohesion and team building exercises (Aoyagi et al., 2008; Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003; Senécal et al., 2008). However, the complex social processes that cultivate meaning and shape culture and behaviour are not easily uncovered or measured (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Hofstede, Bram, Daval, & Geert, 1990; Schein, 2004). The dominance of objective psychological concepts, such as cohesion, may explain why interpretive understandings of team interaction and dynamics is a relatively emergent field and why few researchers have adopted a cultural approach to investigate group interaction in high performance sport. Encouragingly, a handful of scholars addressed the shortfall in cultural change management research in high performance sport, offering a cultural analysis in this distinct arena (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a).

Cruickshank and Collins (2012b) recognised two key contextual challenges that an agent of change must acknowledge, guard against and utilise, to deliver sustainable performance culture change. First, the cultural change agent must be acutely aware of the nature and distribution of internal power relations that are unique to the high performance environment. As highlighted earlier, many athletes in high performance sport earn considerable salaries (Howard & Crompton, 2002), perform in a public setting and receive considerable attention from fans and media. Greenleaf et al. (2001) identified that an examination of the ways in which the manager’s performance-driven values and practices continually align with and/or are shaped by performers’ needs, preferences and aspirations is required. Reid, Stewart, and Thorne (2004) further identified that the diverse professional disciplines in which the support staff operate create a potential for conflict and power struggles. Consequently, in such an environment, support staff can either derail or invigorate a programme (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2013a). Therefore a clear understanding of the flow of power and its distribution is needed to ensure player and staff satisfaction and unity. As a potential solution, Collins et al. (2013) noted that a non-hierarchical shared expertise approach to leading coaching and support sport teams was more effective in such an environment.

In addition, Cruickshank and Collins (2012b) identified external stakeholders as yet another contextual challenge for consideration. The perceptions and actions of certain stakeholders can directly influence the team’s success and subsequently the cultivation and maintenance of a high-performing culture. One notable external (to the team) stakeholder is the board of directors or governors which shapes conditions of change through support and resource provision (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b). Gilmore and Gilson (2007) identified that whilst board members are often experts in business they are not always experienced in sporting performance. Given the public and objective nature of on-field results, boards’ evaluation of team performance, performance leaders and staff is in a constant state of fluctuation (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Frontiera, 2010). In the high performance sport context, with power distributed across and within not only internal (the on-field team) but external stakeholders (CEO, board, media, sponsors) (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank et al.,

2014), management practice is highly contested, interpersonal and interactive, with high levels of overt and covert conflict (Collins et al., 2013). In such a decentred environment, hierarchical structures and approaches often fail or have limited impact (Collins et al., 2013). Acknowledging multiple views of participants (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014) and collaboration or conferring control to others are advocated, by several scholars, as essential for sustaining a high performance environment (Arnold et al., 2012; Collins et al., 2013). It is these complex, unique and contextual features of high performance sport that require the development of applied theory situated in this context (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013).

It is important to distinguish between the high performance context and high performing context. Not all high performance sport teams are consistently 'high performing', that is, they regularly underperform relative to their resource; similarly just because a team is competing on the world stage does not mean their culture is world class (Collins et al., 2013; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b). High performing cultures, on the other hand, have a shared belief system that sustains optimal performance consistently over time (despite variable results) (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b). Features of high performing cultures include high levels of peer challenge but low threat, effective two-way communication, clear task and role acknowledgement, well-managed positive conflict or constructive disagreement, a strong and mutually respectful and supportive team ethos and, in many cases, consistency of personnel. While these cultures undoubtedly require careful development and constant maintenance, once established they will generate both immediate performance and longitudinal rewards through constant improvement and adaption of process (Collins et al., 2013). Having located this research within the existing high performance sport literature, it is appropriate to discuss the concept of culture in organisations and its relationship with meaning.

Organisational Culture, Meaning and Making Meaning

During the 1970s, the application of cultural theory to organisations became a popular field of research (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Schein, 2004). Resulting from the success of Japanese industry, researchers found that Japanese companies operated differently from their North American and European counterparts (Slack, 1997). While the context of Japanese culture was clearly different from Western countries, it was the way these Japanese companies operated by using different beliefs, norms, values and understandings that was of interest to organisational and management researchers (Slack, 1997). This new ideology and approach to organisations was termed 'corporate' or 'organisational culture' (Slack, 1997) and has been the subject of considerable academic debate since (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Martin, 2002). However, as highlighted by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) an issue with much of the literature on organisational culture was that "the potential value of the culture concept easily disappears behind rather thin and superficial descriptions...characterisations are often used as slogans, wishful thinking and fantasies, rather than a way of gaining a deeper understanding of organisational life" (p. 35).

While there is no universally accepted definition of organisational culture (Frontiera, 2010), most converge on the idea of taken for granted, underlying meanings and assumptions that frame expectations, beliefs and guide organisational behaviours (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Martin, 2004; Schein, 2004). Put simply, culture in organisations is viewed as the pattern of shared meanings and assumptions that guides organisational behaviour (Schroeder, 2010a). Consequently, cultural analysis in organisations focuses upon experiences of people, their relations, meanings and emotions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Across the various definitions, there is consistency in the sense that culture in organisations is holistic, it incorporates the collective, is historically determined and socially constructed, it is imbued with

and characterised by anthropological concepts such as ritual, myth and symbol, is often vague and difficult to uncover or measure and, finally, it is difficult to change (Hofstede et al., 1990). As a result, researchers have focused on the way culture manifests itself in organisations (Smith & Stewart, 1999; Vermeulen & van Slobbe, 2005). Cultural traits are “a physical manifestation of a deeper and intensely more complex phenomenon” and therefore “understanding a culture stems from successfully translating information into meaning, every aspect of an organisation is symbolically representative in some way of its culture” (Smith & Stewart, 1999, p. 103).

Cultural research either views culture as a variable or as a metaphor (Scott, Mannion, Davies, & Marshall, 2003; Smircich, 1983). In research investigating culture perceived as a variable, culture is an attribute or something an organisation has. For those researching culture perceived as a metaphor culture is something an organisation is (Scott et al., 2003; Smircich, 1983). This research defines a high performing culture as a shared belief system in which behaviour of members allows sustained optimal performance (despite variable results) (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b). While the central outcome is a high performing culture (an attribute), the analytical lens adopted views culture as a metaphor, a context, in which organisations exist as a system of meaning, for exploring the social processes of organising, meaning construction and performance.

A widely acknowledged and influential model of organisational culture is that of Edgar Schein. This model consists of three interrelated levels: artefacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions. While the glue of culture in organised contexts, including high performance sport teams, is regularly reported as shared meanings and values (Frontiera, 2010; Schein, 2004), some authors claim these fundamental cultural concepts are limited, offering vague, simplistic and misleading interpretations of an organisation’s culture (Weick, 1995) and “are less valuable than most people seem to think in understanding and influencing culture” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008, p. 182). While some individual-level experiences of culture have been explored (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Harris, 1994), there is a paucity of work on how manager-led change efforts influence members’ experiences at the interpersonal level (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) and subsequently how these interpersonal experiences influence the efficacy of the change efforts (Kezar, 2013; Maitlis, 2005). The literature acknowledges that culture in organisations exists as a scheme of shared meanings that provide an anchor for beliefs and behaviour, however little is known about how the processes of making meaning and therefore change, are experienced at the individual and interpersonal level (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). Schutz (1964) reminds us:

As the social world under any aspect whatsoever remains a very complicated cosmos of human activities, we can always go back to the ‘forgotten man’ of the social sciences, to the actor in the social world whose doing and feeling lies at the bottom of the whole system. (pp. 6 – 7)

Cardador and Rupp (2010) argued that traditional research approaches to organisational culture have neglected the ‘micro’ factors, such as culture’s impact on the experiences of individual workers, focusing instead on the broader macro factors and traditionally valuing more the narratives of those in charge, the positional leaders. Culture in organisations encompasses both group and individual-level phenomena yet, to date, the individual, local dynamics of organisational culture change have largely been ignored (Maitlis, 2005). To understand culture and change in a high performance sport team, one must go beyond surface issues and constructs and look at the meanings, definitions and identities of the people involved (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). As Bruner (1990) argued, the key to understanding any group context, including high performance sport, involves exploring how people interpret their experiences and

how experiences come to be viewed as important or meaningful and subsequently shape the shared meanings that guide collective action. This has given rise to recent recommendations for anthropological analyses of organisations and management practices (Vermeulen & van Slobbe, 2005). If the essence of culture change is to change the system of meanings that are prevalent in the organisational environment and guide behaviour, it follows that any research of manager-led change must explore how particular beliefs, ideals, narratives and meanings are constructed and become meaningful. Therefore, while Schein's (2004) cultural model offers a broad and inclusive analytical perspective, this research adopted Alvesson's and Sveningsson's (2008) definition, viewing organisational culture as involving a process of sensemaking and subsequent construction of meaning and where culture is expressed in terms of language, stories, social practices or rituals and collective experience.

A social constructivist perspective links meaning and culture in that as people make sense of reality they construct meaning and where patterns of meaning become shared, this leads to the formation of culture (Barker, 2008). People construct meaning to orient themselves to the diverse events they experience and to make life more comprehensible (Bruner, 1990). This process is termed sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Organisations and groups, such as sports teams, are ambiguous and unpredictable and exist in open, complex environments (Schein, 2004; Weick, 2009) where members continually search and construct meaning about the organisation from their daily lives (Rentsch, 1990; Schroeder, 2010a). By members expressing their identity, thoughts and feelings about their world in ways which will be understood by each other, meaning is at the very heart of organisational culture (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008); "culture depends on its participants, interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them" (Hall, 1997, p. 2). Limerick (1990) considered that in the absence of the tightly coupled relationships and interactions of the past, meaning is the glue that binds organisations and is the only remaining anchor for collective action and performance. Therefore, meaning becomes a centrally important consideration in the context of this research. This is especially so in national team environments where athletes are present only for short periods with most of their time spent with their respective professional clubs.

Meanings may be constructed explicitly or embedded in behaviour in the workplace, and can be retrospective after a series of events (Isaksen, 2000). For Ashforth and Pratt (2003), meaning is the output of having made sense of something or as an individual interprets what his or her work means and the role the work plays in the context of his or her life. As organisations exist in open environments, the shared meanings are changeable and therefore cultures become dynamic (Frontiera, 2010; Trice & Beyer, 1993). If cultures are dynamic, an agent (or agents) of change can utilise a variety of strategies to either achieve hegemony where disparity exists, or to adapt the dominant hegemonies of a team to the values and ideologies that would better enhance performance. With meaning at the fulcrum of cultural construction, when investigating the belief systems that govern behaviour in organised contexts such as the high performance sport team, it is essential to consider the concept of meaning and how meanings are constructed.

The term meaning has been defined in a variety of ways. For example, it has been operationalised as purpose in life (Frankl, 1992), goal striving (Baumeister, 1991), goal appraisal (Emmons, 1986) and a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1983; Korotkov, 1998). There is consensus that the concept of meaning in organisations incorporates three perspectives; first, meaning as purpose or ideology, second, meaning as the intentions one holds, and third, meaning as cognition or contextual understanding and clarification (Chalofsky, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Consequently, meaning at work, like meanings constructed for

other experiences in life can be positive, negative or neutral (Brief & Nord, 1990; Isaksen, 2000; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). In practice, just because members attribute a particular meaning to something, it does not follow that the meaning is found meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010).

In conceptualising the role of meaning in the workplace, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argued meaning exists as a motivational construct framed by the interdependence of the sense of self, sense of work and sense of balance, he or she thus locates meaning as a deeper more complex construct than simply intrinsic motivation. Consequently, making meaning or creating a sense of significance was shown to be positively related to employee performance during times of organisational change (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schreurs, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2009). This research adopts Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) understanding of meaning construction, as both an articulation of understanding and an affective or attitudinal response.

From the literature review, meaning is determined in the relationship that exists between the individual and the environmental influences or social context (Rosso et al., 2010; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). While recognised across the disciplines as a product of constructivism, Ashforth and Pratt (2003) contend that organisational meaning is constructed individually, from an individual's perceptions or, socially, from norms or shared beliefs, or both. However, the two significant academic traditions that have informed research and understanding of meaning in work are psychology and sociology. Despite the performance impacting potential when people construct meaning in organised settings, Rosso et al. (2010) explained that there tends to be a lack of clarity in the field because of the diverse array of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches used to explore this phenomena. In their analysis of meaning in work research, they found that rather than taking a more comprehensive lens, research tended to examine singular factors of processes contributing to making meaning at work. This had led to failure in establishing a coherent identity, and, despite contributing to knowledge development in various fields, has also led to confusion about what is known about making meaning at work (Rosso et al., 2010). Therefore, where possible this literature review attempts to clarify such confusion by situating the organisational literature within its disciplinary roots of psychology and sociology to provide a logical and theoretical framework. Rosso et al. (2010) found that while scholars have approached meaning from an array of perspectives, literature centres on two key issues: how work becomes meaningful (psychological and social mechanisms) and where meaning comes from (sources of meaning).

Processes for Making Meaning

The literature offers various explanations of how the mechanisms or processes enable people to construct meaning in organisational situations. The mechanisms which shape perceptions about the meaning of work "range from intrapsychic processes emphasizing the fulfilment of the self to those that transcend the self entirely" (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 108). The process of constructing meaning has been positioned as a psychological necessity that draws on existing symbolic systems rooted in culture and language where a congruence between inner beliefs, desires and external events is achieved by the active organisation of the understanding of experience (Isaksen, 2000). Making meaning evidently becomes internal, personal and cognitive but at the same time highly social (Bruner, 1990). This dichotomy is reflected in the literature; research has largely focused upon the social-psychological mechanisms underlying making meaning in work, not the fundamental interpersonal or cultural processes facilitating the construction of meaning. Rosso et al. (2010) identified authenticity, self-esteem, self-efficacy, purpose, transcendence, belonging and cultural and interpersonal sense making as the integrated mechanisms through which people construct meaning at work.

Psychological perspectives. To date, the literature on making meaning in work has primarily employed a psychological perspective (Rosso et al., 2010), with the underlying presumption that meaning is grounded in the individual's subjective interpretation (Baumeister, 1991; Brief & Nord, 1990; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). The individual is prioritised and surrounded by a plethora of sources of potential meaning, and so becomes the "primary agency to...assess the meaning of work for themselves" (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 94). Within this tradition, the literature utilises a variety of definitions of the meaning, from general values and attitudes and beliefs about work (Brief & Nord, 1990; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999) to the personal experiences and significance of work (Sosik, 2000; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

Mechanisms centred on authenticity integrate various sources of meaning, both internal and external, to aid in the development of one's 'true' self (Rosso et al., 2010). Gecas (1991) identified authenticity, too, as a central underlying factor that enables individuals to construct a sense of meaning in their lives. People have been shown to achieve authenticity through a sense of personal engagement and immersion in work (Kahn, 1990; Ryan & Deci, 2002), by affirmation of valued personal identities (Gecas, 1991) and through congruency between values and work behaviour (Bono & Judge, 2003). The promotion of the authentic-self enhances meaning construction because it offers a deep authentic connection to oneself (Bono & Judge, 2003) and it enables feelings of internal consistency (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002) between beliefs, values and identities while working (Shamir, 1991).

Increased levels of self-esteem may also increase meaning in work (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991). Through accomplishment and affirmation experiences in work, there is an increase in perceived value and worth. Consequently an individual's perception of their contribution and capability are reinforced, which strengthens favourable views of the self, increasing the meaning given to the work (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991). Similarly, self-efficacy acts as a mechanism for meaning construction; individuals feel they have capability, competence (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991), personal control and autonomy at work (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As a result, they perceive themselves to be making a difference and as having a positive impact on that beyond themselves (Grant et al., 2008), giving greater meaning to their work. Although achievement is common to both the self-efficacy and self-esteem mechanisms, the former is achieved through control and autonomy, while the latter achieved through a sense of the self as worthwhile (Rosso et al., 2010).

A sense of purpose is an integral mechanism in the construction of meaning in work (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002), but also life and existence (Frankl, 1992). Meaning is sourced through a sense of purpose in a number of ways. First, experiences become meaningful when they affirm that one's actions have significance and purpose or assist in achieving a desired future (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Grant et al., 2008). Moreover, work is experienced as deeply meaningful when it is perceived as being important to a community, society or spiritually (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Grant et al., 2008; Lips-Wiersma, 2002a; 2002b; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Second, when an individual has a clear sense of purpose he or she is able to connect present experiences to future desired or anticipated experiences (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002), and summon deep intrinsic motivation and a sense of persistence in the face of challenges (Antonovsky, 1983). Finally, participation in a larger system of shared values cultivates a common purpose by providing an ethical compass to guide perception and behaviour (Ros et al., 1999). Meaning is constructed when work exists within a system with shared values and as a result of the assurance an individual feels when acting in accordance with a values base (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).

Although related to purpose, transcendence or connecting to something greater than the self and beyond the material world (Maslow, 1971) is a regular theme in literature as to how people construct meaning in their work (Frankl, 1992; Lips-Wiersma, 2002a). Work is meaningful when individuals can subordinate themselves to the group (Frankl, 1992) and connect or contribute to something greater than the tangible self, such as the organisation, family, a cultural group or the divine (Lips-Wiersma, 2002a). Meaning through transcendence, and the required subordination to others creates a dialectical tension with the mechanisms such as self-esteem or efficacy, which both seek control and autonomy over work (Rosso et al., 2010). However, it is posited that these mechanisms do not work in isolation but in synthesis and unison (Rosso et al., 2010).

As a result of our drive to be part of desirable social groups, such as winning sports teams, people experience significant meaning from the sense of belonging achieved through group membership, identification and experiences of connection to groups in work (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Kahn, 2007). The positive experiences of shared common identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000), togetherness, interpersonal closeness, comfort and support (Dutton et al., 2006; Kahn, 2007) also foster considerable meaning. These are particularly powerful where group membership engenders a sense of value and distinction in comparison to others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989). There is a considerable affective connection between meaning construction and belonging because individuals feel as though they belong to something special (Hogg & Terry, 2000). In addition, membership in an established social group or category may not only become meaningful, but may also expose the individual to an already established set of constructed meanings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Isaksen, 2000). Rosso et al. (2010) asserted this perspective adds a social and affective mechanism to meaning construction, in synthesis with introspective, self-based and cognitive mechanisms.

The vast majority of meaning making research in organisational studies focuses upon the experiences, cognitions and feelings of the individual, it is the cultural or societal forces shaping meaning making that is particularly salient for this research. While all of the mechanisms discussed above are important in understanding the way in which individuals draw on sources to construct meaning at work (Rosso et al., 2010), the literature reports that creating, changing or discarding meaning frameworks is not only a function of an individual's cognition but is impacted by social structures (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick, 2009) and their influence upon meaning making should not be underestimated (Schwandt, 2005). The role of cultural and interpersonal sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) is particularly relevant for research concerned with managing change to promote a high performing culture amongst a group of high performance athletes and related management personnel.

Sensemaking perspectives. The sociological perspective of organisational meaning making, termed sensemaking (Weick, 1995), recognises that individuals ascribe meaning to experiences or come to see particular parts of their lives as more, or less, meaningful in ways that reflect culturally or socially prescribed value systems and worldviews (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; 1995; Geertz, 1974). The sensemaking perspective emphasises sociocultural forces and the role of the social landscape in understanding how significant meaning is constructed (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

Sensemaking is a process of social construction, whereby, people negotiate their organisational lives, confront events and endeavour to interpret and explain salient cues based

upon their experience (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). As people make sense of their experiences, they give meaning to them and in turn this guides future behaviour (Weick, 1995). Maitlis and Christianson (2013) summarised that sensemaking is triggered when people in organisations encounter something ambiguous, something that violates expectations or is perceived as significant to them. In such instances individuals will challenge fundamental assumptions (meanings) about how they should act.

The theoretical development of sensemaking and its application to organisations is largely credited to Weick (1979; 1988; 1993; 1995; 2009; 2010) and of its numerous theoretical foundations the major origins lie in social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), American pragmatism (James, 1950) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Complimentary research has explored the interpersonal (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) and social processes (Maitlis, 2005) of sensemaking, leader (Bartunek et al., 1999), middle manager (Hope, 2010; Rouleau, 2005) and member perspectives (Humphreys et al., 2012), the roles of narrative (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) and identity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), along with the influence of different contexts, such as crisis (Weick, 1988; 1993), strategic change situations (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Carey, 2013; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), symbolic leadership (Frost & Morgan, 1983; Gioia et al., 1994), pressure (Cornelissen, 2012), and emotion (Maitlis et al., 2013) on shared understanding and collective action. The relevance of sensemaking to research about change in a high performance sport team lies in its local practical application, “the central concern of sensemaking is understanding how people in organisations construct meaning and reality, and then exploring how that enacted reality provides a context for organisational action” (Choo, 2001, p. 337).

Weick (2009) postulated that there are a number of intermingling ‘sensitising concepts’ underpinning the process of ‘making sense’. The first is the role which identity plays as individuals interpret events and enact (Currie & Brown, 2003; Pratt, 2000; Weick et al., 2005). Second, sensemaking is inherently a social activity, whereby plausible meanings and narratives are constructed, shared and retained (Maitlis, 2005; Rentsch, 1990); these narratives are “both individual and shared...an evolving product of conversations with ourselves and with others” (Currie & Brown, 2003, p. 565). Third, retrospection influences what people notice and provides the opportunity for sensemaking (Dunford & Jones, 2000). Retrospection occupies a similar position to reflective practice (Dewey, 1910; Schön, 1995); it allows both the individual and the collective to make sense of the milieu into which athletes, coaches and support staff are thrown. Next, individuals extract cues from the environment which act as frames of reference in linking ideas or simple, familiar structures to larger networks of meaning (Weick, 1995). The fifth concept postulates that people concurrently shape and react to the environments they encounter, thus sensemaking is an ongoing process (Weick, 2009). The penultimate concept is that people favour plausibility over accuracy in accounts of events and experiences (Currie & Brown, 2003). Weick (1995) explained that, “in an equivocal, postmodern world, infused with the politics of interpretation and conflicting interests and inhabited by people with multiple shifting identities, an obsession with accuracy seems fruitless, and not of much practical help, either” (p. 61). The final concept is the concept of enactment, that people enact the environments they face in narratives (Bruner, 1991; Currie & Brown, 2003) to help them understand what they think, to control and predict events (Weick, 1995) and, to reduce the complexity of change (Kumar & Singhal, 2012).

A sensemaking understanding of high performance sport team cultures celebrates the agency of individuals in constructing the meaning of their experience (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Human agency is the capacity for people to make choices and, in particular, it

encompasses both the creativity and the motivation that drives individuals to break away from scripted patterns of behaviour (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). When people question their path of actions in response to an experience, this brings meaning to existence, a meaning that will guide actions in future. Where this experience is shared, sensemaking forms the collaborative medium that constructs shared understanding and awareness from disparate individual interests and perspectives (Rentsch, 1990; Weick, 1995). Refining this perspective, Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) used social information processing theory to explore an organisational social process, which they termed interpersonal sensemaking. This approach suggests that individuals examine the social landscape; they read and interpret cues in their work environments that directly and indirectly shape the meaning of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Furthermore, sensemaking in organisations has been recognised as a way of establishing shared and collective purpose amidst ever changing and unstable conditions (Bennis, 2009; Driver, 2007a; Markow & Klenke, 2005; Rentsch, 1990).

Sensemaking challenges the assumption that the locus of meaning is solely internal and introspective, and assumes that meaning is a social construction shaped by context, environment and experiences of the individual as well as culturally bound by social cues and interpretations available to the collective (Bruner, 1990). Consequently sensemaking offers a theoretical lens through which the relationship between culture, meaning and change can be explored (Weick, 1995), while also allowing consideration of the forms of distributed power unique to high performance sport (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014).

In focusing on the retrospective construction of plausible meanings that subsequently rationalise what an individual does in response to organisational experience (Weick, 2009; Weick et al., 2005), sensemaking becomes “about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery” (Weick, 1995, p. 8). Practically, this features in the notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy whereby expectations are real (Weick, 2009). The self-fulfilling performance impacting (or diminishing) role of sensemaking is therefore of particular relevance to research about manager-led change to promote high performing cultures in a high performance sport team.

Sensemaking and culture are interdependent on multiple levels (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003) as individuals negotiate (vertically and horizontally), legitimise, politicise and enact the meanings that guide behaviour through processes of sensemaking (Eero, 2003). This social constructivist understanding recognises that meaning cannot be understood outside of its cultural context (Bruner, 1990). Where people are acting in a collective, meaning making is central because it is the primary site where meanings which inform and constrain identity, understandings and behaviours materialise (Weick, 1995). It is through sensemaking that organisations are constructed and interpreted (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), and issues are noticed, shaped, interpreted and sold by some members to others (Dutton et al., 2002; Rentsch, 1990). However, given that meaning making can be a subtle, socially located process and easily taken for granted, “the transient nature of sensemaking belies its central role in cultivating meaning and determining human behaviour” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). This perspective recognises the importance of socially discursive and educative practices in negotiating and cultivating meaning (Lesser & Storck, 2001; Sonenshein, 2007; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Thus, when considering change in the context of high performance sport, there are two layers of sensemaking, that of the change recipients in response to a manager-led change effort and that of the manager or change agent as a consequence of his or her experience, with both, to varying degrees, being interdependent (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Having considered the

processes of how meaning is made, I will now discuss the sources of meaning that are drawn on to construct meaning in the organisational context.

Sources of meaning. Scholars researching meaning in work have considered a plethora of antecedents that shape constructions of meaning. Naturalistic enquiries into meaning construction at work suggest that individuals use a variety of sources of meaning simultaneously and it is in the alignment or combination of these sources that meaningfulness is found (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). These range from focusing on the individual, or self (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and broadening to organisational issues (Brief & Nord, 1990; Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and beyond, including the well versed notion of spirituality (Driver, 2007a; Lips-Wiersma, 2002a; 2002b).

It is clear from the literature that meaning construction is complex; it is shaped within the context of many possible sources and processes of meaning, each interrelated (Rosso et al., 2010). Bruner (1990) contended that meaning arises from the interdependency of cultural and psychological factors, where neither one nor the other acts in isolation. The literature hints at the need for greater attention to be given to the symbolic and influence processes that create and legitimise the meaning of the change (Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994).

Agents of Change

When considering cultural change in organisations, Scott et al. (2003) explained that underperforming groups may require a change in culture (improvement in current practice) or a change of culture (introduction of new belief systems) or, in many instances, elements of both. Brooks and Bate (1994) referred to these as first and second order change, where first order change is consistent with existing meanings and beliefs, and second order change is a schematic shift that alters the content of meanings and requires new learning. The review presented here aims to introduce and summarise the organisational change literature that is most salient to the present study.

The most universally popular paradigm of cultural change is Schein's (2004) leader driven perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a). According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008), this popularity is largely due to the central agency afforded to management and accompanying optimism about ease of change and impact. The leader driven perspective gives agency to the positional leader(s) and they become the key agents of change. From this perspective, it is often necessary for leaders of high performance sport teams to facilitate change of the culture to bring about performance improvements (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a). Younger organisations might require culture creation by leaders, more mature organisations might require subcultural diffusion or, if dysfunctional, wholesale cultural change. Whilst leadership has been studied in far greater detail than organisational culture, Schein (2004) recognised the symbiotic relationship between leadership and culture arguing, "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture" (p. 11). Neither leadership nor culture should be evaluated in isolation, as they are "two sides of the same coin" (p. 10). However, while this perspective draws upon the legitimate power and authority imbued upon positional leaders by the position they hold (French & Raven, 1959), it traditionally views leadership, power and influence as hierarchical and position centric, ignoring that a person may hold a position but not be influential, and conversely an individual may not hold a position yet may be viewed as a leader by their peers and thus highly influential. Considering the unavoidable position of leader in manager-led change, it is necessary to briefly discuss appropriate models of change within the literature.

Change Models

Given the emphasis on charismatic, transformational leadership, many of the traditional perspectives of change are understandably management centric, focusing on managers' (as change agents) actions and favouring the intervention or 'grand project' concept (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006).

Planned, episodic change. Planned change, often termed strategic change, is a significant theme within the organisational culture and sensemaking literature especially where change interventions have been shown to trigger sensemaking and influence change both positively and negatively (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gioia et al., 1994; Mantere et al., 2012). Planned change perspectives tend to assume that change can be accomplished with detailed planning and subsequent execution by leaders who assume the role of agents of change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Commonly framed as infrequent, discontinuous and intentional, planned change efforts tend to occur as episodes in response to external events such as personnel or structural change (Weick & Quinn, 1999) and are accompanied by revolutionary and transformational narratives (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). From perceived misalignment (by leaders) between an inert culture and perceived environmental demands, planned change can directly target organisational meanings from which changes in practice follow (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994; Weick & Quinn, 1999) or may begin with structural transformation that disrupts existing organisational meanings and triggers sensemaking from change in daily practice (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Mantere et al., 2012).

Various practice models exist, from the 'recipe for success', cliché abundant and happy ending pop-management writings (Alvesson, 2013), where transformation can be achieved in six steps (Frontiera & Posner, 2012), to the (North American hegemonic) academic research of the business and corporate sector, such as Dawson's (2003) five step model or Kotter's (2012) eight-stage change process which endeavour to reduce meaningful change to a series of manageable (and achievable) steps. One popular episodic style model is Schein's (2004) three-stage culture change model.

Grounded in Lewin's three-stage change theory (1946), the positional leader is first required to expose the organisation's culture to group members to create an awareness amongst members that the group's culture is problematic (this stage is called 'unfreezing') (Schein, 2004). This process is best achieved by imparting 'disconfirming data' that shows the group its goals are not being met. This process creates survival anxiety amongst cultural members and an awareness that if change is not initiated, the consequences for individuals, groups and the organisations will be dire (Schein, 2004). Once survival anxiety is created, the positional leader begins the second stage of 'cognitive restructuring', where he or she uses a variety of tactics to create a shift in meaning, constructing alternative values and changing behaviours (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Schein (2004) identified a number of primary and secondary mechanisms that can embed and communicate desired meanings. Primary cultural creators include those things to which key decision makers pay attention, measure and control, their deliberate teaching and role modelling, how they allocate resources, rewards and status, and how they recruit, select, promote and excommunicate. These primary mechanisms are supported by secondary mechanisms such as organisational design and structure, systems and procedures, physical space and building design, stories about important events and formal statements of organisational philosophy (e.g. charters and creeds). In the third and final stage, 'refreezing', the positional leader reinforces the new meanings and demonstrates that the new culture has succeeded by linking success with the new meanings and values. This can be

accomplished with confirming data from both the internal and external environment, in performance sport, externally this could mean competition results (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a), or internally through performance analysis, feedback processes or qualitatively from internal sources.

Openly critical of Schein's model of cultural change and its application to high performance sport, Frontiera (2010) argued that the three step process risks over simplifying a highly complex and contested process, which is notoriously difficult to achieve (Smith, 2003). Further criticism is that linear change models, such as Schein's, view of meaning construction in a way that trivialises the 'managing of culture', exalting the positional leader to the role of creator of culture (Alvesson, 2013). In doing so it fails to recognise the roles of other key actors in the cultural space and the parts they play in accepting or resisting cultural change initiatives (Martin, 2002). Given the established social nature of constructing a group's culture and contrasting episodic, linear step intervention style change projects, another perspective of change is that of continuous change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Continuous change. Continuous change theory looks to the experiences, feelings and sensemaking of those within the change process (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Change in organisations is not static; it is dynamic and enacted (Weick, 2009; Weick & Quinn, 1999), and is constructed or destroyed daily through talk and action (Gray, Bourgon & Donnellon, 1985; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Thus culture becomes a context through which organisational identity is interpreted and formed rather than measured and controlled (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Dovetailing with meaning and sensemaking, perspectives of continuous change view organisations as being in a constant state of flux and identities, experiences and interpretations of all within the organisational milieu as central to understanding change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). This interpretive perspective redefines the role of the agent of change as a creative and imaginative one, where "in the chaotic world, a continuous stream of ecological changes and discontinuities must be sifted through and interpreted...abandoning the prescription that organisations should adapt to their environments; rethinking constraints, threats and opportunities and considering the primary role of strategic managers to be the management of meaning" (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985, p. 730).

Sensegiving and the Management of Meaning

'Sensible environments', those that are rich for sensemaking and meaning construction, are shaped by identifying and understanding sensegiving triggers, enabling the act of sensegiving by leaders and members (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) and the socially discursive and educative practices in negotiating and cultivating meaning (Eero, 2003; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Sonenshein, 2007; Wood & Bandura, 1989). The relationship between meaning, culture and manager-initiated change has led to the emergence of leaders who are "no longer the rational analysts of a few years ago; they are managers of vision, of mission, of identity, of culture. They are managers of meaning" (Limerick, 1990, p. 22).

These constructions become important when considering the position of the performance director or head coach of a national sport team. Performance leaders or head coaches have "declarative powers" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 143) and are in the privileged position to "introduce a new discursive template for organisational members to notice new things, make fresh distinctions" (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 579). The literature which is generally concerned with the behaviour of those in leadership roles, refers to these leaders influencing audiences in the direction of a preferred definition of reality as sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Goosby-Smith (2009) cited a key role of a sports coach as a sensemaker, sensegiver

and driver of intentional change. Whilst a useful starting point, his study failed to interpret the role of the coach in guiding the sense that athletes make of a performance sport experience.

From an ethnographic case study of manager-led strategic change, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) offered an influential model that synthesised both sensemaking and sensegiving, viewing the two as interrelated and existing in iterative, sequential and reciprocal cycles across vertical and horizontal organisational structures (see Figure 1).

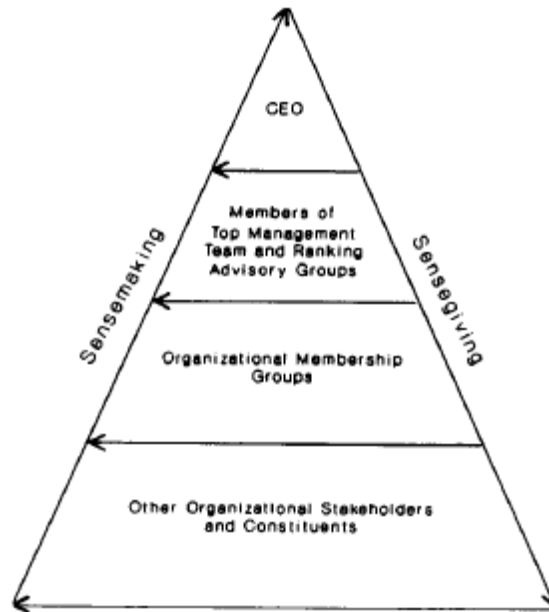


Figure 1: Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991)

The model consists of four stages of sensemaking and sensegiving. Stage one, at the apex of the model is the 'envisioning' phase and concerns the cyclical sensemaking effort made by the positional leader, the CEO, who makes sense of a new situation by constructing a guiding vision for the organisation. Stage two ('signalling'), is a sensegiving effort by the positional leader, who attempts to communicate the vision for the new reality to stakeholders and groups. Stage three ('re-visioning') constitutes sensemaking by stakeholders to interpret and make sense of the meaning of the communicated vision. The fourth stage ('energising') consists of sensegiving by the change recipients who, having made sense of the vision, attempt to enact and realise it in practice. This phase is also permeated by the emergence and communication of commitment by leaders and stakeholders to actioning the vision and acts as a feedback loop to the positional leader and top management team highlighting the sensegiving and sensemaking activities of stakeholders. These activities subsequently lead to sensemaking by the top management team and some modification or 're-visioning' of the initial espoused vision.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) conceptualised the relationship between sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change as parallel cycles of cognition and action, and understanding and influence, where sensemaking exists for the self and sensegiving for others. Others argued that the delineation and personal/social dichotomy is less clear (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). The study and resultant model has however highlighted that sensemaking and sensegiving exist as central processes in managed organizational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and provide an alternative lens through which to view manager-led change.

Through the concept of the management of meaning (Smircich & Morgan, 1982) scholars reported a politicising of meaning, and have been critical of organisations and leaders

for leveraging meaning through sensegiving to foster motivation and attachment to the work or an organisation (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). However, the influence of sensegiving efforts in defining the ideological reality of others (particularly by those in positions of positional power) has more recently been revealed as less tightly coupled than earlier thought (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Hope, 2010; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Critics argued that attempting to coercively manage meaning through some leadership and cultural practices may actually reduce the experience of meaning through dissimilarities in power, autocracy, controlling the affective domain, and the use of meaning as a form of normative control (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Long & Mills, 2010). However, that said, through sensemaking, meaning can be constructed with a degree of social justice if it emerges from the individuals and working group as Bennis (2009) contemplated, “at the core of these ideas is the recognition that meaning is rooted in the group and collective” (p. 159).

When considering manager-led change, while sensegiving implies the use of manipulation and coercion to trigger sensemaking and change, the dialogic properties of sensegiving and sensemaking and individual agency is still central. Where despite manipulative potential, the leader is still communicating with a living and interpreting audience (Smerek, 2010) and intended meaning may not embed and in fact instigate a search for new meaning. Sensegiving is enabled by both the discursive ability of leaders and members to construct and articulate persuasive accounts, and the routines, practices and structures that afford time and opportunity for members to engage in mutual sensemaking and sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Kezar’s (2013) study of sensemaking and sensegiving from a bottom up perspective (change led by people not in authority positions) found three key elements to transformative change, the depth of process, breadth of engagement and connection to strategies and barriers. The depth of process referred to sensegiving efforts moving from superficial to deep understanding, whereas breadth of engagement referred to organisation wide engagement, horizontally and vertically with all stakeholders. The third key element in transformative change was sensegivers who connected sensegiving with barriers to overcome and intended strategies. It is now necessary to return to the context of study, to report the pertinent research of change in sport organisations and in particularly high performance sport.

Change Research in Sport Organisations and High Performance Sport

With contemporary sport adopting commercial and corporate models (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007), it is not surprising organisational change and shifting cultural practices in sport organisations has become a popular topic for research (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004a; 2004b; Girginov & Sandanski, 2008; Skinner, Stewart, & Edwards, 1999; Slack & Hinings, 1992; Smith & Shilbury, 2004). Organisational change and culture has been explored in national (Amis et al., 2004a; 2004b; Girginov & Sandanski, 2008; Slack & Hinings, 1992), regional (Colyer, 2000; Skinner et al., 1999) collegiate (Scott, 1997; Smart & Wolfe, 2000) and professional sport organisation contexts (O’Brien & Slack, 1999). In a similar tradition to the broader organisational research, culture has been identified as a competitive advantage and critical success factor in both the success of on and off-field organisational performance of sport organisations (Smart & Wolfe, 2000). Successful change in sport organisations is reported result from effective transformational leadership and organisational structures that promote shared power amongst organisational staff and volunteers (Amis et al., 2004b). In a longitudinal study of change at the Queensland Rugby Union, Skinner et al. (1999) reported change in sport organisations as complex and chaotic, whereby change filters through the organisation with differing implications at different organisational levels. Of particular relevance to this study, they

reported differing change outcomes experienced by the elite and community faculties of the organisation in response to same change in environmental conditions. This further confirms the rationale of examining the high performance team as a loosely-coupled organisational unit. Smith and Shilbury (2004) investigated Australian national and state sport organisations and national league sport clubs to explore the cultural dimensions of sport organisations. While they found some unique sport dimensions, no overall cultural model was reported, however they identified the cultural dimensions of sport organisations as shaped by rituals, symbols, size, history and tradition.

To date, change in sport organisations has largely been investigated as a response to external circumstances including environmental disturbances (Skinner et al., 1999) and the political, economic, social, sport culture and organisation specific landscape (Girginov & Sandanski, 2008; O'Brien & Slack, 1999) rather than management-led initiatives. Furthermore, extending the dominant narrative in the broader organisational literature (as highlighted earlier), the examination of cultural and change phenomena in sport organisations has been framed by leadership centric (Amis et al., 2004b; Scott, 1997; Weese, 1996) and/or broad systemic and macro perspectives (Amis et al., 2004a; O'Brien & Slack, 1999; Slack & Hinings, 1992). Narrowing the focus upon the specific context of elite or high performance sport, few authors have extended organisational change and cultures to the specific context of the on-field high performance sport organisation. Four empirical studies were identified that explicitly investigated cultural and change phenomena in this context (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014; Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a). These investigations were supported by a number of theoretical articles referred to throughout this literature review (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; 2012b; 2013).

First, Frontiera (2010) studied cultural change from the perspective of six general managers in North American professional sport using Schein's (2004) organisational culture perspective. Frontiera (2010) conceptualised his findings to offer a new model of change, termed the 'Culture Change Cycle' consisting of five abstract steps. The cycle begins with a new leader arriving and evaluating the symptoms of a negative culture, then establishing a new way of doing things and communicating this to group members. Once established the new leader supports his new way of doing things through consistent actions termed 'walk the talk', and in doing so becomes a symbol of the new culture. General managers 'triangulated' their vision and values through consistent value-driven communication, behaviour and decision making. The fourth phase focuses on 'embedding the new culture' through the experience of success, and members subsequently embracing the new cultural meanings and beliefs. Finally, a new culture with new improved values, decisions, and behaviour is crystallised through on-field success, where the leader celebrates success with new values and communicates this throughout the organisation (Frontiera, 2010). Unlike arriving at a 'frozen' cultural product as in Schein's (2004) model, Frontiera's (2010) included independent thinking to ensure the cultures adapts to external influences. This returns the leader (and the culture) to the beginning of the change cycle to ensure the culture moves with the external environment. The study found the cultural change process to be consistent across all participant organisations and sports. This is surprising given the unique contexts of each professional sport studied. However, Frontiera (2010) concluded that cultural change may be more difficult and time consuming for a larger group than a smaller group as a result of the greater number of relationships that exist. The research focus was largely from the perspective of the corporate leadership of the sport organisation and lacked an in-depth focus upon the on-field team, limiting the transferability of such findings directly to the high performance team context (Frontiera, 2010).

In a second study, Schroeder (2010a) also used Schein's (2004) organisational culture perspective to construct a change theory from the perspectives of ten intercollegiate head coaches who engineered cultural change to facilitate on-field success. The coaches first created a set of values specific to their team to initiate the cultural change process. The value sets that emerged were described as strategic values, behaviour values and relationship values. Using several tactics the coaches orientated all actions and symbols towards those values, a similar leadership tactic to those documented by Frontiera (2010). The coaches consistently connected their actions to the team's values through rewards, sanctions and recruitment strategies, and subsequently found rapid changes in team culture and improved performance. A number of elements unique to the context of USA collegiate sport, for example, extensive recruitment resources, scholarships and academic requirements, were used by coaches to shape culture and facilitate change. The American-centric findings and conclusions are therefore argued to have questionable transferability to other international elite and high performance sport contexts.

Two recent research studies by Cruickshank et al. (2013a; 2014) investigating culture and change in high performance sport are distinguishable through their use of a decentred and complexity theory lens. Using interpretive methods, Cruickshank et al.'s (2013a) research was the only study that considered change from multiple perspectives in addition to the positional leader(s). Their study reported that management, by regulating the flows of power and covertly and subtly framing the structural, physical and psychosocial context in which the team made performance-impacting choices effectively facilitated change. Performance leaders altered the physical environment by building an open plan training facility and publicly displaying performance data. They created selection competition to frame the structural environment by using objective performance monitoring and evaluation. Finally, the psychosocial environment was framed by regulating ownership, the selection and recruitment of leaders, role models and cultural architects, supporting non-selected players and upwardly managing the CEO's perceptions.

Cruickshank et al. (2014) explored best practice cultural change from the perspectives of seven newly appointed Olympic sport performance directors. The results supported their earlier work by highlighting the contested nature of performance sport leadership, where optimal change acknowledged and managed the multidirectional and power based social systems prevalent in performance sport. Reported cultural change was dependent upon cultivating and upholding shared values, standards and perceptions within the performance department, through a two-way interaction and power flow with internal and external stakeholders. The findings reported the importance of performance leaders being cognisant of a sport's cultural, political and performance landscape, and subsequently sensitive and exploitative of historical, competitive and social contexts. Performance leaders also pursued a process of an initial evaluation and planning, where they identified and recruited experts, allies and cultural architects. This was followed by an impact phase where they endeavoured to prioritise and address the most pressing needs and facilitate optimal immediate results to cultivate shared perceptions and multi-stakeholder support. The grounded theory approach offered strong practical application given that theory was constructed from the unarticulated, tacit knowledge of practitioners. Unlike other studies (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a), Cruickshank et al. (2014) explicitly articulated the non-linear, negotiated and contested nature of social interactions and managed-change in high performance sport. Subsequently, best practice was reported as emphasising the ongoing, continuous nature of change whereby the attainment, integration and management of fluctuating both internal and external stakeholder perceptions is central.

These studies appear to have moved the concept of culture change management in high performance sport forward considerably. Yet, they are subject to a number of limitations. First, the studies approached the construct of culture and change management from multiple theoretical perspectives; including organisational culture theory, decentred politics and complexity theory. Second, while the use of interpretive and qualitative research philosophies gave voice to the participants and firmly grounded the phenomena of culture and change as a human endeavour, the studies were retrospective. As a concept bound by time, retrospective interpretations obscure the actual process of change or it becomes shaped in certain ways. Third, three of the four studies (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a) occupied leader-centric perspectives, privileging solely the interpretations and perspectives of the positional leader as change agent. Only Cruickshank et al. (2013a) considered the perspectives of other participants including players, however their data were limited to the accounts of only six players. Such sampling meant that study outcomes were unable to offer neither any consistent insight into change recipient experience nor their interpretation of manager-led change initiatives. Finally, past research has privileged only the successful teams. Given that sport performance is the product of a complex system, there may be many possible explanations for success (Collins et al., 2013). Given that manager-led cultural change efforts are statistically likely to fail (Smith, 2003), such sampling renders these studies' conclusions and theoretical construction susceptible to survivorship bias (Brown, Goetzmann, Ibbotson, & Ross, 1992), and may limit the narrative of successful cultural change in high performance sport.

While offering diversity and variety, the approaches and perspectives of previous research have done little to align the theory and practice within high performance sport management. Consequently, the literature lacks a degree of theoretical coherence and consistency through which to understand creation, change and sustenance of high performing cultures. The sparse literature to date identifies a clear gap in present understanding of culture and change in high performance sport. Furthermore, those who have investigated or theorised this topic have argued a need to continue to robustly explore cultures and managed change across a variety of contexts of sport and time (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a; Wagstaff et al., 2012). Authors recommend pursuing theory through methodologies that account for multi-stakeholder perspectives and longitudinal researcher immersion, such as ethnography and action research, to understand culture and managed-change in high performance sport (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014).

Synthesis and Implications

This chapter highlighted that while research has addressed issues of change and culture in high performance sport, the area lacks theoretical synthesis and an understanding of the change experience at the personal and interpersonal level. A consideration of organisational behaviour literature highlights potential theoretical influences for high performance sport. However, it is clear that to build bespoke contextualised theory, further investigation of organisational behaviour theory in the high performance sport context is needed.

There is currently little understanding of the how change efforts impact the meaning constructions that guide organisational behaviour in high performance sport. Current change models are limited to leader-centric and somewhat linear and simplistic approaches. While researchers recognise that culture frames and is framed by member sensemaking, very little is about how, at the individual level, these meanings are constructed and reconstructed from collective experience (Cardador & Rupp, 2010); especially not in the context of a high

performance sport team. Given the rationale presented, meaning and sensemaking provided a lens through which the relationship between culture and manager-led change could be understood. Furthermore, a methodological approach that acknowledged multiple stakeholder views (Cruickshank et al., 2013a) and a longitudinal researcher immersion (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008) was essential to allow a rich and local interpretation of culture and change, and to integrate with and contribute to the emerging body of theory.

It is widely recognised in both research and practitioner discourse that managing change is a crucial part of contemporary high performance sport management and leadership (Arnold et al., 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Yet surprisingly, the depth and volume of academic debate does not reflect this. Few studies exist on the meaning making of high performance athletes (and management personnel) in response to manager-led change. Research is needed that complements and extends the work of Cruickshank and Collins (2013a; 2014) who justified that high performance sport is a unique management context. In critiquing the literature on change and culture, the missing thread across all contexts, including high performance sport, was an understanding of how change recipients make sense of their experience and in doing so construct the meanings that frame and guide collective behaviour and action. For high performance sport management researchers, theoretical influences from the organisational behaviour literature offer a foundation for investigating the practices of manager-led change in high performance sport. The application of these organisational knowledge bases offers a novel approach to conducting change research that acknowledges the unique context of high performance sport (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014).

Having established the need for greater understanding of culture and change in high performance sport, the purpose of this research was to investigate experiences of these phenomena in a high performance sport team with a particular focus upon meaning making. This investigation of manager-led change was positioned within the meaning and sensemaking literature, foregrounding the agency and experiences of participants. By doing this I acknowledged issues of both structure and agency (Giddens, 1984) which appear prevalent considerations in high performance sport contexts (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014). A meaning and sensemaking approach offered the opportunity to understand manager-led change from the perspectives of sensemakers and sensegivers, of change recipients and change agents. One major research question was developed and underpinned by five sub questions:

How does the organisation act as an agent of change to effectively promote a high performing culture within the high performance unit?

- *What are the players' sources of meaning when playing for New Zealand?*
- *How were/are these meanings constructed?*
- *What actions can be taken to foster meaning and purpose?*
- *What are the implications of these actions?*
- *What factors constrain or enable the ability of people to construct meaning?*

The ensuing chapter explains the philosophical and methodological foundations of the research, how the research was undertaken and my role as participant-researcher.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approaches adopted for this research. In order to establish context, I begin by explaining the research site and participants, before outlining and justifying the research paradigm, and the underpinning epistemological and ontological assumptions. Grounded in these assumptions I introduce and justify the chosen methodology, ethnographic action research (EAR). I explore EAR's origins from the traditional methodologies of ethnography and action research and outline the philosophies informing this method and how it is enacted in the field. This is followed by a summary of the EAR model utilised in this research and the supporting data collection tools and analysis methods utilised to answer the research question. The chapter concludes with how the researcher approached validity, trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

Research Site and Participants

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is needed to select a case that presents an opportunity for intensive study of the phenomena in question (Flick, 2014). Furthermore, Patton (2002) articulated that the logic and strength of selecting the sample lies in "information rich cases for study in depth" (p. 273). Stake (2000) argued that while some typicality is useful when selecting a sample, selection should be primarily based on the potential to learn about the phenomena and, "that may mean taking the one most accessible, the one we can spend the most time with. Potential for learning is a different...criterion to representativeness...whilst balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (pp.446 – 447).

As the provider of the researcher scholarship, the research site for this research was the New Zealand Rugby League (NZRL) the National Sport Organisation (NSO) of rugby league in New Zealand. I was embedded as a participant-researcher in both the organisation and the HPU, and was guided by the broad challenge of gaining a full understanding of the current international best practices pertaining to national sport team management.

A number of factors determine the suitability of an action research style project to a particular research site. These include the willingness and ability of an organisation to engage in the action research process (Reason & Bradbury, 2013), general accessibility and proximity of the organisation to the researcher (Stake, 2000; Tolich & Davidson, 2011) and specific situations of the phenomena under study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). The NZRL met these considerations and provided a unique opportunity for learning by offering ready access to the entire high performance programme, an open-minded supportive approach and a clear desire for change and improvement. The NZRL's and my mutual desire to explore change and culture in a high performance sport organisation was an important dynamic for pursuing an action research initiative with this particular sample group. Investigating a single change project offered the potential for a detailed and in-depth picture, sensitive to local context and the meanings of certain individuals and groups. The single case was crucial to understanding change phenomenon and encouraging more realistic and context bound change practice. Considering the complexities of change, with multiple actors, interactions and practices amidst unfolding change processes framed by how people make sense of what is occurring in that context, a single case can be sufficient for learning (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008).

The participants of this research were the members of the HPU, that is, anyone with direct responsibility for the performance of the team. This included the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), high performance director (HPD), head coach, assistant coaches (two), sport support

personnel (eleven) and players (thirty-two). In addition, external stakeholders (four) were included to provide new data pertaining to the key research questions. For ecological validity, it was necessary to make this distinction between the organisation and the HPU and focus on those responsible for the daily functioning and performance of the on-field team. The rationale for treating the HPU as a distinct organisational sub unit was founded on several unique factors that distinguished the HPU from office-based organisational staff. These included the bespoke nature of goals and roles, unique forms of interpersonal engagement, and the extent of individual emotional ties resulting from a shared involvement in tangible performance (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b). By using purposeful sampling, I learned about issues of fundamental importance to the purpose of the research, yielding greater insight and deep understanding (Patton, 2002). While all members of the HPU were considered participants, in identifying, prioritising, planning and implementing action, given the manager-led focus, change collaboration existed almost exclusively between myself and the core group in the project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), those ascribed formal performance and organisational leadership positions with the HPU; the CEO, HPD and the head coach. I termed this core group, HPU leaders (more information on the participants and their roles is presented in Chapter Four). While the research included a large numbers of participants, as is the case in much action research, a core group of individuals assumed leadership for designing and implementing change initiatives, where they themselves, over time shifted between roles of co-active researchers, supporters and participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Having located the research site and the participants in the research, it is now necessary to discuss the research paradigm underpinning the study.

The Research Paradigm

Building on earlier work in practice focused sport management research (Ferkins, 2007; Ferkins, McDonald, & Shilbury, 2010), the research question was developed to be action orientated. The word “does” within the question was used to emphasise the research was not only an evaluation of current practice but promoted application of what might be possible. In designing the research question, the intention was to determine which actions would promote a high performing culture within the HPU at a NSO based on some initial data about the HPU (Ferkins, 2007). Embedded within this question was an assumption that solutions would hold multiple meanings for different participants and would be situational and context specific and, as a result, would need to be studied within an organic and localised setting. A second important assumption related to the relationship between the researcher and participants; in this study participants were viewed as key participants and contributors in the research process not simply as sources of data (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2009).

Constructivist-interpretivist was chosen as the research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a). For (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a), the characteristics of constructivist-interpretivism include a relativist ontology (the presence of multiple realities), a transactional and subjectivist epistemology (investigator and ‘object’ of investigation co-construct meaning) and hermeneutical, dialectical and naturalist methodologies (research undertaken in the authentic, natural setting).

Theoretical Perspective

As Crotty (1998) explained, a researcher must not only establish which methodologies and methods to employ, but must also justify his or her choices in terms of their potential to influence research outcomes. In justifying these choices researchers reach into assumptions about the nature of reality and human knowledge, namely a theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998).

There is widespread discussion in academia as to the terminology and labelling of research paradigms or theoretical perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b; Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Tolich & Davidson, 2011). Positivism, post positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical inquiry, feminism, postmodernism, structuralism and post structuralism are commonly used terms (Crotty, 1998). These paradigms establish "...the philosophical stance that lies behind our chosen methodology – it helps provide a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The broadest and most commonly compared paradigms are positivism and interpretivism. Each theoretical position holds alternative assumptions of epistemology, the nature of knowledge, and ontology, the nature of truth and reality (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b). These underpinning assumptions have divergent implications for which methodologies, methods, data collection and analyses are used to answer a research question.

The advancement of the understanding of groups and teams in sport has been dominated by positivism (Aoyagi et al., 2008; Crombie, Lombard, & Noakes, 2009; Sénécal et al., 2008). When applying positivism in the context of a high performance sport team, culture is studied as if there is 'valid' knowledge, or one true cultural picture for all, existing independent of the participants, which is deduced and measured to develop behavioural laws (theory) (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Jones and Wallace (2005) claimed that while such knowledge does aid in improving coaching and performance, sport has generally been portrayed as technocratic, sequentialised and as a systematic process that can easily be interpreted and rationalised. As a result of this dominant ideology, "very little research has examined the symbolic or interpretative elements" (Schroeder, 2010a, p. 64) that exist within sports teams and their interplay with sport management. However, as McNiff (2013) argued, contexts of managing, organising and educating are about real people and their lived experiences. Therefore people and their experiences were central to developing the design of this research. At the outset, prior to the conceptualisation of the research question, there was a desire to build theory and knowledge located in the practice and lived experiences of those involved in the NSO. Giving voice and authority to participant experiences was central in building locally constructed theories.

To understand the world and its experiences from the voices of those who live within it, an interpretivist stance should be adopted (Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002). Interpretivism is a general term used to denote a number of related theoretical perspectives, for example, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and grounded theory (Crotty, 1998). Interpretive traditions view the world as socially constructed where knowledge is subjective, realities are multiple, and both shaped by context (Crotty, 1998). The interpretive paradigm is a problem solving, inductive, theory building perspective that aligns with qualitative methods in an attempt to understand the world and its experiences from the point of view of those who live within it (Poczwadowski et al., 2002).

Some sports coaching (Becker, 2009; Hooper, Burwitz, & Hodkinson, 2003; Schroeder, 2010a) and sport management researchers have embraced interpretivism (Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Skinner et al., 2014). Interpretive research attempts to search and uncover meaning, values and explanations, while also identifying and explaining any emerging concepts (Flick, 2014). Hooper et al. (2003) concluded that greater use of interpretivist research designs enables sport performance practitioners to reflect on insightful analysis of social and cultural influences on an individual's emotional responses and interpretations. By using an interpretivist approach, a researcher can explore not only the meanings of members of a high performance

sport team, but also discover how these members interact in given situations through exploring the social and psychological elements of a competition environment (Hooper et al., 2003).

Maintaining the position that all qualitative research is interpretive in nature, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identified four major interpretive paradigms for qualitative research: postpositivist, critical (including Marxist and emancipatory), feminist-poststructural, and constructivist-interpretive. All paradigms were considered for this research and the constructivist-interpretive perspective was considered to be the most suitable. The constructivist-interpretive theoretical perspective is characterised by a view that reality is socially constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and wider social systems (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2011). A constructivist inquiry does not attempt to generalise across populations, rather it attempts to understand a particular phenomenon, for example, culture change in high performance sport (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b). This approach searches for and uncovers meaning, values and explanations while also identifying, explaining and analysing any emerging concepts (Flick, 2014). In the interpreted meanings, there are assumptions that society and social order are not set in stone but socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; 1995). Therefore, the constructivist-interpretive perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a) allowed me to generate in-depth insights into the negotiated realities of participants and interpret individual narratives and discourse through engagement with the voices in the research process.

Within this perspective there are a number of important philosophical groundings informing this research coupled with paradigmatic tensions that require elaboration. These involve the epistemology and ontology underpinning constructivist-interpretive philosophy, Schön's (1995) notion of an epistemology of practice and postmodernism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b).

Ontology and Epistemology

I adopted an epistemological stance grounded in subjectivism. Schinke and Hanrahan (2009) explained that the "philosophy of science defines epistemology as theory about the nature of knowledge that presupposes the relationship between the knower and the known" (p. 37). Epistemologically, subjectivism rationalises that people construct meanings (knowledge) in different ways and that there are multiple realities and truths, even for the same phenomena (Flick, 2014; Silverman, 2005). Furthermore, my ontology was one of relativism, which is a belief that there is no universal truth or validity, but that truth holds a relative and subjective value according to context and perception (Crotty, 1998). This underpinning is important because it not only enabled me to interpret individual perceptions and understandings through engagement with the voices in the research process, but it also allowed me to view cultural meanings as constructed socially and therefore open to change (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; 1995), providing a philosophical basis for action driven cultural change. While the research is grounded in epistemological subjectivism the additional and complementary practice epistemology was adopted because of the practical nature of this project (Schön, 1995).

Epistemology of practice. Boyer (1990), Schön (1995) and more recently, McNiff (2013) argued that there is a need for an evolved scholarship beyond the quantitative-qualitative paradigm debates that predominated the 1980s. This form of scholarship reframes our understanding of knowledge as something researchers do, that is "never static or complete", but rather "in a constant state of development" (McNiff, 2013, p. 29). Schön (1995) viewed this scholarship as demonstrating an epistemology, a way of knowing, that meets the everyday needs of people working in real-life situations or elucidates the relationship between a

profession's knowledge base and its practice. Brought to life by Schön's theories of knowledge which are in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action and which effectively bridged the theory-practice disparity in action research. For this reason, it is essential that the theory emerging from this research is not abstract, but is located in the "practitioner's tacit forms of knowing that emerge in practice" (McNiff, 2013, p. 34).

Earlier work by McNiff (2000) in the context of organisational study asserted that such scholarship provides a body of knowledge to "help people deal with the living reality of their work, particularly as it refers to struggles to negotiate their identities and relationships with one another in organisational contexts" (p. 1). Teams in professional sport exist as social contexts in which people share part of their lives together. These are "rich fields for learning" and "contexts with rich promise for social renewal" (McNiff, 2000, p. 5). This thinking underpinned the perspective of the HPU as a site for learning, supporting McNiff's (2013) notion that organisation and management theory are also educational theories. A second epistemological consideration was that of postmodernism.

Postmodernism

Crotty (1998) explained that postmodernism is based on the notion that reality is not mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather is socially constructed as the mind endeavours to understand its own personal reality from individual experience and interaction. Postmodernism also views the world and knowledge as not only socially constructed, but culturally determined, that individuals are shaped by cultural forces (Crotty, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), and local language rather than grand or metanarrative (for example, Marxism or Capitalism) frames thought processes and knowledge construction (Grbich, 2012; Lash, 1990). The non-finite and transitional nature of reality in postmodernism implies borders can be crossed, identities incorporated and reconstructed and social change and renewal possible (Crotty, 1998; Lash, 1990). Alongside a cultural determinism, another central tenet of postmodernism is the role of power, positioning all man-made institutions, human relations, values and human creations as expressions of a will to power (Lash, 1990). Therefore, any critique is bound by the cultural forces and power-laden discourses of both researcher and participant, where the research product itself is a first, second and third interpretation (Geertz, 1974).

Postmodernism subsequently focuses upon subjectivity, and calls for "more local and small scale theories fitted to particular problems and particular situations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b, p. 27). Furthermore, Denzin (2000) argued a postmodern approach to cultural inquiry:

Celebrates the local, the sacred, the act of constructing meaning. Viewing culture as a complex process of improvisation, it seeks to understand how people enact and construct meaning in their daily lives. It celebrates autoethnography, the personal account, mysteries, myth and folklore. (p. 401)

In addition to the culture studied, postmodern, interpretive research is concerned with the effect the researcher has on the culture of study (Sands, 2002). Narby (1998, cited in Sands, 2002) argued that from the 1960s, anthropologists "came to realize that their presence changed things" (p. 13). Sands (2002) located this researcher influence in the sport setting highlighting that "a foreign presence can at first affect a team or community...and can disrupt the flowing of normal social intercourse" (p. 22). In recognising the delicate nature of social research, Geertz (1988) challenged claims of the legitimate representation of a group of people by an outsider, arguing that research findings and interpretations are in fact a construction of the researcher. And so a period in social science that is popularly termed 'the fourth

movement' or a 'crisis of representation' took hold (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b). This philosophy challenged the grand narrative and also what Van Manen (1988) termed "interpretive omnipotence" and "experiential author(ity)" (pp. 21 – 22). These terms recognised that traditional cultural researchers were able to divine the reality of the culture and that their texts were author evacuated and "cleaned up" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 57).

Subsequently, these broad tenets of postmodernism informed the research in a number of ways. At an ontological and epistemological level, the influence of postmodernism acknowledged multiple ways of knowing and being and established that the accumulation of knowledge as relative and context based (Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002). Therefore, the very blending of the multiple research philosophies and methods positions postmodern thought at the very heart of the research. As a postmodern project, this research acknowledged that there can be no objective, dispassionate, value-neutral account of a culture and its ways (Smith & Deemer, 2000), nor can action research be seen as being value neutral (Elden & Chisholm, 1993; Reason & Bradbury, 2013). Knowledge making is a political process in the service of particular purposes (Elden & Chisholm, 1993; Reason & Bradbury, 2013). Subsequently, the data collection, analysis and write up overtly positioned and acknowledged me as the author and my own socially constructed lens upon the research field (see p. 9). In postmodern action research, researchers are concerned with the development of democratic forms of knowledge that position participants as co-researchers and constructors of the data (Reason & Bradbury, 2013) and pragmatically select problems to solve that contribute to solutions that hold positive social value, concerning humanistic values and marginalised peoples (Elden & Chisholm, 1993). My postmodern project exists in a post-colonial, globalised world and such an approach is essential given the cultural diversity of the participant group. It acknowledges the presence of alternative worldviews, belief systems and meaning structures to the traditional colonial, Eurocentric and American world order (Sparkes, 2002). This postmodern action research landscape allowed the commonplace interactions between players, management and researcher (accompanied by key readers) to co-emerge alongside socio-spatial identity and meaning, where these identities shape the meanings in which people experience professional and personal aspects of their lives (Sumara, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) argued that a postmodern approach adds greater theoretical weight to interpretive research as it facilitates "epistemologies from previously silenced groups...to offer solutions to representational concerns" (p. 27). To summarise the overlapping and contributing philosophical underpinnings of this research, a schematic synthesis can be found in Figure 2.

In summary, this research exists as an action-centred, postmodern constructivist-interpretive ethnography (Denzin, 1990). Guided by these philosophical assumptions, the research synthesised traditional methods of ethnography and action research, termed ethnographic action research (EAR) (Bath, 2009; Hartmann, Fischer, & Haymaker, 2009; Tacchi et al., 2003) as methodology to answer the research questions.

Methodology: Ethnographic Action Research

EAR combines an ethnographic approach in an action research framework to, "address the identified gap between research and the ability to implement its findings" (Tacchi et al., 2009, p. 35). Muller and Guendouzi (2009) recognised that ethnography and action research share a methodological basis in that "ethnography seeks to discover meaningful structures in a culture from the perspective of those whose culture it is" and action research is "undertaken with the aim of improving the functioning of the social institution, practice or structure for the benefit of those involved" (p. 1). EAR identifies the usefulness of "action research to a project with an

ethnographic bias where the brief is to immerse and map a culture for the purpose of enacting an appropriate intervention” (Bath, 2009, p. 218), as this research is.

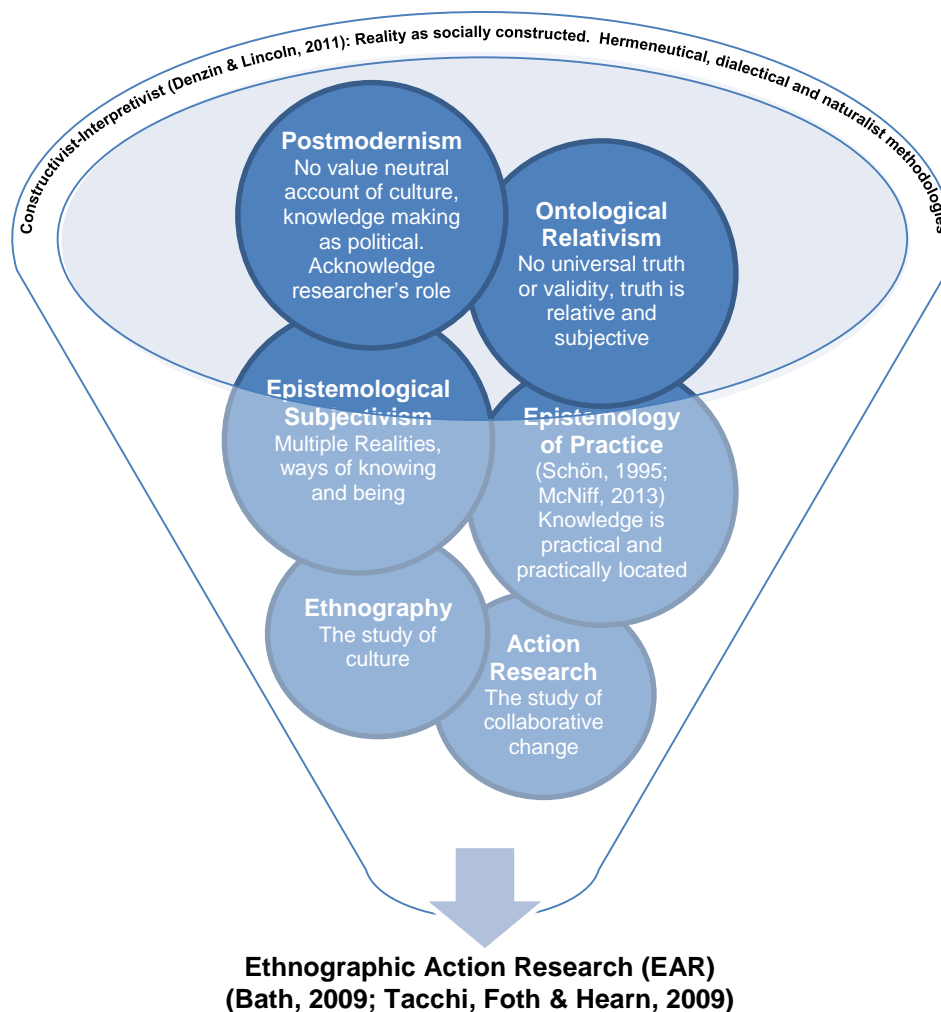


Figure 2. Research philosophies

EAR aligns with my ontological and epistemological stances discussed earlier because both ethnography and action research can view the truth as subjective, knowledge as open to interpretation and construction, and take place in the naturalist setting (Crotty, 1998). Given the multicultural diversity of the sport’s playing and staff base, it was necessary to acknowledge a methodology that gave equal voice to all participants and recognised the researcher’s socially constructed lens.

Historical Traditions of Action Research and Ethnography

Ethnography is a form of qualitative social research and is one of several forms of enquiry into non-quantifiable features of social life (Sparkes, 2002). Ethnography research refers to the process of collecting information about a specific group or culture, and the product that binds together events, understandings and behaviours into a meaningful portrait (Krane & Baird, 2005). Most contemporary definitions of ethnography align with Denzin’s (1997) notion that it is “that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about” (p. xi). Ethnography attempts to articulate “authentic representations of the complexity and richness of people’s lives through narratives or tales of oral and life histories” (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 259). Sands (2002) explained, “Ethnography is separated from other qualitative social science research methods by its

emphasis on intensive, focused and time consuming participation and observation of the life of the people being studied” (p. 21).

Ethnography as a methodology has grown in popularity in sport research over the past 20 years (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002). More recently ethnography has been used as a methodological base through which to investigate leadership psychology in a NSO (Wagstaff et al., 2012), thus providing further support in its suitability for investigating social constructions in sport groups and organisations. For this research, my prolonged engagement with players, coaches and management and their environment enabled me to gradually enter their world and gain an understanding of their lives and meaning (Lincoln et al., 2011). Wagstaff et al. (2012) argued that the ethnographer is in the unique position to “observe, experience, and engage in dialogue with immediacy as events unfold” (p. 28); my role gave me penetrative insight into the social and behavioural underpinning of the social dynamics in my research organisation. Edwards and Skinner (2009) identified the flexibility of ethnography as its strength. As a result of the authentic nature of ethnographic inquiry, I was able to explore, examine and interpretively uncover the interactions, perceptions, meanings, hidden messages, and subsequent actions of social actors (Purdy et al., 2008) over the course of the various phases of the EAR model. Furthermore, such insight in this natural setting allowed authentic meanings to emerge organically.

Action research, is essentially a form of inquiry designed to create change or improvement (Cardno, 2003). Cardno (2003) argued, “the term ‘action research’ creates the expectation that those involved will be researching a particular situation with the intention of taking action that will make a difference – that is, will bring about change or improvement” (p. 1). Action research has its origins in the work of American social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who was concerned with social problems of prejudice, Jewish persecution and authoritarianism during the Second World War (Tinning, 1992). Generally credited as the forefather of action research, Lewin (1946) challenged the traditional hegemony that the social scientist should be a disinterested ‘objective’ observer of human interactions (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Lewin (1946) argued for a form of research that involved collaboration between the investigator and their traditionally disempowered, depersonalised ‘subject’, and in doing so reconceptualised the relationship between theory and practice (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Lewin (1946) saw action research as a way of generating knowledge about a social system while at the same time attempting to change it, recognising that theoretical concepts must be tested in action and that their value is in their successful application in the field. Gustavsen (2000) argued that, “theory alone has little power to create change...there is a need for a more complex interplay between theory and practice” (p. 17). Thus, the basic premise of action research is that change and research are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, a simultaneous focus on improving practice and developing theory is indeed possible (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

Lewin’s (1946) paradigm has shaped a generation of social researchers dedicated to action orientated, collaborative inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2013; Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). Described as both a research method and methodology (McNiff, 2013), action research has become a method used to describe an abundance of techniques, approaches, principles and philosophies that all pursue collaborative inquiry with research participants engaging in cycles of action and reflection (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). The literature is full of assorted descriptions and, as a result, action research has been used as an approach for personal reflection (e.g., action learning), a means of improving practice (e.g., developmental action research), an approach to liberation of the oppressed (e.g., critical action research or participatory action research), and a pedant method

(e.g., action science) (Cardno, 2003). Despite the variety of approaches, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) asserted that they are not mutually exclusive, rather viewing them as, “sets of general principles and devices...which can be adapted to different research issues and contexts. Each has its own emphasis and can be appropriately used in conjunction with other methodologies” (p. 61). Amongst the multitude of approaches, style and philosophical underpinnings of action research, the key feature is the multiple cycles of planning, action and reflection (Cardno, 2003). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) illustrated this in their model of action research (see Figure 3).

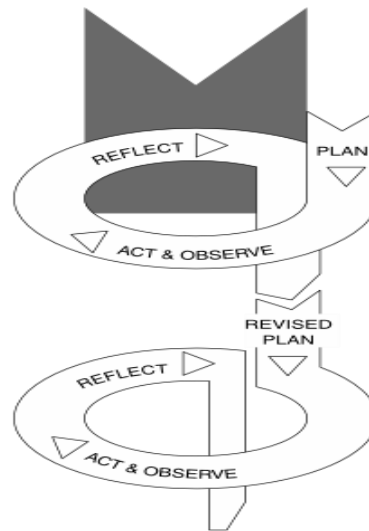


Figure 3. Action research model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 564)

In their model, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) emphasised the spiralling nature of the process, when one cycle ends, the research does not, it continues to cycle addressing the original problem or investigating an emergent dimension of that problem.

Ethnographic Action Research

Ethnography is a research approach that is used to interpret and understand different cultures. This makes it an apt methodology for understanding communities like sports teams and organisations. However, the usefulness of “action research to a project with an ethnographic bias where the brief is to immerse and map a culture for the purpose of enacting an appropriate intervention” (Bath, 2009, p. 218) made it an attractive to the core group (HPU leaders) in this study, who were seeking a cultural change that improved practice and on-field performance. The integration of ethnography and action research resulted in a design that considered the study of general laws of a social system (discovering meanings and sensemaking processes in a culture) with a collaborative change focus to diagnose a specific situation and improve practice.

In the late 1990’s authors recognised a need for a more authentic form of participatory action research and recommended the integration of an ethnographic approach (Samra-Fredericks, 2000; Slater, Tacchi, & Lewis, 2002). EAR integrates participatory techniques with ethnography in an action research framework and addresses the identified gap between research and the ability to implement its findings (Tacchi et al., 2009).

Philosophies and Principles of Ethnographic Action Research

Both ethnography and action research as interpretive methodologies are philosophically similar, emphasising an interpretive, subjective and socially constructed nature of reality and knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b). In addition, the postmodern belief that knowledge is created by collaboration between research participants and researcher underpins both action research and postmodern ethnography. I utilised these philosophies and methodologies to

encourage participants to move from a superficial consideration of the emergent challenges to a more critical and in depth understanding of the issues against the backdrop of both the context and landscape of the HPU. Tacchi et al. (2009) stated that EAR follows the cycles of planning, action and reflection typical in action research models, but that the ethnographic focus enables the researcher to embed themselves in the culture to gain rich understandings of socio-cultural constructions otherwise difficult to document. This approach allowed me, as the action researcher, to not only become an insider but also to consider the multiple possibilities and views of participants (Bath, 2009; Frankham & Howes, 2006).

Bath (2009) and Frankham and Howes (2006) identified pragmatic challenges associated with traditional action research, particularly that the researcher can be viewed as an outsider by participants; one who is reflecting on practice, yet is removed from the front line of practice. In Bath's (2009) study she found that this led to power relations between researcher and participants and concerns over the representation of others. Conversely, insider action research by managers can create power constructs between managers and subordinates that may also influence the representation of the data (Coghlan, 2001). Therefore, the participatory nature of ethnography enabled me to hold the dual role as both the researcher and legitimate member of the culture, and immerse myself in both the organisation and the question (Bath, 2009). The action research then offered an ecological means of implementing organisational change in a real world setting (Cunningham, 1993; McNiff, 2000; Somekh, 2006) with the multiple forms of data collection used in EAR allowing multiple triangulation and a thick description of the culture (Geertz, 1974).

The multi-stakeholder perspectives of the ethnographic approach was appropriate for the attempted change given that it is erroneous to assume that people relate to the change effort and outcomes in the same ways (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Further ethnographic emphasis was placed at the beginning of the EAR project. In action research literature, this is referred to as a period of context and issue identification, where researchers endeavour to learn about the context of study and identify issues for change (Cardno, 2003; McNiff, 2013). However, the literature highlights difficulties and limitations of traditional action research short-term approaches in unpacking and understanding the context and issues in a complex and multi-layered research field within limited time frame (Bath, 2009; Frankham & Howes, 2006). The period of understanding the research context and issues is improved by becoming a participant, or 'insider'. Phase one and two of the EAR model allowed me to establish the context and issues of the culture of the HPU to enable a familiarisation and gain a richer understanding.

Bath (2009) concluded that given the distinctive features of EAR, it is "legitimate not only to slip in an introductory ethnographic period within the action research, but also to characterise the methodology of an entire project as having an 'ethnographic action research' methodology" (p. 214). This methodological grounding supports the original work by Tacchi et al. (2003) who suggested that "ethnography can direct a study while the action research component can 'link back the research to the project plans and activities'" (p. 3). Tacchi et al. (2009) argued that while EAR has an underlying aim of being participatory to challenge preconceived notions, they identified differences compared with other participatory forms of action research. Authors have noted that in the more traditional 'participatory action research', insiders learn what outsiders want to hear, or display the necessary rhetoric to fulfil political agendas (White, 1996). Although discussed in the field of development studies, there are many similarities with research in team sports and this is something I considered within the research design. Certainly, the ethnographic approaches enabled a culturally determined context to be

applied to the research field, and grounded the data and resultant change in the lived experiences of those in the HPU culture.

The exercise of ethnography with action research turns action research towards a postmodern discourse. As Bath (2009) reflected, traditionally in action research, “the practitioner-as-researcher occupies a central position as an interpreter-of-practice. However, this interpretation can be viewed as constrained by a theoretical lens that pays little attention to the researcher’s biography in terms of their position beyond the practice” (p. 215). While reflection and reflexivity is outlined as part of action research methodology (Cardno, 2003), Bath (2009) argued that EAR research extends the level of reflection by calling for “practices of reflexivity that include accounts of both theory and autobiography” (p. 215). Reflexivity allows the author to position him or herself, the work and the reader in a social, political, historical and cultural context, while moving the method to a more critical position exploring the complexities of collaborative endeavour with greater scrutiny (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). Sands (2002) argued that whilst:

Learning how to fit in, the ethnographer must also travel in the opposite direction, achieving a removal from the everyday existence that he tries hard to assimilate and become immersed in. The ethnographer must develop a perspective that mediates his or her cultural background and that of the newfound cultural mates. (p. 22)

Bath (2009) argued that this is achieved by attention to postmodern and post-colonial explanations of authorship. These post-colonial approaches allowed me to express my own social position and identity and allowed traditionally silent voices and cultural elements in the data field to emerge (Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002). This is an essential element of this research particularly given the culturally diverse nature of the participant group (players, coaches and support staff in the HPU) and rugby league’s existence as a traditionally marginalised or repressed voice within the New Zealand sporting and societal milieu (Falcous, 2007). Such reflexivity allows the researcher “to confront the issues of identity and representation and consider how we might develop texts that highlight the problematic worlds we study, our relationships to such worlds and how we might translate them” (Tierney, 1997).

Reflexivity constitutes a shift to collecting and evaluating data without complete detachment and objectivity, but rather with an internal dialogue and constant scrutiny of what I, the researcher, know and how I know it (Hertz, 1997). Hertz (1997) argued that reflexive social researchers do not simply report truths or facts but they also actively construct interpretations of their experience in the field and robustly question how these interpretations came about. Sparkes (2002) stated that to be reflexive:

Researchers need to reflect on the political dimensions of fieldwork, the webs of power that circulate in the research process and how these shape the manner in which knowledge is constructed. Likewise, they need to consider how issues of gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, social class, age, religion, sexual identity, disability and able bodiedness shape knowledge construction. (p. 17)

Richardson (2000) argued, “self-reflexivity brings to consciousness some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing. Truth claims are less easily validated now; desires to speak ‘for’ others are suspect” (p. 936). Coffey (1999) argued, “In striving to legitimise fieldwork as ‘real’ research, which is difficult and personal but methodologically fruitful, we can lose sight of the fact that ethnographic research is peopled – by the researched and the researcher” (p. 8). Reflexivity helped me explore the multiple relationships between the researcher-self, the field and the people in the field and also facilitating distance between the researcher-self and practitioner-self embedded in the ethnographic field (Coffey, 1999).

In summary, EAR provided this research with a framework for exploring the research question. This design offered an opportunity for knowledge production that was located in the unarticulated experience of the participants (McNiff, 2013), validation in the field of managing a high performance unit and the chance to improve existing practice. This unique and original approach effectively addressed the research question and helped me understand cultural phenomena in high performance sport, currently a topic of significant interest to both practitioners and researchers (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b).

Designing the Ethnographic Action Research Model

Whilst universally recognised as sequences of planning, action and reflection (McNiff, 2013), the design of the EAR model draws on a large body of literature from action driven organisational and educational research (Bath, 2009; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Johnson & Duberley, 2000; McNiff, 2013; Mezirow, 1991; Reason & Bradbury, 2013; Tacchi et al., 2009). Cardno (2003) advanced Lewin (1946) original designs of cycles of planning, action and reflection and later designs by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), amongst others, by including 'mini-cycles' or 'spin-off cycles' that result from the main cycle and which encourage rigour in the process (see Figure 4).

The 'mini-cycles' were particularly prevalent when HPU leaders (participants) were developing and implementing interventions and action steps. Greenwood and Levin (2007) offer three key underpinnings that have informed the design, analysis and interpretation of the research. The first underpinning is that participants and researchers co-construct knowledge through as a collaborative communicative process. Second, action research is context-centred aiming to solve real-life problems. The third assumption recognises the importance of the extant knowledge and experience of participants as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research process and result (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Of particular relevance to this research is the emphasis Greenwood and Levin (2007) placed upon the collaborative nature of the process in which solutions are sought and enacted as a vehicle to derive, shape, and construct new meanings. The application of this research method to the field of cultural change in high performance sport moves knowledge beyond describing current practice.

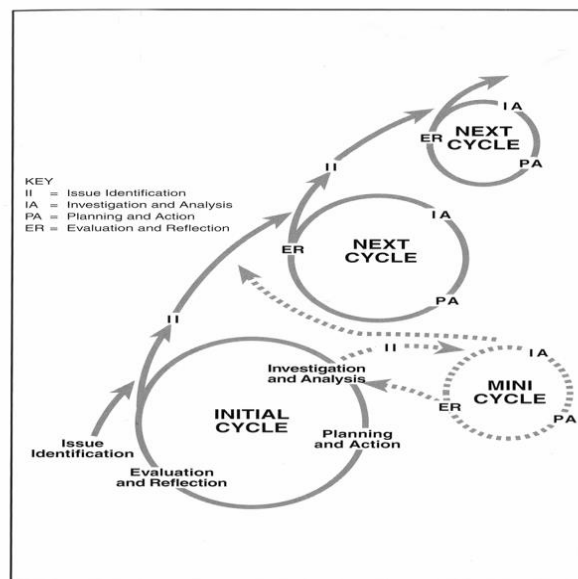


Figure 4. Action research model (Cardno, 2003, p. 13)

This research attempted to understand the complexities and dualities that exist when applying theoretical solutions to practical contexts and the difficulties that arise in finding the nexus between theory and practice. My intention was to produce more than a series of recommendations for cultural change management in high performance sport, which can be deduced from retrospective interviews with coaches and players. Instead, my aim was to observe and work with participants in the planning and enactment of change management strategies and so gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of change in the context of high performance sport, and the complexities faced by the participants when implementing change initiatives, the HPU leaders as primary change agents, and the players and team management as change recipients. As Chalip (1997) argued, “the examination of efforts to foster change provides a unique opportunity to further the development of theory” (p. 4). I devised a pragmatic, action driven method to enable participants to follow a “...critical and risk-taking exploration of their experience” (Chalip, 1997, p. 4), rather than a method which would only provide superficial evaluation of the issues and challenges they face.

Underpinned by a postmodernist understanding of knowledge construction, and Schön's (1995) epistemology of practice, four forms of knowing; experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical were considered and integrated throughout the EAR process (Heron & Reason, 2008). First articulated by Heron (1981), these forms of knowing (or epistemologies) that exist in social research were later integrated into an action research framework by Reason (1994) and first used in the sport management context with NSOs by Ferkins (2007) and Ferkins et al. (2009), Ferkins et al. (2010) and Ferkins and Shilbury (2010). Experiential knowing is by direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place or phenomenon, constructed by perception, through empathy or resonance (Reason & Bradbury, 2013). Presentational knowing is the product of the encounters of experiential knowing and reveals this significance through expressive imagery, for example, narrative, music or art. Propositional knowing is “intellectual knowing of ideas and theories. Its product is the informative spoken or written statement” (p. 367). Finally, practical knowing is the understanding of how to do something, a skill or competence for example (Reason & Bradbury, 2013).

Cooperative inquiry considers multiple forms of knowing and acknowledges the research participants as co-researchers and establishes the collaboration from the outset (Heron & Reason, 2006). All four forms of knowing were incorporated throughout the research process. In conceptualising the research focus the presentational and propositional knowing of key organisational leaders were considered and their professional, practical and personal experiences and retrospective narratives were acknowledged. In undertaking the context and issue identification phases (one and two), the experiential and presentational knowing of participants was explored, and in later action orientated cycles, practical knowing was acknowledged through in-situ conversations and meetings, and retrospective narratives resulting from the data collection methods. This broad framework of inquiry attempted to produce local, but more authentic theory, not merely of what we know, but how we know, reaching “...beyond the primarily theoretical, propositional knowledge of academia” (Heron & Reason, 2006, p. 149).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) emphasised the spiralling nature of the process; when one cycle ends, the research does not and it continues to cycle addressing the original problem or investigating an emergent dimension of that problem. Reason and Bradbury (2006) referred to this cyclical process as convergence and divergence. Convergence considers the same issue multiple times, each in greater depth, whereas divergence considers different issues in successive cycles. The study design used ‘meta learning’ (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) to

support convergence and divergence as the EAR progressed through the research stages. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) recognised that it is essential to differentiate between the learning cycles of the action and those of the researcher as learner order to maintain rigour in the inquiry. They argued that the dynamics of these learning phases allows action research to become “more than everyday problem solving...it is learning about learning, in other words ‘meta learning’” (p. 13). Meta learning aligned this research with postmodern understandings of knowledge and facilitated greater rigour in the inquiry process.

To achieve meta-learning, this research consistently engaged three forms of reflection, surrounding action, termed content reflection (*experience of action*), process reflection (*interpretation of action*) and premise reflection (*reflection on action*) (Mezirow, 1991). Content reflection allowed consideration of the issues around the promotion of a high performing culture and the associated meaning amongst the participants in the HPU. The process reflection allowed consideration about how the cycles of inquiry worked, while the premise reflection explored the unstated and often subconscious underlying assumptions that governed attitudes and behaviour of the participants (Mezirow, 1991). Coghlan and Brannick (2014) emphasised how important it was that the reflective process occurred at each step of the action research model, not merely in evaluation stages. This commitment to multiple forms of reflection have been employed effectively in other action research driven sport management research to explore action, meanings and learning (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; 2015). While a useful starting point, I felt these forms of reflection failed to effectively address my role as researcher in the field. Therefore, I complemented Coghlan and Brannick’s (2014) use of these three forms of reflection with methodological and epistemic reflexivity (Johnson & Duberley, 2000) to ensure a more robust and systematic reflection. Methodological reflexivity facilitated monitoring and acknowledgement of my behavioural impact upon the research setting and epistemic reflexivity allowed my belief systems to be scrutinised, effectively analysing and challenging my meta-theoretical assumptions (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). The documentation of this reflective process can be found at the end of each findings chapter (Chapters Four to Seven). This reflexive dialogue differentiates the sensemaking of John the ‘participant’ from John the ‘researcher’ allowing for a richer, more authentic story to emerge and at the same time contributing to the rigour and credibility of the method and the findings (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Pellatt, 2003).

Ethnographic Action Research Cycles and Phases

Cardno’s (2003) four phases of the action research process (see Figure 4) framed the design of the research phases. These four phases are:

1. Issue identification
2. Investigation and analysis
3. Planning and action
4. Evaluation and reflection

Figure 5 offers a schematic process model of the research.

Phase one and two: Context and issue identification. The starting point for this research was engaging the core group of key organisational leaders at the NZRL to explore and agree on a focus of inquiry. From discussions with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and high performance director (HPD), it was clear from the outset that they sought sustainable change in the HPU and were particularly interested the concept of culture and meaning. Emerging from these discussions and from engaging the literature, a broad focus of culture, performance and change was established. Fletcher and Arnold (2011) proposed that “the potential to effect change is far greater working through performance leaders and managers, rather than solely

counselling athletes...by creating an environment where high performance becomes sustainable across the team” (p. 236). Initial negotiations acted as the beginning of collaboration between me, as the researcher and the core group of HPU leaders, the HPD and CEO.

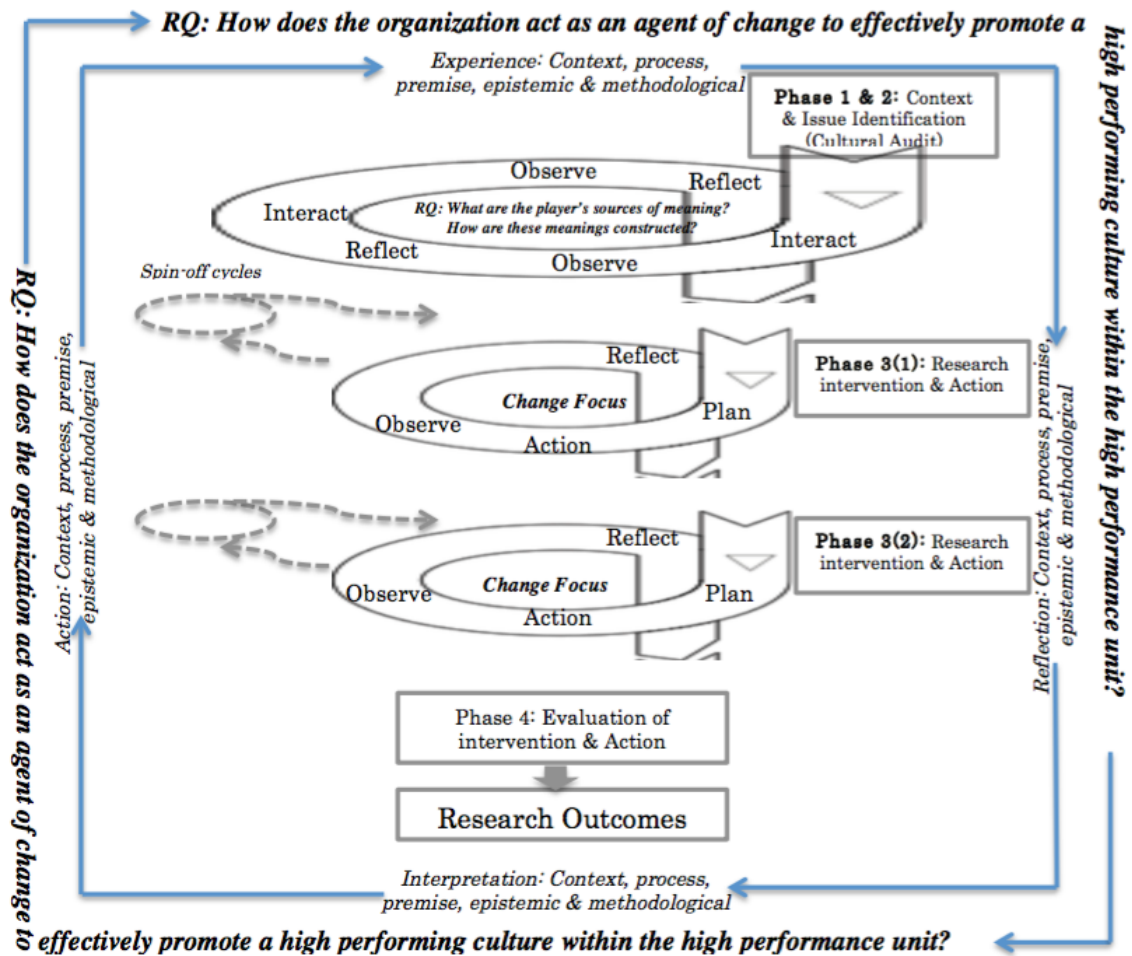


Figure 5. The EAR process model adopted for the research

It is well recognised that formulaic approaches to change that do not recognise members existing and complex understandings of organisational life will fail to deliver the desired change outcomes and that existing cultural dimensions need to be identified to achieve a successful change effort (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006). As Bennis (2009) articulated, “at the core of these ideas is the recognition that meaning is rooted in the group and collective” (p. 159), therefore it was imperative to gain an understanding of the culture and meanings within the HPU. This was achieved through phase one and two, context and issue identification. These two phases served as a cultural audit to allow the issues of most relevance to emerge naturally, rather than from explicit collaboration with HPU leaders. In June 2012, I was embedded in all areas of high performance operations for a seasonal cycle (approximately ten months), for two and half days a week, as a volunteer assistant to the HPD to chart the ways in which the HPU constructed its network of shared meanings that constituted its “indigenous version of reality” (Smart, 1998). In August (2012), the HPD invited me onto the HPU management team to directly undertake the research. To maintain a legitimate position within the HPU culture, my given role was termed ‘High Performance Support’ and I held direct responsibility for performance analysis support to management and players (scouting and selection reports, video, statistics, GPS and wellness monitoring).

Phases one and two began with collating background information on the history of rugby league in New Zealand and the NZRL, informed by literature to help understand both the cultural context and meanings landscape of the HPU at the NZRL. All members of the HPU (39 at the beginning, 52 at the conclusion) were engaged in the research. Two players chose not to give informed consent and thus were omitted from the findings of the research. Phase one and two were designed to determine the meanings that shape the culture of the HPU and therefore a theoretical framework for the project. Phase one and two answered two key sub questions underpinning the central research question; what personal meanings do players attach to representing New Zealand and how are/were those meanings constructed? As I became more familiar with the cultural and social constructions present at the NZRL, formative thoughts about issues of importance became a focus (Silk, 2005). To maximise the legitimacy of the research, its outcome and to allow me to maintain an open mind, the project began with a broad research focus (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and scholarly curiosity about the research area (Krane & Baird, 2005) established through informal discussion with supervisors, the CEO and HPD and engagement with literature.

From the outset, it was intended that whilst being part of the collaborative process, as lead researcher, I would act informally and attempt to affect change in an authentically sensitive way by not acting directly as the agent of change. It was my intention to facilitate change by engaging HPU leaders in thought provoking discussions on the research topic, while the HPU leaders were responsible for implementing change initiatives with the HPU. Using the findings from phase one and two, I collaborated with the CEO and HPD to draw out priority themes for action. This helped to maintain participant-researcher distance in the field, allowing greater scrutiny of data. In phases three and four I continued to collaborate with the HPD and CEO and included the head coach.

From phase one and two, a series of themes and sub-themes focused upon sources of personal meaning and their modes of construction emerged. This phase concluded with the dissemination of these themes in a brief report and presentation to the CEO and HPD (see Appendix A for a copy of the report and Appendix B for presentation notes). As part of this presentation, a collaborative planning session was conducted using findings from phase one and two as a central resource to prioritise a focus of the change effort and link phase one and two with phase three. These themes formed the foundation for the action in phase three. This is reported in Chapter Four.

Phase three: Intervention and action. This phase focused upon developing strategies that could help the NZRL and HPU leaders act as agents of change to promote a high performing culture in the HPU. These strategies were designed in a collaborative manner primarily with the HPD, but also the CEO and the head coach. While shifting from overt to subtle throughout the research, my collaborative involvement with HPU leaders was greatest during planning periods away from direct interaction with the HPU (Chapter Five). Once the HPU was together in competition (April and October to November), my collaborative role became subtler and greater emphasis was given to observation of interventions (as a management team member). The change strategies were informed by learning and insight obtained in the previous phases, suitable theoretical concepts from literature and where appropriate participants' past experiences. The planned strategies were also implemented in the form of 'action', as shown in the EAR model (see Figure 5). In this phase, it was important to make the distinction between the research intervention and other initiatives implemented in the normal operations of the high performance department. Another important element in this phase was the conscious monitoring and reflection undertaken by me and in collaboration with

the HPU leaders. Conscious reflection allowed me to draw out themes for focus, further helped to maintain participant-researcher distance in the field, and enabled greater scrutiny and analysis of the manager-led change efforts. The purposeful 'mini-cycles' of reflexivity and meta-learning were essential at this stage to effectively contextualise learning, situate me as the researcher, and inform subsequent action. As detailed in the EAR model (see Figure 5), the project passed through two phases of intervention and action in line with the rugby league competition calendar and interactions with the HPU. Phase 3 is reported in Chapters' Five and Six.

Phase four: Evaluation of intervention and action. In this final phase, evaluation of intervention and action, supported by data from other participants, HPU leaders (CEO, HPD and HC) and I critically reflected upon the value of the planned action in terms of managing cultural change. As with phase three, phase four was influenced by existing and emergent theoretical and thematic concepts coupled with experience of the action phases. This phase was carried out by participant observation, unstructured interviews and artefact analysis in which exploring change and learning was the central focus. The findings of phase four coupled with learning from all previous phases formed the outcomes of the research in response to the central research question addressing how the NSO performance leadership (CEO, HPD and HC) could act as agents of change to effectively promote a high performing culture within the HPU. This phase is reported in Chapter Seven.

Undertaking the Fieldwork

I began the consultation process over a series of face-to-face meetings with the CEO and HPD to establish the focus of the research. Given the high performance management parameters of the research scholarship, the CEO and HPD were identified as essential individuals for engagement as both were full-time employees and responsible for the strategic leadership of the organisation as a whole and the high performance domain. Initially, there was a desire from the organisation to pursue a project investigating multiple case studies of successful (as indicated by consistent successful performance) sporting team/organisational cultures. This initial project request appeared to be driven by a desire to pursue the traditional management initiatives of benchmarking to elucidate the characteristics of such organisations. However, as discussed earlier, effective cultural change is context specific (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008) and formulaic change efforts or copies, that do not consider the existing cultural context are likely to fail (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006; Brooks & Bate, 1994; Smith, 2003).

During the initial consultation process, we discussed the importance of context and subsequent transferability limitations of that investigation design. I shared an alternative approach, to gain a deeper understanding of one's own context and the journey of change, I recommended focusing on understanding the phenomena as it existed to the NZRL, rather than a single time snapshot of cultural characteristics. After considering this alternative, the CEO and HPD agreed to pursue that alternative line of enquiry as they could see the intellectual property of the project not only being uniquely 'Kiwi'² and specific to New Zealand Rugby League, but also contributing to a desired legacy within high performance at the NZRL. A

² Kiwi: Kiwi is a contemporary colloquial term to describe people from Aotearoa New Zealand. Emerging amongst the military during the First World War, the name is derived from the national symbol of New Zealand, the native flightless Kiwi bird. Unlike many demographic labels, its use is generally not considered offensive, is used in self-reference and is generally viewed as a symbol of national pride and endearment for the people of New Zealand (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Collins & Jackson, 2007; Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

collaborative meeting followed between the supervisory team, HPD and myself to construct the general thrust of the research. The NZRL's desire for change, their willingness to collaborate and their openness provided me with an 'all-access pass' to the real world of high performance sport and facilitated the action orientated design.

Despite being an investigation of only a single organisation, the process of gaining access and acceptance in the often-guarded world of high performance sport, the length of the ethnographic engagement, and the complexity of the action cycles made this an ambitious project to manage. The decision to use action research with an ethnographic bias was driven by the appeal of generating research outcomes and concurrent action that not only met the intended brief set by the NZRL, but would benefit the NZRL, while also yielding rich data for theory development. The project required careful administration to meet the requirements of the doctoral programme within the specific time frame. It was important to acknowledge the complexities that ensued, while also managing the participant-researcher duality throughout the research process. Acknowledgement of these challenges can be found at the end of Chapters' Four, Five, Six and Seven as part of researcher reflection, however I will now discuss the complexities of negotiating access to the research site.

Negotiating and Maintaining Access

A significant part of ethnographic and action research is gaining access to the phenomena of study, however gaining permission to enter is not the same as access (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Harrington, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2013; Warren, 2001), as Glesne (1999) argued,

Access is a process. It refers to your acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research purposes (p. 33).

For this research, negotiating access centred on building relationships with gatekeepers, a process which is unpredictable and uncontrollable (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003; Kawulich, 2011). Gatekeepers occupy both formal and informal positions (Wanat, 2008). Formal gatekeepers are viewed as people who occupy positions of power and have the (positional) authority to grant official permission and sponsor research (Glesne, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Kawulich, 2011; Wanat, 2008). The key individuals who acted as formal gatekeepers were the HPD, the high performance manager, the head coach and to a lesser extent the CEO, whom without their support, this research would have not progressed beyond conception. I saw their acceptance as critical to the success of the project.

As indicated earlier, I entered the HPU as a volunteer for two and a half days a week and approached my voluntary position with good manners, a willingness to help, a strong work ethic and sincerity (Wanat, 2008). This process gave me time to develop a reciprocal working relationship and rapport with the two office-based HPU leaders, the HPD and CEO, and the other office-based HPU management personnel. I was also flexible and persistent (Maginn, 2007), and where possible made efforts to chat informally with them and asked questions about their families, their past and their playing history. This process was of two fold benefit. First it continued to build personal relationships, but second it gave me further insight into the narratives of management and players within the culture.

Acceptance from these positional gatekeepers was essential for initial entry and support throughout the research project, but it was only the beginning. I knew if I was to build an authentic portrayal of culture and change, giving voice to all participants, I needed to build

meaningful, trusting relationships with management, and more importantly players (Harrington, 2003; Kawulich, 2011; Wanat, 2008). Despite being experienced and comfortable with 'the boys' in the masculine environment of elite team sports, as an outsider coming in, entry into the culture of the HPU was a daunting venture. When negotiating access and acceptance, cultural members inevitably came to check me out, wanting to know what I was doing, my intent and whether I could be trusted (Greene, 2014; Kawulich, 2011; Warren, 2001). Periodically, by accidental use of language, dress and actions, I revealed myself as the cultural "naïf, an awkward simpleton" (Crapanzano, 1992, p. 61) making cultural faux pas as players unintentionally and intentionally caught me out.

Participant observation acted as a form of phased assertion (Collings, 2009) and was a central strategy for becoming culturally competent. Through participant observation I was able to subtly learn the social structure and cultural practices of the research site to successfully negotiate entry (Feldman et al., 2003; Kawulich, 2011). I was overtly conscious to watch others to learn what was appropriate, the language, the greetings (the "bro shake") and the way people interacted. My own form of social learning and socialisation supplemented what was learned in conversations, meetings and interviews. As part of learning the social structure and my own cultural assimilation, participation was invited (and required) in a number of cultural practices (rituals) and 'rites of passage' (Chapter Four).

Identifying key informal gatekeepers and building relationships with them was also central as these individuals often unofficially guard and protect research settings and participants (Feldman et al., 2003; Kawulich, 2011). For this research, those individuals included the assistant coach, certain players and the HPU management personnel who had particularly personal relationships with the players. While my research relationships with formal gatekeepers were important, these informal gatekeepers allowed not only cultural assimilation, but also access to a more authentic cultural picture. To develop relationships with these important individuals, I established rapport by striking up informal conversations. I listened, gave time and energy and valued the aspects of their lives that they shared with me (Maginn, 2007) to help create a position where participants felt comfortable with my presence (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Underpinning my cultural assimilation was the way I presented myself to the participants (Maginn, 2007) and the multiple roles and identities I occupied as I journeyed through my long-term immersion in the field (Goffman, 1959). In reflexive accounts of qualitative research, it is important to consider the role of the researcher's multiple identities in shaping and negotiating insider-outsider status and their influence on the collection of data (Couture, Zaidi, & Maticka-Tyndale, 2012; Mazer, 2003). The researcher is required to learn how to move between his or her various identities, whilst being aware of and understanding the effects of such movement on the research. Consequently, highlighting how such skills were acquired or developed was an integral part of the learning and documenting of ethnographic methods (Fuller, 1999). A malleable identity, referred to by Ball (1990) as the "skilful self" (p. 165) was central to the research being a success, where the researcher is to:

...to make themselves acceptable to all parties in the field, if possible to take on a research role that allows maximum flexibility in forms of social relations and social interaction...to be all things to all people and to sublimate their own personalities, commitments and beliefs as far as is humanly and ethically possible. (Ball, 1990, p.165)

I entered the field as an outsider, someone without explicit priori knowledge of the community under study, nor its members (Greene, 2014). Despite this initial position, I wanted

to be viewed by participants as someone who could identify with their lives, and equally they could identify with mine. Phase one and two presented the chance to become acquainted with the HPU management and players and to test the data collection methods. I negotiated the data collection phase to build rapport and trust with participants by adopting the poise of a cultural chameleon. I subtly manipulated my behaviour and identity to present a front and blend in when required (Goffman, 1959). I presented was the identity of a quasi-Kiwi, one that required a conscious attention to dress and fashion (snap back baseball caps, singlet, short haircut), language (no academic terms, colloquial 'Kiwisms', rugby league terminology) and behaviour (handshake greetings, non-verbal gestures). To reduce player's suspicion of me and close the imaginary distance between their perception of me and that of themselves, I presented an identity that softened my English heritage, and downplayed my middle class upbringing and educational background. Other examples included how my language changed when interacting with management rather than players, and in private conversations rather than group interactions. I used pre-existing knowledge, whether it was discipline specific with management or personal experience with players, to generate conversation, establish a common ground for our relationships and build trust.

As I became a more familiar feature of the management group, and as old players and personnel left, and new ones joined, participants came to identify me as the practitioner (participant), rather than the researcher. I was no longer the explicit outsider; my position had shifted towards an insider. Positions or positionality is relative to the cultural norms and values of both the researcher and participants (Greene, 2014; Merriam et al., 2001) and refers to the extent to which the researcher's self or identity is aligned or shared with participants (Chavez, 2008). Despite the established influence of one's cultural and theoretical perspectives and the importance of acknowledging these, researchers often seldom address their position in the research (Greene, 2014). Initially I was perceived as a social member but cultural stranger. However, repeated interactions and shared experiences with players and management personnel over time generated trust between the participants and me. Over time, I became accepted as part of the management team and shifted to a cultural member. As part of this shift and commonplace in masculine sports environments, I acquired nicknames along the way (Fine, 1979). Early on, some of the staff referred to me as 'Sione' (Samoan for John). Later on, players used my physical characteristics as a stimulus for nicknames, such as 'Donkey Arse' or 'Barge Arse'. However, as Adler and Adler (1987) argued, while the researcher should cultivate trust, rapport and identification, they should maintain a polite distance from participants as not to risk acquiring complete membership. In practice, as I became emotionally and physically involved in collaborative planning and discourse with HPU leaders this became a challenge, as I felt myself adopting the beliefs, motivations and discourses present in the culture. The identities I performed were neither natural nor were they fixed in time; they were constructed by the societies and group to which I found myself attached. A number of experiences served as sudden reminders of my outsider status. One example was when I was over familiar in greeting a new player I had not met before with a hug, only to be awkwardly greeted at a distance with a traditional handshake. On occasions, participants challenged my identity, some non-intentionally, but others I perceived as somewhat devious attempts to expose me as the outsider. As a result of experience, I fluxed between insider and outsider through the research process. I alternated between feeling culturally similar in many beliefs and identity, and culturally quite different, battling my own internal sense of identity along the way. Negotiating and renegotiating one's position in the insider-outsider dichotomy is often reported in this style of research (Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014; Naples, 1996).

My experience concurred with postmodern views of positionality in qualitative research, where the researcher's position as an insider-outsider exists not as a dichotomy but as a continuum (Breen, 2007) where these positions are not fixed, but through experience "are ever-shifting and permeable social locations" (Naples, 1996, p. 140). Greene (2014) argued researchers should not concern themselves with being either/or (outsider or insider), and rather strive to be both, as there is mutual benefits in being close to one's research and keeping a distance to maintain an outside perspective. The flux in positionality over the course of the research did pose its own methodological challenges. Knowing participants personally undoubtedly challenged the way I related to them as a researcher and the impact upon me as researcher was two-fold. First, as a result of long-term emersion and evolving friendships with participants, there was a need for consideration with respect to researcher identity disclosure (Greene, 2014). As participants came to see me as the practitioner, the insider, my researcher role lay invisible and I was required to be forthcoming where necessary about my researcher identity. This required continual carefully negotiated social interaction and impression management to maintain rapport and identity while highlighting my intentions and ensuring ethical access (Chavez, 2008). This required, as Greene (2014) writes "a skilful performance on the part of the researcher to convince the participant of his true identity – especially as it may be desirable to shift from one's role as researcher to researched and back again" (p.6). Secondly, it is reported that insidersness coupled with an intimate and emotional attachment to participants forms a challenge to objectivity and maintaining an analytic distance (Taylor, 2011). A commitment to reflexivity (see p.58), meta-learning (p.48) and engaging critical friends (p.59) facilitated the conscious moderation of the multiple identities at play throughout the research process (Mazer, 2003), enabling continued access to the culture of study, while also facilitating a distanced researcher perspective.

Methods

Within the framework provided by Cardno (2003), the design was heavily influenced by the writings of Bath (2009), Tacchi et al. (2009), Ferkins et al. (2010), Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) and Coghlan and Brannick (2014). Tacchi et al. (2009) identified the need for EAR to utilise "diverse methods to uncover and explore different kinds of knowledge", and that these tools are to be employed within a triangulated research approach (Patton, 2002) to achieve a 'thick' description of the culture (Geertz, 1974). Tacchi et al. (2009) recommended the following as key research methods in EAR: participatory approaches (observation, participant observation and field notes), in-depth interviews, diaries, feedback mechanisms and other self-documentation. The field methods used in this research included participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing, and artefact analysis (Tacchi et al., 2009). Furthermore, a reflexive poise was adopted throughout the research and documented through a reflexive diary to contextualise the research. These methods were chosen primarily because they have been previously noted as conducive to a collaborative approach between the researcher and the participants (co-researchers; academic supervisors) (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003).

The mixture of these data collection methods facilitated the broad data required to frame the journey through the EAR process. These methods also allowed the rich narratives of meaning, culture and negotiated reality in the world of high performance sport to emerge, contributing to the depth of theory development through all the stages of the research. I adopted the combination of these methods as a result of considerable support for multiple data collection methods in both action research (Cardno, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) and ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Schensul & LeCompte, 2012). In action research, multiple methods of data collection facilitate triangulation and are

essential contributors to validity (Cardno, 2003). In ethnography, multiple data collection methods and approaches allowed a description of meaning and culture to emerge organically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b).

Participant observation. A primary data collection method was observation of HPU members as a participant in my role in the high performance department. Cardno (2003) recognised participant observation as a central data collection tool in understanding the impact of planned action research initiatives. Sands (2002) argued that when using an ethnographic approach, observation forms the fundamental method to uncover and make cultural assertions. As a participant observer, the experience of becoming a cultural member, rather than merely an external observer provided depth and credibility to the cultural interpretations, while also supporting collaborative interactions when diagnosing, prioritising and planning action with HPU leaders.

Given the potential sensitivity of the topic area and resultant data, the participant observer role was considered appropriate, and allowed me to interact organically; casually and non-directly without committing fully to the goals or values shared by the participants (Angrosino & Pérez, 2000). Participant observation was used throughout the fieldwork phase, and it was accepted that various levels of observation and participant observation occurred almost constantly throughout the research process.

Procedure for observations. Observations were conducted in the head office, at training camps, test matches³/competitions, hotels, public events and meetings. I employed a number of ethnographic skills documented by Wagstaff et al. (2012) including asking questions, engaging in dialogue with participants and subtle eavesdropping. Krane and Baird (2005) argued this process requires conscientious observation of seemingly insignificant social interactions, conversations and events. These were documented through the use of field notes, reflective journals, and electronic memos on an android cell phone and based on ongoing analysis. Wagstaff et al. (2012) suggested such ethnographic skills are essential to achieve the rapport and trust required for acceptance into a culture, however such approaches do require great effort to establish oneself as 'one of them', something essential to the nature of ethnography as illustrated in the earlier section on negotiating access. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) advised against the participant observer trying to see or hear everything, as they may become intrusive and negatively influence the information he or she is exposed to. Therefore, through my various daily responsibilities with different people and at different sites, to ensure authentic data, my observations remained casual rather than intrusive.

Interviewing: Unstructured and semi-structured interviews. The research utilised two forms of interviewing: unstructured and semi-structured. Unstructured interviewing, often referred to as informal conversations or ethnographic interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Patton, 2002), was an integral field method used to understand the world from the participants' point of view (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) and to allow participants to attach meaning to experience in their own words (Krane & Baird, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). The unstructured interview resembled a chat, where the questions flowed from the immediate context or problem (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The unstructured interviews often resulted from ongoing observational fieldwork and became a natural extension of participant observation (Patton, 2002). This style of interviewing differs from formal interviewing, in that the interviewer is not passive, but encouraged "to get to know respondents beneath their rational facades" (Fontana

³ Test or Test Match: An official international fixture or game between the New Zealand team and another nation's team, e.g. Australia.

& Frey, 2000). Denzin (1989) poetically described this style of interviewing as “those interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives and have the potential for creating transformational experiences” (p. 15).

The unstructured interview allowed me to understand and interpret the complex behaviour of a high performance sport team without limiting the inquiry by imposing any priori categorisation (Flick, 2014). I was able to probe and gain in-depth information about the interventions, actions and meanings, while at the same time allowing new topics to emerge (Flick, 2014; Patton, 2002). The personal, relaxed and natural flow of the unstructured interview offered an authentic experience to participants, encouraging an openness in their responses (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Patton, 2002), while at the same time promoting collaboration between and with HPU leaders. This style of interviewing aligned with the postmodern understanding of knowledge construction, that is one that views the interview data as a product of a relationship between the participant and researcher (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Fontana and Frey (2000) described such interactions as “negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents” (p. 663).

While the unstructured interviews did not use predetermined questions or categories they were not entirely random and non-directive (Patton, 2002). I needed detailed knowledge and preparation before I embarked on the interviews to achieve in-depth insights into participants’ experiences (Patton, 2002). It was essential when engaging in the interviews that I kept in mind the purpose of the research, the research question and the general scope of the issues within the action research (Fife, 2005). Topics and concepts for unstructured interviews in all research phases centred on the themes identified through collaboration and ongoing data analysis. Unstructured interviews are identified in the forthcoming chapters as ‘Interview’.

Adopting the same procedures described above, semi-structured interviews were also conducted as part of phase one and two. These interviews were chosen to provide flexibility and structure for both data collection and analysis (Flick, 2014; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Questions for the semi-structured interviews focused on the central research question and sub-questions (see Appendix C for the interview prompt sheet). While I initially planned to use semi-structured interviews as an integral research tool, I decided at the conclusion of phases one and two, that these interviews would not be used in phases three and four because of a number of practical and methodological challenges (Chapter 4, Researcher Reflections: Process and Premise Learning). Semi-structured interviews are identified in the forthcoming chapters as ‘SS Interview’.

Procedure for interviews. The same procedures were followed for both interview approaches. The data from the unstructured and semi-structured interviews was recorded using a Dictaphone where possible. This way I gathered verbatim information and could include reflections, in the form of notes, during or post conversation. The use of technology in professional sport and business is commonplace; as similar technology is used to record, interpret and analyse performance in sport, or record minutes at meetings. A total of 117 separate recordings were collected, comprising over 60 hours of data.

I transcribed data verbatim into Microsoft Word. This process helped increase my familiarity with the data and participants and further immersed me in the research problem. Data were uploaded and saved in a qualitative software program (NVivo 10) for ongoing analysis, and were identified and refined. Data were also assigned to themes which led to the continued development of the thematic framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Artefact analysis. I collected documents (official and unofficial) and objects that provided an insight into the lives, experiences and perceptions of the participants in their construction of meaning, culture and change over the course of the research. The data types ranged from formal documents and printed publications, to newspaper interviews and team posters. Whilst this was a secondary data collection strategy, it was used to support the primary methods and acted as a source of triangulation when exploring the research question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

Reflexivity. To maintain an analytical distance and pursue a postmodern discourse, reflexivity was essential (Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Sparkes, 2002). Researchers are required to consciously reflect upon their actions, reasons for their actions and how they acted in the research field (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). Through reflexivity as praxis, I was able to constantly challenge my assumptions, beliefs, interpretations and conclusions, and in doing so was able to test my emergent theory within the literature, the participants and critical friends. Reflexivity allowed regularly addressing questions related to power issues to become an in-depth and ongoing process, exploring how and in what ways my social class, social position and cultural heritage produced particular power hierarchies. It also addressed in what ways these hierarchies structured my interaction with, and interpretations of, the players and management, and conversely, how these same issues structured how the athletes and coaches responded in the research context (McGannon & Johnson, 2009).

Procedures for reflexivity. Reflexivity was carried out as praxis through a reflexive journal and oral discussions with critical friends (supervisors). The use of critical friends throughout the qualitative data generation process is valued in sport management research as a means of generating thought-provoking discourse and challenging observations and interpretations (Skinner et al., 2014). I engaged with my primary supervisor to robustly interrogate the research method and my involvement in data collection. A secondary supervisor with eighteen years' experience in high performance sport peer reviewed my data analysing. This enabled me to critically reflect upon the emerging data and my assumptions and emotions in a self-aware manner (Holt & Sparkes, 2001). Furthermore, considering my immersion as a researcher in the field of study, the use of critical friends facilitated an extra layer of rigour to the research process. As Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) argued, the challenge to researchers using ethnographic approaches as they become immersed in their data and research field is that of 'going native' or "completely adopting the interpretive view of the organisation's members and thus losing the dispassionate view required for a more theoretical, second-order analysis" (p. 436). What begins as a conscious effort to be seen as one of the group becomes subconscious because of the prolonged engagement with the culture under study (Lincoln et al., 2011). My critical friends had not been exposed to the direct, subjective insider experiences and thus could adopt a more detached position, challenge my subjectivity and offer a more objective analysis of the data and as well as helping me with my debriefing efforts (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). A particularly useful tool to create distance and deconstruct the familiar world of the HPU during data collection was recording informal interviews between myself and my supervisors (Van Heugten, 2004).

In addition to the use of critical friends, as part of the reflexive process, I embarked upon a continuing journey of self-reflexivity and exploration of my own social context and categories, their social construction and my role within the research field to address the questions of "how do my identity and social position bring me to ask particular questions and interpret phenomena in particular ways?" and "how does my own identity and social position privilege particular choices in the research process while also marginalizing [sic] particular

choices?" (McGannon & Johnson, 2009, p. 59). These questions shaped the research process in socially, culturally and politically specific ways (Sparkes, 2002). This process was documented using a Dictaphone, an A5 journal, memo software on an android cell phone and on the original data transcripts as memos. As part of identifying the context and issues (phases one and two), I began with an analysis of my context and social construction. This analysis included a personal historical narrative and in situ analysis of data generated against the reflexive questions above. This helped me acknowledge my own biases and social categories, and also explore how these biases and categories position participants in relation to the social categories to which they belong (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). This project passed through two action cycles, with four layers of reflexivity, including the evaluation phase. During the action phase, reflexivity was achieved through the action cycles, particularly the 'mini-cycles', which questioned content (what was happening), process (how it was happening) and premise (why it was happening) and facilitated a holistic reflection of the whole process. Summaries of this learning can be found at the end of each of Chapters Four to Seven. For an additional layer of reflexivity, throughout all phases, I considered my behavioural impact upon the research (methodological reflexivity) and the impact of my belief systems upon the research product (epistemic reflexivity) (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Such a reflexive and iterative practice provided rigour within the research process (Reason, 2006).

Data Analysis

In EAR, analysis begins when data gathering begins (Bath, 2009; Frankham & Howes, 2006). In this project, the analysis process began with understanding the context of the research field (phases one and two) and took place throughout the research. Initially the analysis focused upon uncovering the meanings and their modes of construction in the culture of the HPU. Analysis began in a deductive fashion, using theories of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and organisational culture and change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008) as a theoretical framework. As the project progressed into the action phase, the analytical focus shifted to designing interventions, the planning and implementation process, and consequently the impact this process had upon the prevalent meanings and behaviours of the participants. Throughout this analysis, a constant inductive process allowed a focus on formative thoughts about issues of importance (Silk, 2005). This facilitated an ongoing, iterative process between data collection, analysis and interpretation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The postmodern lens influenced the analysis through an attention to complexity, narrative, power, social illusions, cultural violation and challenge (Grbich, 2012). While the postmodern lens inherently influenced the way I looked at the data, made linkages and positioned portions of text in themes, as eluded to earlier, I regarded postmodernism as more of a rhetoric for justification rather than an explicit set of methodological and analytical procedures (Delamont & Atkinson, 2009). I was overtly conscious of the potential for researcher self-indulgence when persisting with postmodern driven data analysis methods (Ellingson, 2009; Grbich, 2012), and was subsequently motivated to ensure the research participants were the heroes of the story. There were four avenues of data analysis through the research process: reflection, interaction, formal thematic analysis and the write up process.

Reflection. Reflective and reflexive processes formed an integral part of the data analysis. I reviewed the evolution of my ideas, reflected on what learning and change was taking place and what was shaping that learning, and why certain questions were asked or not asked, and why data was generated in a particular way. A primary tool in the analysis process was the use of reflective diaries in the form of handwritten journals and electronic memos stored on phones and tablets which allowed me to make sense of the cultural and change landscape in the HPU and identify gaps in understanding for further exploration. In total, 162 pages of

transcribed diary memos were completed over the duration of the research. The reflexive diary allowed me to collect primary data and organise the chronological unfolding of events while capturing my own thoughts, ideas and impressions of the cultural landscape. With reference to the EAR model design for this project (see Figure 5), the diaries enabled me to adopt both a reflective and reflexive poise, and provided the vehicle for the multiple levels of critical reflection upon both the process ('mini-cycles' of experience, reflection, interpretation and planning action), and the learning (meta-learning; content, process and premise) surrounding cultural change in a high performance sport programme.

Interaction. Regular meetings with the participants, in particular key organisational leaders, the CEO and HPD, and my supervisory team provided an opportunity to further analyse and unearth meaning from the experience of participants over the course of the research. I was conscious of the importance of collaboration, not only in the spirit of authentic action research, but to give validity to the analysis process and reduce the influence of researcher bias. Sharing my interpretation of the issues, solutions and outcomes with the core group (HPU leaders), promoted both overt and subtle collaboration and encouraged them to draw conclusions from the data. In some instances, where appropriate, I discussed the relevance of particular theory with the key participants. This aided in the interplay between theory and practice, or practical knowing and propositional knowing (Heron & Reason, 2006), giving legitimacy to alternative forms of knowledge and applying Schön's (1995) epistemology of practice.

Procedures for interpreting thematic construction. The data generated using my research tools enabled themes and categories to emerge informing the research's direction and guided a conceptual blueprint from which to report the research. I used three computer software programmes (Dragon Naturally Speaking 12, Microsoft Word and NVivo 10) to aid with transcription, organisation of data, coding and thematic development. I transcribed data (audio transcripts, field notes, memos, artefacts and reflexive diary) using Dragon Naturally Speaking 12 into Microsoft Word. Transcripts were then organised in NVivo 10 for ongoing analysis, identification and refinement of themes through a posture of indwelling (Pavlish & Pharris, 2012) allowing the participants' narratives to emerge. Using NVivo 10, the data were designated themes, in synthesis and union with my literature review. This culminated in the development of a thematic framework to inform theoretical development (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes and categories for coding were created according to content (Flick, 2014). As new data was collected, new sub-themes and categories emerged. These themes, categories and sub-categories were displayed electronically in NVivo 10 to provide a data set for interpretation. Data analysis ceased when saturation occurred, that is, when no new themes emerged either during data collection or the analysis phases (Silk, 2005). During data analysis and theory construction, an additional researcher (secondary supervisor) facilitated intensive scrutiny of my familiar perspective (Van Heugten, 2004) that promoted a more objective, theoretical analysis of the data (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Aligning with the philosophical stances of the research, the analysis process provided the research with methodological rigour and process to make sound sense of the data. The interplay between analysis and data collection, and the considerations discussed above ensured trustworthiness. The same approach for thematic development was used through all phases of the EAR model. Developing the thematic framework was essential to make sense of the diversity of themes and subthemes, yet still retain a close link to the research questions, and assist in theory building and testing. The thematic framework holds a series of central themes, grounded in the research question, and several sub-themes or categories based upon emergent findings or re-emergence from the literature that pertained to the research question.

The write up. Another significant analytical tool was the writing up process. Analysis of the data should be a systematic and developmental process that looks to ascertain “What is going on” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9). In the case of this project, ‘telling the story’ in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, converted data into evidence and drew meaning from the experiences of participants. This descriptive story writing was another form of reflective thinking, enabling a deeper level of analysis in each chapter. The cycle of reflective analysis through writing up culminated in Chapter Eight, the conclusion. This chapter synthesised all the emergent findings and participant experience with literature and academic theory and enabled me to construct new understandings for cultural change in high performance sport.

Using the data analysed throughout the EAR, I described how the participants constructed meaning in the HPU and what inhibited, promoted and framed these constructions. Through the analysis I was able to critically evaluate the actions taken by the organisation to promote a high performing culture amongst the HPU. Through robust phases of action and reflection, the research critically evaluated the impact and implications of these changes and the factors that stimulated or constrained sensemaking and change. As a result, the research attempted to answer the main research question of how the NZRL high performance leadership (CEO, HPD and HC) acted as agents of change to effectively promote a high performing culture with the high performance unit. A schematic outline of the research outcomes, findings and the theoretical synthesis of the project as it passed through the EAR phases can be found in Figure 12 in Chapter 8. This created new knowledge for the high performance teams at the NZRL regarding cultural change initiatives and sensemaking that will hopefully prove useful in high performance management at the NZRL.

Time in the Field and Action Research Timeframe

As with any EAR research, it was necessary to develop a flexible design that allowed for changes as data emerged, but still providing a framework for the project (Ferkins et al., 2010). The broad timeframe of the time in the field ran from December 2011 to April 2014 (2 years, 4 months). The precise numbers of research phases were determined by the progress and outcomes of the cycles and the sport’s competition calendar. The research outcome, the successful promotion of a high performing culture, was targeted for the team’s performance at an upcoming pinnacle event, the 2013 Rugby League World Cup. Therefore cycles focused upon preparation, competition and review of this pinnacle event. A detailed final timeframe of the action research cycles can be found in Table 1.

Cycles	Dates
Phases 1 & 2: Context and issue identification	June 2012 – May 2013
Phase 3: Research intervention and action	July 2013 – October 2013
Reflection and monitoring	July 2013 – October 2013
Phase 3: Research intervention and action	October 2013 – December 2013
Reflection and monitoring	October 2013 – December 2013
Phase 4: Evaluation of intervention and action	December 2013 – April 2014 (Post World Cup)

Table 1. Research Phases and Timeframe

Considerations of the Approach

Validity in Method and Establishing Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness and validity are two key concepts by which the quality of the research is determined (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). In terms of research validity, the aim of this research was to ensure that the data which was collected, interpreted and presented accurately represented the phenomena under study (Cardno, 2003), that is the evolution of a high performing culture in the performance programme of the NZRL. In line with previous ethnographic studies in high performance sport (Wagstaff et al., 2012), sport psychology (Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Krane & Baird, 2005) and action research in sport

management (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; 2015) a number of steps at a number of levels were taken to ensure the qualitative standards of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and ultimately the trustworthiness and validity of the method, data and research product.

First, I was immersed in the field for two years and four months, allowing me to build a long-term living relationship with both the field and the participants. This facilitated and maintained relationships of trust, cooperation and authenticity while also acquiring dependable and credible data in the form of the reality of participant life experiences (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Despite sharing some similarities with the participants (age, gender, sporting history), given rugby league's Polynesian hegemony in New Zealand (Falcous, 2007), as a white European, I did acknowledge that I am culturally different to many of the players (and management). Therefore, I advanced my knowledge of Māori⁴ and Pacific Island culture and values as recommended prior to (and throughout) data collection (Rossi, Rynne, & Nelson, 2013; Smith, 1999). This enabled a more sensitive interaction within the culture, gave a greater historical and personal context to the data and its analysis, and reduced outsider (Eurocentric) bias (Rossi et al., 2013). While aiming for enculturation and acceptance, it was also important to maintain my identity as the researcher by ensuring an openness with participants about the project and method. As McNiff (2013) argued, such openness about method and collaboration, reporting and transparency with participants makes action research credible. This process allowed continual data analysis and comparison to "refine constructs and to ensure the match between scientific categories and participant realities" (Burns, 2000, p. 324).

Second, the research engaged in multiple forms of data triangulation, both internal (between multiple sources of data) and external (member checking and researcher triangulation) to ensure not only rigour in the research process but also dependability, confirmability and credibility of data and analysis (Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Skinner et al., 2014). While alternative forms of data validation are becoming popular in postmodern research (Ellingson, 2009), with constructivist-interpretivism at the heart of the philosophical and methodological framework, triangulation remained the principal strategy to ensure data trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). My primary data collection tools, unstructured interviews and participant observation, were solely derived from lived experience and "are less abstract than many instruments used in other research designs" (Burns, 2000, p. 324). These primary tools were supported by other methods, including semi-structured interviews, artefact analysis and field notes to incorporate multiple forms of data triangulation. Consensus was revealed by examining where the data intersected (Silverman, 2005) and consequently facilitate Geertz's (1974) thick description of culture. Supporting researchers (supervisors), with experience in high performance sport, examined the data and agreed on all raw data themes. This process provided a constant interplay between, not only the data and the researchers, but also the researchers themselves, and thus offered an extra form of triangulation (Butt & Molnar, 2009). Member checking with participants was undertaken during phase one and two to verify data and participant reality (Tolich & Davidson, 2011) and check research outcomes (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). At the conclusion of phase one and two, formal data checking procedures were deemed inappropriate with change recipients (see Chapter Four: Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning), however, unstructured participant interviews continued to provide an informal check on data and experience.

⁴ Māori: The indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Third, the reflexive posture of the research not only embodied a process of “disciplined activity”, in which I continually questioned and re-evaluated information whilst challenging my personal bias and context (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 272), but also acknowledged the integral role of the researcher in the research process. One of the major criticisms of modern ethnography and qualitative action research is the potential for researcher bias (Dick, 2002; Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Sparkes, 2002). As Tolich and Davidson (2011) asserted, immersion and active involvement is essential in action research, where participants speak through the researcher giving access to their lived experience. The data was monitored and reflected upon via the reflexive journal and critical friends (supervisors). Such reflexive and critical conversations offered a means of exploring and documenting potential biases that may have influenced the research direction. Reflexive practices and the acknowledgement of my contextual perspective (see *Locating my voice*) enhanced confirmability (Shenton, 2004). The research used four action steps as well as multiple levels of reflexivity including inter-data, intra-data and researcher reflexivity. This reflexivity and its iterative application through the action cycles facilitated rigour within the research (Reason & Bradbury, 2013). This reflexive process allowed me to remain conscientious about my behaviours, conscious to my own personal biases and the influence I had, as the central instrument of analysis, on the direction of the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

Finally, engaging in multiple cycles of reflection, planning, action and evaluation that continually challenged previous conclusions created a process of internal data validation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). These multiple cycles ensured that the quality of data and the accuracy of interpretations were evaluated (Dick, 2002). Action research practitioners consider that knowledge derived and tested in practice generates credibility, and so, one method of ensuring credibility is the action research process itself (Dick, 2002; Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Skinner et al., 2014). Greenwood and Levin (2007) argued there are two ways to assess the credibility of action research; workability (are the actions resulting in a solution to the ‘real world’ problem?) and tangibility (results interpreted and constructed to offer meaning and understanding about what has occurred).

Ethical Considerations

With its highly participatory and collaborative nature, EAR is inherently intrusive (Bath, 2009). This was largely alleviated by the collaborative nature of the research experience, which provided a positive environment for the individuals and organisation involved, and gave voice and agency to the research participants. However, there was still a possibility that the questioning and probing at potentially sensitive issues and times, for example micro politics and power would cause a negative experience. Furthermore, with the prolonged data collection period with the same participants (two years and four months), the importance of preventing deception and ensuring overt research in building a positive research experience and outcome was also pertinent. Cardno (2003) stated, “recognising and openly acknowledging such a situation is part of doing ethical research, and goes beyond mere compliance with the principle of informed consent”. Supplementary to the standard ethical practice of informed consent and the right to withdraw from the process at any point, additional measures were also put in place to minimise risk of a negative impact on participants.

Given the high profile of the participants and the organisation, confidentiality and protecting identity was a paramount consideration. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) stipulated, “Confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed” (p. 72). A major ethical consideration of this research involved the disclosure of sensitive information about the participants, the organisation and their practices. However,

following a review of my proposal, it was recommended that it was necessary to disclose the participant organisation, for two main reasons. First, because of the public nature of the scholarship attempting to ensure organisation anonymity would be futile, and second, academic quality, reader understanding and transferability of theory would be significantly impaired without understanding the context of the sport and the NSO. It was openly acknowledged that while only the organisation would be expressly identified, the project could not guarantee absolute confidentiality of the finite group of people in the HPU. It is possible (even with all identifiable features removed) for those with insider knowledge, to identify participants. That said, every possible measure was undertaken throughout the research process to ensure participant confidentiality and privacy (Cardno, 2003). All names of the participants and any highly identifiable features have been kept out of the recording of the data transcripts, reports and any publications that may ensue. A coding system of participant pseudonyms was used from day one for records and reporting of data. The ethics approval letters from AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEK) can be found in Appendix E.

Once data collection had begun, regularly identifying my role as researcher with participants, and allowing them to engage me when actively collecting data also helped to ensure my presence as researcher was overt and to prevent deception. In addition, making transcripts of the recorded material available to participants upon request for approval as well as giving the opportunity to contribute to final conclusions attempted to reduce misinterpretation and researcher bias (Cardno, 2003). Further ethical considerations focused upon mitigating coercive influences and power imbalances, truthfulness and limiting deception, data management and social and cultural sensitivity.

Chapter Summary

In summary, I began this chapter by locating and explaining the NZRL as the research site and the members of the NZRL HPU as research participants. Establishing my research paradigm and epistemological assumptions that have underpinned this research followed this. My adoption of the constructivist position was justified and I offered a rationale for my adoption of a postmodern understanding of my role as researcher and Schön's (1995) epistemology of practice. I subsequently highlighted my socially constructed history that has both shaped the motivations for the research and has been the 'lens' through which the culture of the HPU at the NZRL was observed and interpreted. The research design was further shaped by a desire to not only build knowledge but also find solutions to cultural management issues in the HPU at the NZRL. To meet this objective, EAR methodology was used for this research and was justified in detail. This was followed by an explanation of the research methods, analysis approaches, the steps taken to ensure compliance with qualitative research standards, and the ethical issues addressed.

In drawing this chapter to a close, I want to leave the reader, with a quote from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who contemplated, "the *only* seeing we have is seeing from a perspective; the *only* knowledge we have is knowledge from a perspective" (cited in Grbich, 2004, p. 11). It is necessary to remember this as you, the reader, negotiate the events, experiences and stories presented in this research, and subsequently construct your own interpretation. What is presented here is my interpretation, from my perspective. The following chapter details the first two phases of the EAR model, issue and context identification, and attempts to historically and culturally contextualise the NZRL and offer a cultural audit of the HPU to highlight the issues that became the focus of the research intervention.

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

This chapter documents the first two phases of the EAR model, the context and issue identification (see Figure 5). Through the initial ethnographic immersion in the NZRL and HPU, the story presented seeks to give readers a cultural insight into the HPU. The analysis begins by locating the research site in a historical and cultural context, articulating the reader to the sport of rugby league in New Zealand, the NSO (NZRL), and the HPU and national team, the Kiwis⁵. I then document the story and ensuing events of the ten months of phase one and two, including management planning, test campaigns and training camps, interspersed with my researcher journey as I negotiated access to the research field. The process incorporated investigation and analysis of the culture to both highlight the sources of meaning at play and uncover how those meanings were made. The chapter then focuses on the emergent issues that inhibited meaning making and influenced culture, and the collaboration with the CEO and the HPD to frame the forthcoming change focus (phase three). The concluding part of this chapter evaluates phases one and two of the EAR process and summarises the outcomes.

Context and Issue Identification

Given that “no organisation can be properly understood apart from its wider social and cultural context” (Scott, 1995, p. 151), the existing cultural dimensions need to be identified and acknowledged to achieve a successful change effort (Brooks & Bate, 1994; Lawson & Ventriss, 1992). An understanding of the cultural, political and performance landscape is particularly relevant in leading effective change in high performance sport (Cruickshank et al., 2014). Formulaic approaches to change that do not recognise members deeply embedded meanings and diverse understandings of organisational life have been criticised in terms of their ability to deliver desired change outcomes (Alvesson & Svingsson, 2008; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006; Brooks & Bate, 1994; Smith, 2003). Rosso et al. (2010) argued that understanding meaning in the workplace centres on two key issues, where meaning comes from (sources of meaning), and how work becomes meaningful (meaning making mechanisms). In focusing on the possibility of change, as exploratory phases, phase one and two (conducted between July 2012 and April 2013) were designed to determine the existing cultural dimensions of the HPU, that is, the meanings that existed and shaped behaviour when athletes played for New Zealand, and the mechanisms through which these meanings were constructed, including the influence of the management and leadership of the HPU.

In light of the potential for sustainable change being greater when working through organisational leaders (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), it was the intent that the findings from the cultural audit (that formed phase one and two) would give clarity to the core group of participants with direct leadership responsibility for performance (i.e. the CEO, the HPD). Through collaboration, findings would then inform the focus for the change effort (phase three). In April 2013, the results of phases one and two were documented in an executive report and formally presented to the CEO and the HPD. Shortly afterwards, at the CEO’s request, the written report was also given to the NZRL board and principal funders, High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ). The writing and dissemination of findings allowed for greater collaboration with the participants, and ownership on their part in relation to the change focus (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011).

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) highlighted that care should be taken to not combine narrative and its interpretation when structuring discussions and data, but to separate the

⁵ Kiwis: The colloquial name used to refer to the New Zealand National Rugby League team.

events that took place from their interpretation. They emphasised that separating the story from its analysis and indicating which is which, contributes to methodological rigour and avoids difficulty for readers when evaluating the work. To ensure the integrity of the story for the reader, this recommendation was followed in the design of this chapter and subsequent chapters with sections relating to researcher reflection or analysis labelled as such. In this chapter, the story of the unfolding events is presented first, followed by thematic interpretation and then my reflections as the researcher.

Culture and cultural meanings are heavily contingent upon not only social, but also historical processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bruner, 1990). Historical context is of central importance when exploring an organisation's capacity to change and to deal with change (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). To more clearly understand the cultural landscape of the HPU at the NZRL, I undertook a thorough review to locate the present day sport of rugby league in New Zealand and the NZRL in a historical context. I will now offer a brief summary of that review pertinent to the research (the full review can be found in Appendix F).

Historical Context of the Research Site

Rugby league in New Zealand. Rugby league in New Zealand arrived as the 'Northern Union', a rival, 'professional' and breakaway form of rugby union from northern England. In 1910, the New Zealand Rugby Football League (NZRFL, present day NZRL) was formed as the game's national sport organisation with responsibility for administration, governance and operations of the game in New Zealand. However, rugby league in New Zealand was never to become dominant in the way it did in New South Wales, Queensland or northern England (Coffey & Wood, 2008). This was largely due to the historical role of rugby union in the construction of a New Zealand national identity and resulting culture (Falcous, 2007). The emergence of a 'professional' code threatened the privileged position of rugby union (and its amateur ethos promulgated and policed by the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, NZRFU), and challenged the early construction of the New Zealand national identity. The reaction to this challenge was one of repression and marginalisation, characterised by continual struggles for legitimacy and subsequent stigmatisation by NZRFU and rugby's position in national discourse (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007; Greenwood, 2007). Out of such marginalisation, rugby league's national development was fragmented, struggling in the rural provinces and only becoming established in urban hotbeds such as Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and on the coal mining West Coast (Coffey & Wood, 2008). Rugby league in New Zealand today is the product of its distinctive socio-historical origins and antagonistic development, and is defined by a relatively small, yet fanatical following who possess a strong sense of allegiance to all levels of the game (Falcous, 2007).

Ethno-cultural intersections. Since the game's inception in New Zealand, rugby league has received considerable support amongst marginalised groups, primarily the indigenous people of Aotearoa⁶ New Zealand, the Māori, and more recently, the Pasifika, the indigenous immigrants from the Pacific islands (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007; Greenwood, 2007). Since the early days of rugby league in New Zealand, Māori have played a prominent role, providing a large number of players (both domestically and internationally) and administrators to clubs (Coffey & Wood, 2008). Rugby league served as a medium to promote

⁶ Aotearoa: The Māori name for New Zealand. Often used in spoken or written English alongside New Zealand, e.g. Aotearoa New Zealand to reference the country of New Zealand and acknowledge its bi-cultural society (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

Māoridom⁷, Māori success, and celebrate separatism and liberation from colonial-Pākehā⁸ hegemonies and stereotypes (Falcous, 2007). From the strength of Māori rugby league, a separate governing body (New Zealand Māori Rugby League) was established along with a representative team, the New Zealand Māori, who at the height of separatism competed alongside the Kiwis at the 2000 Rugby League World Cup (Coffey & Wood, 2008). The role of Māori in rugby league in New Zealand has been such, that from a playing perspective the game has to some degree become a Māori, and more recently, Pasifika⁹ domain (Falcous, 2007).

The decades following the Second World War saw large numbers of immigrants from the Pacific islands (predominantly from, although not exclusively Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands) arrive in New Zealand in search of work and opportunity (Grainger, 2006). The collision sports of rugby league and union offered salient media for Pasifika aspiration, advancement and recognition (Horton, 2012), where large families became the backbone of Pasifika involvement in rugby league (Coffey & Wood, 2008). Māori and Pasifika are widely represented within the New Zealand game and these participation trends are intensified at the elite level, so much so that the New Zealand Kiwis ANZAC test team in 2004 drew entirely on players with Māori or Pacific heritage (Falcous, 2007). It is unquestionable that the contested, stigmatised and marginalised evolution of rugby league, and its ethno-cultural 'Polynesian' flavour, has shaped not only the culture of rugby league in New Zealand, but also the underpinning values, beliefs and meanings of those involved in the present day game in the professional era.

Commodification, performance and the Anderson report. Despite already being a 'professional' sport, rugby league was impacted by considerable commercial growth from the mid-1970s. The lack of a sustainable professional game in New Zealand and the sport's marginalised existence resulted in New Zealand high performance player diaspora, as athletes sought professional opportunities in Australia and the United Kingdom. Court cases, restrictions, selection and transfer policies all created conflict and unease between high performance players and the NZRL during this time. In 1990, a landmark court case saw the NZRL remove transfer regulations, triggering mass diaspora of New Zealand talent to Australia, which continues today (Wright, 2013). In 1995, New Zealand's first privately owned professional rugby league team, the New Zealand Warriors (formerly Auckland Warriors) played their first season in the Australia-based NSWRL competition. The growing commercial sports market in Australia made "the 'business' of rugby league, especially its media portfolio a clear takeover target" (Rowe, 1997, p. 221), culminating in the infamous 'Super League War' of the mid-1990s, where media corporations assumed central ownership of the global professional game (Denham, 2000; Falcous, 1998; Rowe, 1997). The 'Super League War' and the ensuing creation of the National Rugby League (NRL) rationalised and modernised the game along strictly commercial lines (Andrews & Ritzer, 2007; McGaughey & Liesch, 2002). Trade routes were opened, with salary caps and player earning potential dramatically increased. As commodification and commercialisation firmly established itself in the cultural fabric of rugby league, the cultural meanings and values attached to the game were threatened and in many instances changed or reconstructed to suit a commercial narrative (Denham, 2000; Falcous, 1998).

During this era of commercialisation, the rugby league field has become a prominent sociocultural site for the contemporary achievement and advancement of New Zealand players,

⁷ Māoridom: The world of Māori people

⁸ Pākehā: New Zealander of European descent – probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa New Zealand (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

⁹ Pasifika: People with heritage from the Pacific Islands

especially those whom identify as Māori and Pasifika (Horton, 2012; Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005). Recent figures show that 35% in the senior NRL competition hold New Zealand eligibility and the figure rises to 40% in the U20s version (NZRL, 2012). Professional rugby league (and union) has become a cultural hub of mainly Pasifika and Māori talent, where these players are widely recognised as outstanding athletic products, who are prime commodities to sell rugby league and in high demand for purchase on the global sport labour market (Grainger, 2006; 2009; Horton, 2012). Such demand for these players offers a potentially lucrative career option that is in stark contrast to the reality of traditional Pasifika and Māori pathways into unskilled labour (Horton, 2012). The trend of mass player exodus to either Australia or Europe exists across the performance spectrum. From professional player transfers overseas (Evans & Stead, 2012), to youth players (and their families), often as young as 14, who are actively recruited from New Zealand by agents and professional clubs to take up rudimentary contracts in Australia (The Anderson Report, 2009). As Falcous (2007) wrote, “at the turn of the third millennium the New Zealand game acts primarily as a ‘peripheral’ feeder of playing talent to the ‘core’ economies of the game in Australia and England” (p. 435). When considering leading and managing the HPU, the migration of players and their families presents a number of challenges to the NZRL, as national rugby league organisations and players face the complicated questions of heritage, residency, citizenship and international eligibility (Grainger, 2006; 2009; Lakisa, Adair, & Taylor, 2014; Wright, 2013).

While the global game transitioned swiftly into postmodern commercialism, the governance of the domestic game in New Zealand failed to adjust as quickly. In 2009, amidst growing concerns from the government over the health of rugby league in New Zealand, the government body Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC, presently known as Sport New Zealand) commissioned an independent review of the NZRL’s governance, management, financial and administration practices. From a high performance perspective, the report documented that an acceptance of talent diaspora by the NZRL had led to a laissez-faire approach to the leadership of high performance whereby it was “outsourced to Australia, that’s NZRL’s current policy” (The Anderson Report, 2009, p. 45). The resulting uncontrolled, unmonitored ‘outsourcing’ of the development of New Zealand’s best players to Australia was demonstrated by the lack of a clear strategy for high performance.

Despite a widely revered talent base (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007; The Anderson Report, 2009), the inconsistent approach to managing high performance rugby league in New Zealand had manifested in the team’s results in recent decades:

The 2008 Kiwis team which won the World Cup comprised eight Warriors, with the remaining players from offshore (i.e., non-New Zealand residents). New Zealand’s international performance has to date not been demonstrably consistent or sustainable. However, the Kiwis outstanding performance at the 2008 World Cup, the Women winning the world cup three times, and the Kiwis performance in the 2005 Tri Nations final against Australia (where they won 24 - 0), demonstrates that New Zealand has extra ordinary talent. It also shows that the New Zealand flagship high performance team the Kiwis has the ability to be the best internationally - the challenge is to be the best “consistently”. This has the potential to be achieved if supported by a high performance strategy which addresses the talent recruitment and retention issues. (The Anderson Report, 2009, p. 48)

The Anderson Report (2009) prompted a period of significant organisational change, renewal and financial stability beginning with the recruitment of a corporate CEO to lead change and transform sport from “league’s old-school, colourful, grassroots administrators and towards big business and governance” (“Ground zero for under-fire rugby league,” 2008). The NZRL

developed their first high performance strategy for the period 2009 – 2013 and the Kiwis also won the 2010 Four Nations tournament. However, despite significant organisational change and a dedicated strategy for high performance, recent test matches highlighted that the HPU had yet to achieve the degree of consistency in on-field performance that is reflective of a high performing culture.

The HPU at the NZRL

As defined earlier, the High Performance Unit (HPU) at the NZRL (and subsequently the research participants) consisted of anyone with direct responsibility for performance of the team. This included the CEO¹⁰, HPD, head coach, assistant coaches, support personnel, and players. Locating the HPU within the organisational context, HPD is one of four senior executives under CEO, with the others responsible for community and development, marketing and communications and finance matters. HPD's core responsibilities centred on the leadership of the NZRL High Performance Strategy (2009 – 2013). The strategy was operationalised through the high performance programme consisting of the national team, the 'Kiwis', the junior national teams (U16s, U18s and U20s) and their associated regional pathways. At the point at which I entered the HPU, the NZRL were in the 3rd and penultimate year of a four year organisational strategic plan entitled, "More than just a game: Rugby League's game plan to 2013" (New Zealand Rugby League, 2009) and preparing to defend the rugby league world cup at the end of 2013 (eighteen months later). Defined within the NZRL's strategic plan was a vision for rugby league to be; "the sport of choice for New Zealanders, growing the game nationally and make us successful internationally". The mission statement was; "To carve out our future by building on our history", and the organisation was guided by five values; "Integrity, respect, leadership, courage and passion" (New Zealand Rugby League, 2009).

This vision and mission was underpinned by nine strategic priorities; the one relevant to the HPU was defined as 'International Success: Realising our potential to become world leaders on and off the field'. Key outcomes for high performance detailed in this plan included making every international final, achieving a >70% win record (across the programmes), retaining the 2013 Rugby League World Cup and implementing 'a high performance process' that ensured continuous communication and engagement with identified elite players (local and international) (New Zealand Rugby League, 2009). Initiatives to achieve outcomes were based on implementing effective high performance talent identification and development, benchmarking with teams that had consistently performed internationally, and ensuring methods were in place to retain "Kiwi hearts" (New Zealand Rugby League, 2009, p. 17).

The office based (Auckland) members of the HPU consisted of CEO (full-time), HPD (full-time), the high performance manager (part time), the administration manager (part time) and the media manager (part time). When the playing team met (players, coaches and support personnel), HPD and the high performance manager also held roles of team manager and trainer respectively. The remaining management were contracted for either two or four years, and this included coaches, the head coach and assistant coach, and support personnel, the team doctor, physiotherapist, head trainer, and logistics manager. Other than the office based staff, the contracted management were involved in full-time roles with professional rugby league franchises in the National Rugby League (NRL) competition. Management personnel's 'in person' attendance was generally only required when 'in camp' for competition, and where

¹⁰ The following coding system is used to, where possible protect the identity of participants: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), High Performance Director (HPD), Head Coach (HC), P1 - 20 for players, S1 – 9 for support staff, C1 – 2 for assistant coaches.

appropriate for planning and preparation meetings. Given the geographical spread of the management team, meetings were generally conducted via telephone conference. HPD, the two coaches and team trainer were all former professional players and internationals with the 'Kiwis', while CEO had a background in corporate business.

Players were selected to make a squad of between 19 and 24 players dependent upon the forthcoming competition or 'test series'. Those selected were 'professional' (full-time, contracted) players chosen from clubs in either the Australasian NRL, the European SuperLeague and in some instances but rarely, the New South Wales (NSW) Cup competition. Through a process of bi-weekly phone conferences beginning six weeks prior to competition, the committee, convened by CEO, and consisting of the same four individuals, HPD, the coaches and two former players selected the squad. In September, in preparation for end of year campaigns, as teams were eliminated from the NRL competition, a 'train-on' squad was announced of players in contention for selection. Each week as the NRL finals progressed, new names were added to the list. Two to three times per week, training sessions were led by a HPU management member in Sydney and Auckland, with expectations that players based outside of those two centres followed unsupervised programmes. The outcomes for these sessions were generally physical conditioning based, however also included some on-field, rugby league training. The eligibility criteria underpinning the selection process was that a player must be either born in New Zealand, hold New Zealand citizenship, or have a parent or grandparent with New Zealand citizenship.

The HPU came together twice a year; once in April for six days, for the annual trans-Tasman 'Anzac test', versus Australia, and in October for either a single test match, the four nations or the rugby league world cup. The campaign length in October varies from eight days to sixty days depending upon the calendar cycle. In 2011, prior to this research, the team lost the annual Anzac test against Australia and achieved a disappointing third place in the 2011 Four Nations, ending the season one win and four losses. Shortly before I entered the field the team also lost the 2012 Anzac test, continuing Australia's unbeaten run in the fixture since 1998. The six-month period prior to my introduction to the field had seen significant challenges of player availability and withdrawals (APNZ, 2011a; 2011b), which led to the inability to fulfil a fixture against the Cook Islands in Rarotonga (Fairfax Media, 2011), and was suggested in the data to contribute to disappointing results in the Four Nations tournament that followed. Artefact analysis (included formal documents and printed publications, images, team posters and banners and newspaper interviews) also revealed management's growing concerns over the cultural impact of off-field incidents and the subsequent breaking of trust displayed by a number of players,

When the [Senior Player] asked HC if he could go out for beers and the coach said no – and [Senior Player] still went out drinking and took a group of young boys with him. I couldn't help but think about the influence he would have on those young players.

(C1, Performance Review Document, December 2011)

Resulting from HPD and the coaches' frustration at the emergent cultural issues experienced through 2011, in April 2012, HPD recruited an Australian sport psychologist with a background in culture and leadership to consult with the management and team in these areas. The growing use of consultants in organisational change efforts is well documented (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Helms-Mills, 2003; Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004) where consultants have been used by organisational leaders and more recently, high performance sport teams, to help members find meaning and purpose (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Wong, 1998). The consultant met the team in April at the 2012 Anzac test and then joined the management team full-time in October 2012. She offered sport psychology support to individual players on a

need's basis, but worked primarily with coaches and HPD regarding culture issues, change and the 'leadership group'. Based upon her recommendations, HPD established an 'emerging leaders' group' as a leadership succession tool and organised periodic leadership group meetings throughout the year as a means to maintain discourse between off-field HPU leaders (HPD and coaches) and on-field leaders (senior players). Yet, as my field notes indicated, given player and management club commitments these meetings proved challenging to organise, and only two were held away from test campaigns during the nine-month period of phase one and two.

Given the nature of the competition calendar, as a participant-researcher, my interaction with the HPU went through cycles of high-level engagement with HPU leaders and the management team, and low level engagement with players, and vice versa. Much of 2012 focused upon planning for the end of year test match against Australia. In July, we had an in-person management team planning evening at the NZRL. This was followed by bi-weekly teleconferences that discussed logistical plans for the upcoming test match in October. 'Train-on' squad sessions were conducted through September and early October in Sydney and Auckland.

2012 Test match campaign. From 5th to 14th October, the HPU spent nine days in Queensland in preparation for the test match. There were a number of cultural rituals and practices present in the team. A particular practice was that of a Tauparapara¹¹ performed by HC at the first team meeting making references to the responsibility of looking after the team's legacy,

Kia Hiwa Ra, Kia Hiwa Raa, Kia Hiwa Ra Ki Tenei Tuku, Kia Hiwa Ra Ki Tera Tuku, Kia Tu, Kia Toa, Kia Mataara!! Ok fellas, welcome to camp. That's called a Touparapara, ok, back in the day, and I'll just give you a bit of background on it, (ex-player) first did that for us back in 2008 and every campaign we've opened up with that. What it was, back in the day, basically the warriors who looked after the village, they were handpicked back when they were kids, and taught the art of war, or the art of warfare, so their role by the time they got to our age was to not only look after their women and children, but to look after their village. And their job was to sit up in the watchtowers around their village and that was their call to each other in the watchtower to check they're all doing their job. So their responsibility was basically looking after their village. So here we are, up in the watchtower, and our responsibility, everyone in this room, is to look after and protect the jumper [team shirt], and its legacy.

(HC, Team Meeting, October 2012)

The first major event of the training camp, led by the psychology consultant, was to establish 'The Kiwi Way'; an operating values and beliefs of the team's culture. This was constructed through a meeting she led on the first day with the senior leadership group (SLG; four players and the team captain) and HPU management. Using the 'be-do-have model' of change that features in Stephen R. Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989), the facilitated a meeting aimed to help the senior players and management articulate the team's desired values (be), actions supporting these values (do) and goals and aspirations (have). The meeting culminated in the development of the charter entitled 'The Kiwi Way'. Later that evening at the team meeting, the player leadership group disseminated the charter to the rest of the team and it was printed onto two large banners featuring symbolic pictures of the team's earlier success. The banners were hung on display in the team's hotel meeting room and stadium changing room.

¹¹ Tauparapara (ritual chant): A prayer or chant performed by a male on the Marae (communal meeting grounds in a Māori village) before performing a whaikorero (making a formal speech), suitable to the purpose of the meeting to invoke the gods' protection and to honour the visitors (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

Other significant events during the week included a family dinner (whereby family and friends of the HPU were invited to a buffet dinner in the team room at the hotel), the Captain's Run (the last training session before the test, held at the test stadium) and the test dinner, always held the night before the test match. As a newcomer to the HPU I was required to take part in a number of 'rites of passage' for cultural assimilation. These included kava ceremonies¹², bus rituals (including strict seating arrangements for senior players and senior management), and solo karaoke singing, conducted by a senior player master of ceremonies who held the right to the bus microphone and could call players and management up to sing, tell stories, jokes and embarrass when travelling to and from team events (training, games, community work or social events). However most significant and symbolic of my efforts and desire for cultural assimilation, was that of the infamous 'undie¹³ haka¹⁴' at the captain's run,

The Undie Haka

I had heard from the grapevine through my roommate, that one of a major traditions (along with new people singing on the bus), was that at some point in the week, the new players and staff will be called to do a haka in front of everyone. At the end of the Captains Run, one of the support staff called the team and the staff. At this point, I was up in the stand filming the training session. They all turned and shouted for me to come and join them – at this point I thought it was just pulling the entire team together for a final talk. Realising I was the last one and they were waiting for me, I jog down the stand and they started cheering louder, started counting down 10 – 9 – 8 -, I eventually arrived (slightly out of breath). "Huddle up, huddle up. Great session boys, last session before we go into the game tomorrow" S1 shouted, "...but as a custom that's been around for a while now, will the debutants step forward (players stepped forward)..." A player makes a loud cough in my direction as the Captain shouts, gesturing at me, "Come on step forward, oh we get to see these legs up close!" S1 continues, "The custom is that you have to do the haka in front of the circle of trust, right here at the last session before a game, and you have to do it, [pause] in your undies [The group erupt into laughter]. So I think it's gonna be a good one I think..." The four of us stood there frozen. "In your undies guys", S1 reinforced, as the group, staff and players burst into a chorus of ye-ha's, yehooos and cheers.

At this point I had a sense of panic; I was a white, British fella being asked to join three players, two whom were Māori, and one Samoan New Zealander in a haka. S10 had prepared me for it, but I thought I had got away with it. A paradoxical experience; this ritual, the haka, which I had learned contained so much cultural and spiritual significance, yet clearly in this context was used as a humorous initiation. But if ever there was a situation to expose my outsider position, this was it. There was something very special being included to do it – especially as essentially an outsider, they could have left me up in the stands, maybe they should have. In that split second I recognised the significance of this, this was their challenge for acceptance, this was my initiation. Was I willing to or able to accept it - cast aside my fear and anxiety, but more significantly, my former identity and accept theirs? As I stood there in my tight grey boxers, between three large professional Polynesian players, I had nowhere to hide. I

¹² Kava Ceremony: Kava is a crop of the Western Pacific region. The root of the vegetable is ground down to make a drink that is consumed across Polynesia and part of the Micronesia. Kava is used for medicinal, religious, political, cultural and social purposes and the cultures of the south pacific have great respect for the plant whereby the drinking of Kava is central in many formal ceremonies and rituals (Matsuda, 2012)

¹³ Undie: Underwear

¹⁴ Haka: Haka is a traditional postural group dance of the Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand using vigorous movements and stamping of the feet with rhythmically shouted accompaniment. Culturally and spiritually significant to Māori, Haka is traditionally an ancestral war cry, dance or challenge performed for ceremonial purposes such as powhiri's (formal welcome ceremonies) and prior to battle to invoke the gods of war and summon the performer's ancestors. Contemporary haka is performed in competition settings across the pacific and most recognisably before international sports matches (Collins & Jackson, 2007; Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

felt nervous, vulnerable and self-consciously different from them – my body untrained and shining bright white in the sun juxtaposed with a wall of Pacific skin in the huddle. I had to do this, if not I risked ostracising or isolating myself from the culture – the research depended on it. Fortunately, I had a basic understanding of the actions, words and meaning from my teacher training in the UK. I took a deep breath...the S1 called us on, “Haka guys, right then guys, here we go...”

*Once the haka had finished, we all got pats on the back from the players and staff, and the debutant players and I all shook hands (as the other players ran off with our clothes leaving us standing in the middle of the stadium in our underwear!). One player turned to me and said (smiling), “Well you could do with losing a few kilos off that donkey ar*e, but that’s a pretty good haka for a white guy”. In talking to 3 a few days later she commented, “You know you’ve got their respect when they include you in things. They called and waited for you to come down out of the stands and, then they started the count down – and slowed down, 4....3.....2..... So you got there in time. If they didn’t respect or value you they wouldn’t have bothered to include you. You know they’ve accepted you when they do that.”*
(Reflexive Diary, October 2012)

The test dinner was the most formal event of the week, and despite informal behaviour and dress code (polo shirts and shorts), had structured protocols and procedures. The room was set in a ‘u’ shape with a top table for coaches, HPD, senior leaders and any invited guests. Members had a place name, players with a silver programme detailing the team and notable facts about the upcoming test. During the test dinner, newcomers to the HPU (players and management) were also presented with the pounamu¹⁵ koru¹⁶,

The Koru’s basically in Māori terms, based around a new beginning, harmony, and of course we’ve got the brotherhood. So it keeps us connected, so when you’re wearing your Koru, you’re always thinking of the guys who’ve been here before you and of course those people that are coming in for the first time.

(HPD, Test Dinner, October 2012)

This was followed by a short speech, traditionally given by a guest, but on this occasion, HPD, and the jersey presentations to all players and coaches by the captain and vice-captain. Upon collecting the test shirt, most players were encouraged by rhythmic clapping to perform various forms of comical dances to raucous laughter.

Following an encouraging start and drawing 10pts all at half time, the team lost the test match against Australia, following a poor period shortly after half time. A final cultural practice was the presentation of ‘dog tags’ (silver US military style identification tags with the kiwis logo, and the players name) to debutant players on the bus home from the test match, “everyone’s got dog tags now that are still living, just to make them connected to New Zealand Rugby League, and what they’ve done for their country by having a number that’s unique to them” (S1, Interview, September 2012). Engraved on the dog tags is also the debutant player’s ‘Kiwi number’ which is “the unique number given to a new player to mark their place in the kiwis playing history; kiwi number one is the first person to represent New Zealand; we are currently 778 kiwis since the first test match” (HPD, Interview, October 2012).

¹⁵ Pounamu: Pounamu is the Māori (indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) name for nephrite jade stone found in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. In English, Pounamu is generically known as greenstone. Pounamu plays a very important role for Māori, to whom it is considered ‘taonga’ (treasure) consisting of ‘mana’ (cultural and spiritual prestige). Consequently pounamu is given as gifts (often carved necklaces) and passed from one generation to another.

¹⁶ Koru: Spiral motif that symbolises the new shoot of the fern frond and represents new beginnings and growth (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

Despite losing, perceptions of a productive week and a positive improvement in performance were reflected in participant feedback, which made particular reference to the new Kiwi Way cultural initiative, *“Really enjoyed the week, I think we are heading in the right direction with a lot of things, like ‘The Kiwi Way’ stuff”* (P2, Interview, October 2012) and management, *“‘The Kiwi Way’...program and mentoring was well received”* (C2, Performance Review Document, October 2012) and *“working though ‘The Kiwi Way’ was very beneficial”* (HC, Performance Review Document, October 2012).

Beginning world cup preparations. Shortly after returning to Auckland following the test campaign, the NZRL received confirmation of a successful funding application to HPSNZ for the following year’s world cup campaign. Using this money, as part of world cup preparations, HPD organised an inaugural ‘heritage’ camp, held over two days in Sydney in January (2013) and inviting select management (coaches, consultant sport psychologist and team doctor) and a wider squad of thirty-eight players who were in contention for the end of year world cup. With the exception of an early morning fun session with a surf-lifesaving coach, the camp consisted of entirely meeting style exercises. This included a presentation on the forthcoming year, a leadership group meeting, and workshops on performance analysis, our playing brand, and collective responsibility and on-field roles. Following recommendations from the psychology consultant and led by HC, a significant outcome from this camp was the first ever vote for the player leadership group. As HC commented when introducing it, *“Now they are the guys that are going to be leading you out on the field, it will be all judged on...‘The Kiwi Way’...Ok, so the idea is to pick and rank who best represents ‘The Kiwi Way’”* (HC, Team Meeting, January 2013).

The vote produced results that challenged some players and their position in the SLG. The vote acted as evidence to support management beliefs that a captaincy change was required; this was undertaken in February 2013. There was also some transition into and out of the player leadership group, however coaches did exercise their political agency to some extent when selecting the leadership group.

The period after this focused upon preparing for the upcoming Anzac test and developing plans for the world cup at the end of the year. This period followed a similar process to preparing for the test match in October, with selection meetings, planning teleconferences and a leadership group meeting. Shortly before the conclusion of phase one and two, the Kiwis met for six days in Canberra for the 2013 Anzac test, again losing to rivals Australia.

Phase one and two was a tumultuous period with respect to personnel. During this time a number of high profile personnel changes occurred within the HPU. In November 2012, the existing high performance manager announced he was leaving to undertake a full-time role at a professional club. The team’s assistant coach who had recently resigned from his role at a professional franchise replaced him. Following this, CEO announced that he would be leaving at Christmas, and was replaced by a new CEO in January 2013. In February 2013, as previously highlighted, the team’s captain was replaced. One week later, HPD was stood down indefinitely as a result of allegations of misconduct, eventually leaving the NZRL in early April 2013. The recently appointed high performance manager (and assistant coach) transitioned in the role of HPD and national team manager leaving the assistant coach position vacant. March 2013 also saw the appointment of NZRL’s first head of sport science, contracted to fill the trainer vacancy left in December 2012 by the outgoing high performance manager. From the events and experiences of phase one and two, I now locate my data relevant to this research.

Sources of Meaning and Meaning Construction

I engaged consistently and iteratively with the research questions (RQ1 and RQ2)¹⁷ throughout phases one and two. This helped to shape my focus, allowing me to capture relevant data from participants, both overt and hidden, that focused upon the meanings they attached to playing for the national team and how these are, or were constructed. Reoccurring concepts were organised into themes. These themes shaped a descriptive narrative that was central to informing the next phase of intervention and action. Key emergent themes were identified and are presented within subheadings, using the voice of the participants, and supported by reflexive field notes to create a thick, rich text (Geertz, 1974).

Representation. One of the most prevalent and shared meanings was that of representation. Primarily this referred to what players termed personal heritage and centred on representing their immediate family. Family is an individual's most salient non-work relationship and has a significant influence upon the meanings people construct at work (Brief & Nord, 1990; Rosso et al., 2010). The importance players placed on family was also reflective of the central involvement of families in the cultural fabric of not only rugby league in New Zealand (Coffey & Wood, 2008), but also Māori and Polynesian communities (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014), as one player commented,

[Playing professional rugby league] did help the cause, you know, it supported mum and I was able to return the favour through playing for New Zealand. You know, just what she went through, and what she actually went through physically, verbally in relationship wise made me a stronger person, and every time I represented my country I represented what she did for me. (P1, SS Interview, September 2012)

Along with immediate family, wider family or friends was a prominent meaning when discussing representation,

What the Kiwis represents to me is my heritage, all my friends growing up, the schools I went to, so I guess it represents all the people that are close to me and that I've ever known in my life, I feel that I'm representing all of them, all being Kiwis (P2, SS Interview, January 2013)

Culture can be a significant source of meaning (Sosik, 2000) and for some players, playing for the Kiwis meant a unique opportunity to represent their culture,

I think it just symbolises my culture and just getting it out there that I'm Māori and you know I'm proud to be Māori, and that's probably one thing that some Māoris take for granted...coming over here [Australia] and saying that they're Aussies...not thinking about where they came from and their heritage. (P5, SS Interview, January 2013)

The role of representing 'our country' was also raised, along with having a country proud of the team,

First is representing your country, and a yeah, it's a huge honour in itself you know whatever sport you play, and yeah, pretty passionate about that and proud to do it, for your family first and the people of New Zealand. (P4, SS Interview, January 2013)

In representing others, the players' roles took on a transcendent purpose, connecting them to something greater than the self and beyond the material world. Transcendence is a common concept in understanding how people construct meaning from and of their work (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010). Playing for New Zealand became meaningful when athletes could subordinate themselves to a purpose that transcended the self (Frankl, 1992), and contributed to something greater or higher, such as their, family, culture or country (Cardador & Rupp, 2010; Lips-Wiersma, 2002b). Even in the context of repetitive, stress

¹⁷ RQ1: What are the players' sources of meaning when playing for New Zealand?
RQ2: How were/are these meanings constructed?

inducing work that challenges the 'will to meaning', significant meaning has been shown to be constructed through the affective experience that one's work is important to the wellbeing of others (Isaksen, 2000).

The context of an international sport team, by its very nature, places players in situations whereby they come to represent communities, whether it be families and cultures or imagined communities such as nation states. It is therefore of little surprise that the altruistic and transcendent construct of representation invoked affective responses amongst players and management,

I just think about all those people like I spoke of before, who I'm representing, you know, so it's a very proud moment whenever you chuck that jersey on and that's the feeling that you get from it, but then I quickly need to get back into performance mode so that's the emotions that come behind it and you can't help but let it come up when you're doing both the anthem and the Haka, so all of those pictures, I guess it all just comes to one feeling at one intense moment so that's why all the boys get a bit emotional about it, you know, it's not one particular picture, or one particular person or a group of people, its everything all in one, what it represents.

(P2, SS Interview, January 2013)

Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) theorised that transcendent purpose mediates the relationship between self and others, and doing and being, where at the nexus of these continua significant meaning is found. Considering the analysis presented here, playing for the team enacted that nexus.

With a pragmatic interest in behavioural change (thus performance impact), a sense of transcendent purpose is shown to influence moral duty and subsequently organisational duty, commitment and willingness to sacrifice time and effort to the cause (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Organisations that engender and appeal to sense of self-transcendence are able to elicit greater levels of commitment and a sense of work as a calling from members (Markow & Klenke, 2005). Rosso et al. (2010) stipulated that it is important to consider the relationship transcendence has with other meaning making processes. The required subordination and self-abnegation to others for transcendent meaning making creates a dialectical tension between other reported mechanisms that facilitate meaning construction, such as self-esteem or efficacy, which seek control and autonomy over work (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). However, it is argued that these meaning making mechanisms do not work in isolation but in synthesis and unison (Rosso et al., 2010).

The final major source of representation players cited was the history and heritage of the Kiwis themselves and the achievements and efforts of former players,

I guess, going back to representing your country, but I guess once you're here, it's doing everyone else proud that I guess wore the jersey before you, yeah, just the history...then also, the senior boys that have played the Kiwis before that I have come to know and love, in particular S1, I feel like I am representing those guys as well, so that's what heritage means to me.

(P3, SS Interview, January 2013)

While participants found meaning in history and tradition (Sosik, 2000), it should be noted that players only cited the recent history of the Kiwis, namely history which had personal relevance, focusing mainly on the last 12 – 15 years, and not beyond,

I think the modern day player doesn't look too far back. I think the most important one is that they see guys they recognise. I mean [former management] is a big part of the team, but if they can actually see what's been done there.

(C1, SS Interview, February 2013)

The above quote highlighted the importance to the players of a personal connection, offering a practical example of the influence of experience and enactment in meaning construction (Weick, 1988; 1995). That is, an individual has to experience something, for example, a personal relationship or watching childhood heroes on television, to be able to make meaningful sense of it (Weick, 1988; 1995). For Rosso et al. (2010), transcendence is facilitated through self-abnegation to a significant purpose and interconnection with others. The sense of transcendence through representing others was strongest when it was people who players had a personal connection and a shared, lived history with, such as immediately family and friends, the team and ex-players. While the meaning of representing the New Zealand nation was raised, it lacked the affective descriptions that family, culture and teammates received.

The professional athlete. Despite an espoused altruistic emphasis on representation, players pragmatically located their place in the national team within the wider context of professional sport. References to rugby league as a career were commonplace and players were acutely aware their performance as a commodity and their subsequent market value,

Money is you know 50% of why people play; if it was for free, no one's gonna play at all. So I think myself personally, money and changing countries is a big thing...but you know changing teams and doing all you can, while you can for your family...you're not going to be here for a long time and if it's the difference between 20k and 50k, I think some players'll take that and some players won't...sometimes you get an offer, half a million dollars extra, and in those positions, sometimes you have to take that, for your own health and your family.
(P3, SS Interview, January 2013)

It is likely that the wider cultural belief system of professional sport and the commodification of rugby league has significantly shaped player (and coach) meanings. Players pragmatically identified their roles as employees, accountable to signed contracts and line managers in the form of coaches and CEO, where they "...live in the now, or the terms of their contract (C1, SS Interview, February 2013). Playing rugby league becomes a direct reflection of the corporate world where players have come to "compare their performances (commodities) on the market of records and sporting achievement" (Brohm, 1978, p. 59). The result is that teams and players exist as a commodity sold along capitalist lines, viewed as interchangeable parts (Frey & Eitzen, 1991) and bought and sold in accordance with supply and demand (Brohm, 1978),

Most of [players], they'll be aware that getting into the Kiwis will drive their market value up when it comes to renegotiating contracts or contract offers from other clubs. Being a test player is worth a lot to them on the market, and you can't deny it must influence some of their motivation...And if they not aware, which I guarantee, most if not all will, their agents will be and will be in their ears, they're part of the problem too especially when it comes to eligibility.
(HPD, Interview, October 2012)

HPU players being full-time contracted employees of clubs emerged in a club/country dichotomy, where representing the Kiwis was labelled as "sadly, not your day job" (P3, SS Interview, January 2013). This placed the identity of the team in a contested space, as a representative team created in the light of former colonial ideals of nationhood and not in the image of a postmodern globalised community and commercialised professional sport (Maguire, 2011; Tuck & Maguire, 1999),

People come to Kiwis after a 26 week season, it's the part time thing on top of the regular thing they do...the challenges...the short international calendar for sure is one, but the main one is that it's not everybody's primary gig...is it's a high prestige, low, really really low, priority time wise...The Kiwis are prestigious but the clubs are players' career bread and butter.
(S2, Interview, July 2012)

The commodification of rugby league evident within player meanings reflected the rise of professionalism influencing and shifting the dominant ideologies and values upon which sport were founded (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). With the disappearance of amateurism there has been a

shift away from participating for enjoyment towards economic performance and achievement (Brohm, 1978). Morality and ennoblement have been replaced by spectacle and entertainment and the ethics of business and the corporate world guide modern sport (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). The ideological shift was reflected in the tension between player ideals and values (new and emergent; postmodern) and coach ideals and values (traditional; modernistic),

Players love money! Well, most people love money. But they are worse than most, they love it, it's all about who's getting what and how are they getting it. It wasn't like that in my day, we were just happy to be there.
(C1, Interview, January 2013)

C1's quote reflected a devaluing of intrinsic benefit and the rising importance of monetary rewards amongst players and the exaggerated importance of winning where athletic success is associated with outcome goals of profit, visibility, entertainment and prestige (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). Given that organisations and work can be sites where people interpret and make meaning (Asher & Lane-Maher, 2004), work done solely for an economic or career advancement reason is unlikely to inspire a sense of significance, purpose or transcendent meaning (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Steingard and Fitzgibbons (2004) argued that the reduction of meaning in the workplace to meet economic or instrumental ends collapses higher, spiritual realities into observable externalities lacking in spiritual integrity. For the HPU, the dominant culture of a commodified, professional sport manifested at the local level in beliefs and behaviour that promoted meanings of a player-labour exchange and athlete agency, and as a consequence, at times a selfish belief system demonstrated by the question 'what's in it for me?',

Oh if you go from that old school type...and I think [senior player] is a kind of newbie, but he's in that old school type, with that little bit like, "what's in it for me" type, that's kind of what I get from them...I know has a passion for it, but it depends on what carrot, and again, it's about what am I gonna get? I think...I don't think selfish, but kind of self...well, selfish then, they self-reflect more about this is what I'm doing, rather than looking big picture and going look, what's best for the team.

(S3, Interview, October 2012)

The challenge to meaning construction, as Thompson and Bunderson (2003) explained that cultures with ideologies or meanings built on economic currency rather than ideological currency lead to a self-driven, egoistic and instrumental human nature whereby people use the affiliation logic, "the organisation gives me a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" (p. 575) and people work within the boundaries of their formally specified role and contractual requirements. However, it should be noted that alongside a dominant commercialised culture, other cultural beliefs should be considered when interpreting players' economic meanings (Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004; Highhouse, Zickar, & Yankelevich, 2010). Early studies suggested that meaning in work is largely socialised by the individuals' cultural environment (Hulin & Blood, 1968; Whitely, Peiro, & Sarchielli, 1992).

In the context of the community and family centric cultures of the South Pacific, work and capitalist labour is a relatively new social institution. Māori and Pacific post-colonial identities have been negotiated, constructed and reconstructed through their roles in the labour force as expendable labour mercenaries within a "diasporic economic context" (Grainger, 2006, p. 46). The data reflected cultural attitudes to the role of work within Pacific (including Māori) society, whereby it occupied a means to an end (sustenance for family and community), but held less meaning, cultural and social capital than family, church, tribe or cultural practice and ceremony. Player narratives of challenging financial circumstances during upbringing were reported and such socialisation is likely to have influenced the meaning of money in player's constructions of their professional life as rugby league players.

Despite the risk of a descent into meaninglessness when economic performance takes precedence in work (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003), a stance was taken by HPU leaders that acknowledged the growing role of economics in managing and coaching the “modern day” or “21st century player”,

I think the modern day player looks at it as a genuine career, so I don't think back when we were playing...you didn't perceive it as something that you could set yourself up for life, coz there just wasn't the opportunities to do it...a one club man, and that's sort of out the window now, but in some respects the game's driven that too because it's such a business now so there's no loyalty shown both ways.... there wasn't guys coming into the Kiwis because they were getting 25 000 dollars a test match, whereas these days, that will play a little bit of a part in some guys motivation for being in there, which for me, that does have a little bit of an effect on your team culture and its dynamics.

(C1, SS Interview, February 2013)

This pragmatic stance mirrors that of Limerick and Cunnington (1993) who asserted that macro social forces are inevitable and the unstable structures, roles and plural identities of postmodernism signals the inevitable collapse of the corporate citizen, represented in the ‘one-club man’ narrative above, and its accompanying values. The values of loyalty, service and role identity, and processes of commitment, organisational membership and lifelong employment that defined corporate citizenship are replaced by the greater sense of self and independence reported in the data. While the rise of the macro social system of capitalism and resultant bureaucratisation of work has separated people from their craft, this is believed to have led to disaffection and a search for meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1995), implying that there could be an appetite for meaning and sensemaking amongst the HPU.

Kiwi values. Participants drew on perceived ‘unique Kiwi values’ to articulate the meanings attached to the HPU and meaningful experiences. The central values of importance were described as ‘support and care from and for others’, ‘respect of hierarchy and status’ and ‘Kiwi humility’. The origins of supportive and caring values ranged from players’ childhood experiences with their parents and whanau¹⁸, their professional experiences with senior players and coaches, and extending now, to their own families as husbands and fathers,

My Dad and that, they sort of liked their soccer sides but yeah, my mum, growing up used to drive me everywhere and when I played at [NRL club] I was only 16 and didn't have a licence and my mum used to drive me to training and wait for me so...so that was pretty special, what she did do, the sacrifices she did make for me to be a better person and start playing NRL.

(P1, SS Interview, January 2013)

Alongside the central role of care and support, meanings of respect, hierarchy and status were prevalent where “it's really a high respect culture in that respect... they won't buck the system against their elders” (S2, Interview, July 2012). The final ‘Kiwi value’ was that of ‘Kiwi humility’, where being “very humble” (S1, SLG Meeting, October 2012) was culturally revered and perceived as central to what it means to be a Kiwi rugby league player,

We're naturally humble people anyway...we are humble people and we don't go around shouting about when we're winning so...It's putting yourself out there and we don't do that.

(P8, SLG Meeting, October 2012)

Values are so intertwined with meaning that they act as both a source of meaning and a mechanism through which experiences become meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010). In a study of sensemaking and commitment in organisations, Grant et al. (2008) concluded that by

¹⁸ Whanau: Extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

contributing to an organisation and the people within it, facilitates meanings of attachment and commitment through a process of “prosocial sensemaking” (p. 898). Prosocial sensemaking was found to not only strengthen the emotional bonds to an organisation, but also positively influence collective identity construction (Grant et al., 2008).

In the context of this research, values of care and support, respect and hierarchy, and humility (situated within the broader framework of macro Pākehā and indigenous cultural values) served as not only an anchor point for meaning construction and behaviour, but also as a discourse for mass cohesion that galvanised an essentially disparate and fragmented group, “*We’re all proud Kiwis, we’re humble, that’s what we are*” (P8, Interview, October 2012).

Brotherhood. The concept of ‘brotherhood’ and the ‘team as family, teammates as brothers’ metaphor was a prominent and deeply revered meaning within the HPU. For the participants, the concept of ‘brotherhood’ and “*doing it for the ‘brothers’*” (P14, Interview, October 2012) was incredibly meaningful, driven by beliefs that “*they’re [other teams] not as tight as us; they don’t have a bond like we do*” (P7, Team Meeting, January 2013). The ‘brotherhood’ with meanings of interpersonal bonds, connection and togetherness were common throughout,

I guess it’s special in the sense that we all come from different backgrounds and a lot of the guys are in Aussie now, and they probably appreciate it more, coming into a Kiwi environment that they’re not used to with their clubs over here... Kiwis camp is awesome, it’s the best, the best feeling, (staff) will tell you, it’s different to the (club), (pro club) is a great feeling, but the Kiwi camp is different, it’s a special feeling.

(P2, SS Interview, January 2013)

In addition to players, management also perceived the “*Culture of the team (the ‘brotherhood’): The harmony in the group with staff and players*” (S5, Performance Review Document, July 2012) as a major strength of the HPU,

I was saying to HPD before, its, you could not buy it...the ‘brotherhood’, the connection that you’ve got, and the pride – you could not manufacture it, and teams spend years trying to do that and don’t have what you’ve got, it’s the richness you can’t buy.

(S2, Management Meeting, July 2012)

The ‘brotherhood’ acted as a site for belonging, and as Lips-Wiersma (2002a) found, belonging is “a connection of the heart” (p. 391) and central to meaning construction. As a result of our need to be part of desirable social groups (such as sport teams), people experience meaning from the sense of belonging, identification and connection achieved through group membership (Dutton et al., 2006; Kahn, 2007). The sense of belonging that accompanied identification with the team and its ideologies also provided significant meaning and importance to team membership (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010; Weick, 1995),

I probably speak for everyone, in that; every time we come into camp it’s like a reunion, all the ‘brothers’ coming in to see each other again. You play each other during the year, and then end up going to battle with each other against the other teams. It’s something special, and I think other teams don’t have a grasp of that, the other teams like Australia and the UK probably come in and shake hands, where with the Kiwis we embrace each other, catch up and just really enjoy each other’s company...I believe it’s just a natural bond, it’s a natural way of being...and that’s a big factor, because of the way that our cultures been over, I dunno [sic], hundreds of years, we’ve always been these tight knit communities, everybody does their role, within that community, you work together day in day out, and it’s you know, supposed to be a place of peace and safety, and community and love really.

(P2, SS Interview, January 2013)

Such identifications, like those espoused above, where group membership engendered a sense of value and distinction in comparison to others became a powerful shaper of meaning (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979 cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989). There is reportedly a strong affective connection between meaning and belonging when people feel like they belong to something special (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Kahn (2007) found that close interpersonal relationships with co-workers have positive impacts on meaning if the relationship allows the employee to express and reinforce valued identities at work. Through interpersonal cues, group members can determine if their work is meaningful or not. Furthermore, unlike the economic exchange relationship, “which are short term, transactional and quid pro quo in nature, social exchange relationships are richer and more long term in nature, involving the exchange of socio-emotional resources and trust” (Cardador & Rupp, 2010, p. 166) which mobilises sensemaking and meaning construction (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

Within the construct of the ‘brotherhood’, a central discourse was the use of the ‘team as family metaphor’,

There doesn't seem to be any segregation, everybody understands each other, no cliques, we're family, we do get annoyed with each other at times, and that's what family does, it's not perfect and we're not all smooth sailing, but it's just what we know, it's just what we're comfortable with, what we're familiar with, I think it's pretty much the same as what all of us have grown up with, with our own families.

(P1, SS Interview, January 2013)

At a local level, the family metaphor served as a means to articulate the values and beliefs of the ‘brotherhood’ (Long & Mills, 2010). Organisational cultures that treat members like extended family are shown to foster supportiveness, cohesion and encourage teamwork and participation (Richard, McMillan-Capehart, Bhuian, & Taylor, 2009).

At the sociocultural level, the family metaphor acted to reproduce the familiar kinship communities commonplace for Māori and Polynesians (Lakisa et al., 2014), highlighting that meanings in a high performance sport’s team become an extension of socio-cultural training, both internal and external to the organisation (Gray et al., 1985). Certain management personnel assumed parent style roles, with one member of support personnel being referred to ‘Aunty’, where “*she's like an Aunty to all of the boys, my Aunties at home are pretty much exactly the same* (P2, SS Interview, January 2013). The deeply held ideologies surrounding the ‘brotherhood’ highlighted that membership to an established social group also exposes the individual to an existing set of constructed meanings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Isaksen, 2000), and subsequently reproduces an established ideological order. The family metaphor meant something precise, offering a formative context through language and practices that reflected a specific set of values and principles and constructed a desired reality (Long & Mills, 2010). The family metaphor privileged values of unity, harmony, conformance and trust,

I think it comes back to those special people as well, you know, everyone that comes in, when you come into camp, you're family...there's no discomfort anywhere you know...its very comfortable, everybody knows each other, you can just kick back, relax, be yourself, I guess everyone's just on the same mind-set, you know we're here to work as well but we're also here to enjoy each other's company and chill and I guess that's just the familiarity that's a big factor in it.

(P3, SS Interview, January 2013)

However, these dominant and deeply revered meanings were perceived as inhibiting the cultivation of a high performing culture because, “*There is a risk that players associate the different environment [to club], particularly one that they love, with their fun and comfort and enjoying each other's company, with a more moderate performance accountability*” (S2, Interview, July 2012).

The narrative portrayed a rich landscape of meanings and while some players discussed on-field performance, a consistent discourse was not prevalent amongst the playing group. It was concluded, that while having a rich culture, the HPU did not have a high performing culture, that is, a shared belief system (meanings, values and expectations) and the subsequent behaviours and practices that facilitate over time, sustained optimal performance (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b), as S2 judged in her critique of the culture, *“it’s almost off field more than it is on field”* (Team Meeting, January 2013). While investigating the meanings, a number of pertinent issues relevant to the research question emerged that were deemed to influence meaning and sensemaking.

Sensemaking Issues in the HPU at NZRL

The literature implies that work organisations significantly influence personal and collective sensemaking within an organisation (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003; Weick et al., 2005), and act as central sites for meaning (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005). The organisation’s culture shapes the meaning that members give to experience in the organisation, and those meanings subsequently shape the culture and its operative behaviours (Peterson & Smith, 2000). Isaksen (2000) highlighted that the conditions of the workplace require examining to fully understand why some people construct meaning whereas others do not. While many of the meanings presented in this analysis existed outside and predated the organised context of the HPU, as phase one and two progressed a number of organisational conditions emerged that shaped sensemaking and offered reasons as to how the organisation was failing to promote a high performing culture. Three ‘conditions’ were deemed to have created challenging environment for member sensemaking, inhibiting meaning construction and preventing widely shared performance-driven cultural meanings. The issues were a ‘lack of philosophical alignment’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘responsibility, ownership and delegation’. These prevailing conditions manifested in ambiguity, subtle conflict, and a prevailing social structure that included a tight coupling between certain leadership behaviours and sensemaking (Limerick, 1990) and ‘blind spots’ where espoused meanings served to inhibit performance focused meanings and rationalise underperformance.

Lack of philosophical alignment. Data revealed that there was not a widely communicated and shared ‘performance focused’ philosophy amongst the HPU. Researchers have proposed that an organisation’s philosophy and its articulation through a vision and mission, serves as a source of meaning and enables congruence between personal values and ideologies and those of the organisation (Bennis, 2009). Consequently work is perceived as more meaningful when existing within a shared belief system, as a result of the assurance felt when acting in accordance with that belief system (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). A common philosophy, vision and belief system in postmodern organisations becomes the adhesive that mobilises organisational efforts and facilitates collective accomplishment in decentralised, individualistic structures (Limerick, 1990). It was not the absence of a shared philosophy that defined the HPU cultural landscape, but the absence of a widely communicated, performance focused philosophy. Players found great meaning in their membership of the unique ‘brotherhood’ and all that it entailed. However,

What I did notice alongside that was there’s so much, I’d actually use the word love between them, there’s so much connectivity and love and respect and enjoyment of each other, its primary and performance is secondary. So they are more engaged in being together.
(S2, Interview, July 2012)

While reproducing the deeply meaningful kinship communities commonplace for Māori and Polynesians (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014), much of the shared meaning and belief system was constructed along social-personal lines and not consistently aligned to performance. For

those leading the HPU and responsible for generating on-field results, the extant shared philosophy that defined the 'brotherhood' clouded a sense of purpose, promoting social partnerships over on-field performance. While higher purposes were espoused, for players, the dominant shared philosophy failed to connect present performance to future desired or anticipated performance (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002) and in doing so failed to summon the deep intrinsic motivation and the sense of persistence and hardiness in the face of challenges (Antonovsky, 1983) that reflects a high performing culture (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b).

Players and management demonstrated different ideologies and philosophies that generated a tension and frustration for the management team between their vision and certain players' espoused behaviour and attitudes, *"We need to return the focus back towards winning, rather than just having a good time"* (S7, Performance Review Document, 2012). The frustrations reflected a perception that the players were violating the meanings and ideologies implied by the team's perceived purpose, *"respecting the jumper"* (HC, Team Meeting, October 2012). Such violation is suggested to damage the psychological contract between players (and management) formed through the sense of shared purpose, thus leading to meaninglessness (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). While the 'brotherhood' proved deeply meaningful for both players and coaches, it existed as a 'cultural blind spot'. The 'brotherhood' was always overtly defended in open discourse and leveraged to justify and rationalise behaviour,

I think one of the real pluses of the culture that we have, it's a really tight 'brotherhood' environment, which has been a real strength and what was brought up last time is that that can sometimes overplay, you know what we're essentially here for and you know, we sort of get the two, the balance of the two, you know, we're here to get a win and to perform but sometimes the balance can you know be overbalanced, or lean more towards, you're here to have a good time...too relaxed and you know, too comfortable

(HC, Team Meeting, October 2012)

The use of metaphors have been shown to validate some accounts of experience and discredit others (Weick, 1995), while also being used to justify and rationalise consistently poor performance (Cornelissen, 2012; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003). The presence of the dominant 'brotherhood' narrative highlighted the key role of socially discursive practices in negotiating and constructing meaning (Sonenshein, 2007), where issues are noticed, shaped, interpreted and sold by some members to others (Dutton et al., 2002). The 'brotherhood' metaphor served to justify and rationalise underperformance on the grounds that *"I love my 'brothers'"* (P10, Interview, October 2012) and *"everyone's just on the same mind-set, you know we're here to work as well, but we're also here to enjoy each other's company and chill out"* (P3, SS Interview, January 2013). Weick and Sutcliffe (2003) argued that "through repeated cycles of justification, people enact a sensible world that matches their beliefs" (p. 81) and traps the organisation in behavioural cycles of underperformance.

The nexus of macro, cultural traditions, and micro, player justification and reconstructions contributed to the dominant beliefs and importance given to the 'brotherhood'. Meanings come to life through action, and if there is no resistance or go unchallenged they will become embedded in the ideological framework of the organisation (Gray et al., 1985). The deep reverence of the 'brotherhood' acted to facilitate a strong sense of collective identity shaped by strong emotions, practices and beliefs. This appeared to inhibit and blind questioning or challenging the status quo, thus inhibiting sensemaking about performance (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013) and acting as a site for diminished performance accountability and personal responsibility.

From an organisational perspective, as part of a lack of philosophical alignment it became clear that the HPU lacked a clearly articulated vision, core purpose or philosophy. While there was often discussion between CEO and HPD regarding the importance of having a vision for the HPU and high performance programme, there was little or no conscious effort made to articulate one, co-construct one or communicate one to the HPU, *"I remember HPD's quote, if you don't have a vision then all roads lead to nowhere. Nine months on from that [HP strategy] presentation by HPD, we still do not have HP vision"* (Reflexive Journal, February 2013). This arguably contributed to some vagueness amongst the HPU in the core purpose of the group,

...you do not talk about it [winning or performance], particularly from your culture as we saw at Anzac day, where we've actually gotta be more emphatic and ruthless about seeking the win. We do need to talk about it early. It's not win at all costs, and it's not win and forget everything else, and it's not win or else and it's not win and we're not actually gonna guide you on how to get there. But you still need to state it out loud and upfront...one of my observations after the Anzac week...it's an elite squad, I hadn't heard anybody say winning for the whole week...we sort of brought it up...it was just, obviously really clear that you had an enormous respect for each other, an enormous love for each other, but where was the discipline that you would need, the drive towards winning. It's slightly unbalanced. (S2, Team Meeting, January 2013)

Connected to the lack of a vision for the HPU, was the presence of operational rather than strategic meanings amongst the management team. I reflected upon my own sensemaking of this in my reflexive journal,

Review meetings focused heavily on the logistical, operational aspects rather than strategic. Not once did we address the question, what is the purpose of this camp? What is its aim? Did we achieve the purpose – how well? What is our vision for the future for this camp? How does this contribute to our performance outcomes? How do we attempt to measure impact? Questions and analysis largely focused upon evaluating our time management, use of space, and 'slickness' of operations. Lots of the focus appears to be operational – what are we doing? What more can be do? The belief is that the more we do, the closer we will get to winning, and that the relationship is linear. Rather than why are we doing it and how, and more importantly, does this effect that [performance], because even if it looks good, or sounds 'high performance', if it doesn't affect that [performance] don't do it? (Reflexive Journal, February 2013)

During planning, preparation, and in competition, management discourse was largely operational focusing on logistics and schedules, rather than strategy and purpose connected to key performance outcomes. Similarly, all 'performance' review processes were operations focused rather than performance (strategy), as evidenced by management responses in a campaign 'performance' review, *"Very organised tour from logistical viewpoint; Usual planning and organisation was again first class; Excellent overall planning by HPD; Detailed planning and preparation"* (Staff Feedback, 'Performance' Review, November 2012).

The lack of an articulated philosophy resulted in participant's multiple interpretations of experience and impacted the shared construction of meaning. Articulating a vision may act as one medium through which to achieve such shared communication and meaning. In this sense, an articulated vision would frame shared attention towards matters of importance and act as the sense of purpose seen as integral in the construction of organisational meaning and collective action (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). The second emergent condition that influenced sensemaking and meanings within the HPU was the presence of (in)authentic behaviour and actions.

Authenticity. Despite the rich meanings that players attached to representing the Kiwis, data highlighted a disconnect between espoused beliefs and behaviour, for example, some players *"...did a lot of talking but didn't really deliver when we needed..."* (HC,

Performance Review Document, July 2012) and “the mixed messages that [Senior Player] always sends, you know, on and off the field, in terms of the talk he gives it and what he delivers, I reckon that’s sort of hamstringing them [players around him] a bit” (HC, Coaches Meeting, October 2012). Other salient examples included players refusing to attend press commitments, players ignoring team alcohol protocol, wives or girlfriends staying in the team hotel, and players leaving early from training camps. Authenticity and authentic behaviour in organisational contexts is a central mechanism for constructing meaning amongst members (Rosso et al., 2010) and subsequently influences action and organisational change (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2002). Authenticity is a “culture-related phenomenon” that operates as a “prevailing impetus for action, and plays a substantial role in how people function in various settings in society” (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2002, p. 276). Subsequent meaning is constructed through authenticity by enacting higher values (Hendricks & Hendricks, 2003), a congruency between espoused values (or meanings) and work behaviour (Bono & Judge, 2003) and experiencing an authentic self (Kriger & Hanson, 1999). While much of the literature focuses upon the enactment of the authentic self, the findings of phase one and two highlighted participant perceptions of inauthentic behaviour as a significant sensemaking trigger,

I could only honestly say 4 of 8 from our leaders delivered in this respect, question the integrity of the player leadership group, P9 and P8 need to buy-in and feel part of it, and every single player needs to be accountable – no exceptions.

(Staff Feedback, Performance Review Document, July 2012)

Authenticity and authentic environments enable feelings of internal consistency (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002) by drawing together valued beliefs, values and identities (Shamir, 1991) and stabilising emotions in the workplace (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2002). Organisational authenticity or the degree to which organisational ideologies and values align with organisational practices (termed congruence) can vary (Martin, 2002). However, violations of authenticity have far reaching implications for the meanings that guide organisational beliefs and behaviour (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). For those that believed and embodied the meanings espoused through this research phase, any perceived violation or inconsistency had significant implications for the stability of those meanings and the team’s culture (Lips-Wiersma, 2002b). This was also perceived amongst HPU leader behaviour,

I saw behaviours going on and happening and players not being pulled up by anyone, nothing serious, but behaviours that wouldn’t be condoned as professional or performance focused...because X [Management Personnel] has been there for a while, there is a friendship existing between him and quite a lot of the players, and I suppose that’s expected, but I wondered whether it’s just become a bit comfortable and a bit nice.
(S6, Interview, July 2012)

Thompson and Bunderson (2001) argued that the actions people take become “containers of meaning” (p. 17) for others and serve to function as identity affirming practices. When behaviours become identity disaffirming, the risk for meaningless and withdrawal is considerable, for example, “loose players can derail good work” (HC, Performance Review Document, December 2011). Indeed, data highlighted that players (and management) were discerning and overtly conscious to breaks in integrity which created tension between ‘being’ a New Zealand player (ideological) and ‘doing’ (practicing), which is shown to lead to disengagement and meaninglessness (Lips-Wiersma, 2002b).

It became prevalent that certain senior players were exercising or even exploiting their seniority and power within a culture that reproduces a respect for hierarchy. I was acutely aware of certain players leveraging their senior position. Examples included, choosing to attend training camps or not, leaving camps early without notifying anyone, and a senior player

refusing to fulfil his media commitments on the grounds that he was tired, despite being seen up with friends playing the guitar at 2am that morning. C1 commented on his interpretation,

With [senior player leaving camp and not turning up for the following day], there would have been a little bit of, "mate, I've done this before, I'm one of the senior leaders, I don't need to see this", with [other senior player] he would have tried to justify it [taking the young players out drinking] to himself that it was good for team bonding and getting out together but really, to be honest...it was a selfish decision and we've seen plenty of selfish decisions from him...
(C1, Interview, February 2013)

S3 reflected upon a senior player not returning for the second day of a training camp,

I think we make too many excuses for players, and even HPD goes, "oh its family", but I'm like, nah! There's a point, and [HPD] even knew, coz that's when he was saying, "oh I think he's trying to get out of it", but what annoyed me the most is he, and if you want to play for your country...he knew about it since the November or December before, but he couldn't even give that much for the jersey, so it just made me so angry, and then when he's still in the leadership group, I was like why would you do that, coz all of the boys were like, "where's [Senior player], coz again, you set the rules, you have values and then one of them is outside it, and the boys all talk, and they all see, but then the coaching staff still go, here you are, here's your leaders, you know, that's when you start the old "how come he gets that, and he didn't even come?". HPD kind of mentioned about those boys that didn't attend, they had an opportunity, I was like, there's one right there, he said he was going to come back and he didn't, that's even worse!
(S3, Interview, February 2013)

Participants' interpretations of players leveraging power highlighted the precariousness and fragility of organisational meanings, where through action taking they are regularly destroyed (Gray et al., 1985). Sensemaking perceives that individuals examine the social landscape, reading and interpreting cues in their work environments that directly and indirectly shape the meaning of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Therefore, player and management behaviours acted as sensegiving triggers for meaning (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). In situations where there is an inauthentic use of legitimate power by those in authority roles, such as player leaders, team captains or coaches leads to heightened sensemaking and questioning of the prevailing meaning system (Gray et al., 1985). The actions of these senior players leveraging their power demonstrated an interplay between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984) and the flow and distribution of power within the high performance sport environment (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2013a). The HPU afforded considerable social and cultural power to certain cohorts of senior players because of their seniority and playing ability, who subsequently demonstrated considerable agency in their behaviour. For effective performance management an acute awareness and understanding of the nature and distribution of the unique internal power relations of the high performance environment are needed. As demonstrated in this case, the values, standards and practices of a performance department are at all times sensitive to exploitation by privileged stakeholders (Collins et al., 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014).

The behavioural practices of the players highlighted the significance of even subtle events where actor behaviour existed as sensemaking triggers (Weick, 1995). In exploring how meanings are constructed and destroyed, Gray et al. (1985) argued that in the most part, the interpreted actions that form anchors for meaning are largely coincidental, that is, the player did not intend to communicate such meaning. Nevertheless, through socialisation, subsequent ideologies are still constructed and come to hold meaning. The profound influence of unintended actions upon meaning highlighted "how small actions can enact a social structure that keeps the organisation entrapped in cycles of behaviour that preclude improvement" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003, p. 74),

It's pretty easy to get pushed off the track, you've got some other elderly boys coming in, who are in the leadership group [and joking around], you just follow the banter don't you. They don't choose to go that way, they just do...I've got a lot of respect for P4, he doesn't say much, but he does his action off the field and on the field. Whereas, P11, you know there's some there that have got some great leadership qualities, but kind of get steered off the path, you know P9, he's a great guy, you know, but on the field, actions speak louder than words. Even off the field when he's at training...Just when they're joking around, you know the banter, they just catch onto it, you know, it's only little things mate, but they just pick up and it becomes hard to turn around and it's a worry when it's the young ones. (S1, SS Interview, September 2012)

A disconnect between what was said and what was actioned was also evident to some extent in management behaviour, "you know what X [management personnel] is like, he has these ideas one minute, so you go off, set something up, and he does it once and never goes back to it" (S1, Interview, September 2012). Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) found that when leaders, managers and organisational members work in ideological terms and call higher aspirations into being, such as 'The Kiwi Way', individuals "automatically look for discrepancies, mismatches and inauthentic expressions" (p. 508). Inauthentic expressions are met with cynicism and create cycles of negativity that inevitably impact the meaning attached to work (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Hence, for organisations to foster meaning, leaders need to pay attention not only to their organisation's culture but the congruence or consistency of cultural elements. Cardador and Rupp (2010) warned that leaders require an acute awareness of the multiple interpretations of actions, and that contradictory or superficial gestures or actions that are aimed at impression management can undermine rather than enhance meaning.

A need for transparency of communication was evident in selection, and in particular non-selection of players, where the consequences upon player wellbeing and development were questioned,

...improved engagement between management team and players, one of things that I've learnt from the past, is that when they select our squad for the Anzac test of maybe 19, or the end of season test campaign of 23, they communicate really well with them, but what about the 10 or the 15 that hasn't been included in there, well you're still part of the 'brotherhood', they've still got to communicate with the wider group as well, those guys don't know how close or far they are from the black jumper. I know some players who've pretty much given up and withdrawn interest from the Kiwis, when they were 1 place out – they just never knew how close they were, or more importantly what they had to do to get selected next time. Well actually, one went and played for the Australians! (P2, SS Interview, January 2013)

Given the significant attention paid to selection by players, it formed a salient sensemaking cue for them and a significant sensegiving trigger for coaches (Goosby-Smith, 2009). While Weick (1995) cites an environment of ambiguity and equivocality as essential sensemaking triggers, extreme ambiguity, especially when accompanied by weariness (as demonstrated in the quotes above), created "an inability or unwillingness to choose, act and justify" and left players with "too many possibilities and too few certainties" (p.160). The subsequent impact was the onslaught of negative emotions that impacted perceived meaning (Choo, 1996).

Responsibility, ownership and delegation. Observations and participant data regularly made reference to the concept of player responsibility. Personal responsibility for disciplined decision making around off-field issues such as alcohol, players covertly having their wives stay in the hotel against team protocol, immaturity, poor behaviour at official team functions and eating habits were all either observed or regular topics of concern amongst management,

[It's his] debut, but he's been on tour...nearly been sent home from a tour [Staff laugh]...He's a follower, drinking, and then lying, "nah nah, I didn't drink! [Covering his

mouth up –alcohol breath], I swear it! You can't smell that on me can ya!?" That's why he's a follower; he looks for the loose guys to lead him astray. He paired up with (non-selected player) last year, who's just the same...he still gets in trouble down there [at club], you know, he's one of those guys like HPD said, he doesn't mind lying...for an out. (HC, Coaches Meeting, October 2012)

Links were drawn between inconsistent off-field player habits and on-field performance,

So you've talked about off-field discipline with alcohol and things. Discipline is a precursor to good habits...so discipline involves making habits, moving from a thought to a desire to a habit and that's what we need...when we talk about consistency, we talk about that stuff that you've got that other teams have not got as I said earlier today and cannot cultivate for however hard you try, that 'brotherhood', you have to take that onto the field in consistent habits... are you consistent with your play? Do you stick with it for 80 minutes? (S2, Team Meeting, January 2013)

The issues of player responsibility that frustrated management were the complex product of the mutual shaping of player socialisation and HPU leadership practices. The common practice in professional club environments of coaches and management exercising high (disempowering) control over many aspects of a players environment led to a belief held by the HPU management team that players were "spoilt" and "had it too easy" (S1, Personal Conversation, July 2012),

...most of them are spoon fed information...in life I suppose, now if you're an NRL professional now, you're not having to wait in lines, you don't, there's that many staff running round after you trying to get you better, you just basically turn up, for a lot of them, the good players are students of the game and they work to improve themselves, but most of them just turn up. Every club has got a sport scientist or 2, a sport psychologist, in my day I'd never even heard of a sport psychologist, let alone seen one, they're spending money on analysis, GPS's, \$50 000 wrestling mats, they're overloaded....Well, we're part of the problem, I suppose. But to me it's a societal thing too. (C1, Interview, February 2013)

As evidence of Argyris' (1957) seminal work, the data supports the idea that bureaucratic organisations block potential for human development and meaning. As Bennis (2009) noted while "we need to feel part of something greater than ourselves", we also need to "simultaneously know that our 'self' is essential to that greater efforts success" (p. 159). Such bureaucratic control is contradictory to the idea that meaning is the product of tasks that promote need fulfilment through autonomy, independence, intrinsic motivation and self-determination (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). Wherever leadership inhibits or diverts individuals from defining and taking responsibility for their own action and experience, this impacts the development of people (Argyris, 1957) and consequently generates "trained inaction amongst the led" (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 271). Players' club experiences appeared to constrain sensemaking acting as 'meaning residuals' brought with them when they joined the HPU (Mantere et al., 2012). The meaning residuals manifested in trained inaction amongst players, for example, players arriving at airports without passports and missing flights, and a sense of powerlessness amongst management when considering accountability,

Players being so precious that we can't growl [discipline/make them accountable] them if they are "playing up" (demonstrating poor behaviour). I feel like we or I can't really say anything out of line in fear of upsetting the campaign but sometimes I think they needed to be told to pull their heads in e.g., moaning about their pay, and sometimes moaning about just anything they could think of, it's only small but it chips away at people. I know the line is very fine and who am I to say – but again I truly believe the [organisational] values are such a powerful tool and to be able to remind them all every now and then wouldn't hurt. (S3, Performance Review Document, December 2011)

In the organisational setting, beliefs and assumptions are the tools of ontology that provide leaders and group members a prescribed, coherent and convenient framework for interpretation and decision making (Weick, 1995). Yet, framed by external cultural expectations established

in players' club lives, HPU leaders (and management personnel) inadvertently promulgated meanings that worked against self-responsibility, self-initiative and self-control, and, in doing so created situations where players were "crippled by purposelessness, and, inaction when left to guide efforts on their own" (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 271). A salient example was the common rhetoric from HPU leaders that in a high performance environment, "*we'll do everything for you, so all you have to do is concentrate on playing*" (HPD, Team Meeting, January 2013). The opportunity for constructing meaning through contributing to the development of team procedures, routines and conditions was lost (Isaksen, 2000), illustrating the dependency relations that arise when people abdicate their agency and control over the definition of reality to others (Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

There was, however, a clear and widely communicated desire amongst management for player ownership and empowerment,

I don't want to set the rules for anyone, they're my rules, not yours – instead, if you think the actions you are gonna take are fair and reasonable, then do them, but if you think and you're honest with yourself, and you think they're not reasonable, then don't do it...you want the leaders of the team driving this, it's got to come from them, if it comes from us; we're just putting words in their mouths.

(S1, Leadership Group Meeting, October 2012)

The meaning that arises from autonomy and competence at work has considerable behaviour implications for those leading high performance sport teams. Deep intrinsic motivation is found in autonomy and self-satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) and the perception that one is the driver of one's behaviour (Shamir, 1991). Where people feel they have the capability, competence (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991), personal control and autonomy over their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), they experience self-efficacy and enhanced meaning. As part of the subtle interplay between player responsibility and leadership behaviour, conflicting ideas of leadership emerged. Yet, the practical enactment of ownership and distributed leadership practices were not consistently evidenced,

I guess [coaches and management] got that role of coming up with strategy and tactics and training and scheduling, all that kind of stuff, that's their responsibility, and if we buy into it, if we believe in it then that just makes a huge difference.

(P1, SS Interview, January 2013)

The dominant management practices left players largely as passive participants as HPU leaders (coaches and HPD) analysed and presented game footage, controlled meetings and training sessions and set and reviewed player goals. Despite a desire to promote player ownership, HPU management still controlled much of the environment,

[The organisation] made these big banners which they hung in the changing rooms...so it wasn't the boys - the boys put these words together then they got type up and put together with some photos by the C1 who sent them over to NZ, and they got printed on big material banners. They're really nice posters and stuff, good pictures; I was just a little sceptical as to whether the boys really owned it, and therefore whether they had any deeper meaning.

(Reflexive Diary, October 2012)

Leadership and management styles that emphasise control, organising, and coordinating (Gregory, Harris, Armenakis, & Shook, 2009) and the resultant highly formalised, centralised and rule oriented cultures can restrict employee access to meaning (Cardador & Rupp, 2010).

Contained with efforts to delegate or empower players was also the potential for coercion, manipulation and influence to achieve managerial ends, rather than authentic ownership, where "*you're part of it, you either buy in, or you're not in.*" (HC, Team Meeting, October 2012) and,

Our job is to influence that [SLG] as much as possible in a positive way in thinking about what do they want, what will their legacy be, what is their contribution.

(S2, Management Meeting, October 2012)

Meaning is undermined when leadership practices are perceived as superficial or driven by impression management (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). Conflicting language such as 'buy-in', which implies subjugation to the ideas of others, and 'ownership', a genuine shared construction of ideas were present. Given the heightened sensemaking that results from working in ideological terms (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), such conflicting narratives risked interpretations as superficial. Practices such as 'The Kiwi Way' initiative, the use of a consultant and the leadership group as 'middle managers' to convey top leadership ideas, risked perception as a superficial novelty, as evidenced by an experienced senior player's, sarcasm in response to the consultant cultivating a value set with the SLG,

P9: Yeah, nice!! You're good at this, keep going, I couldn't say it better myself. Yeay!

S2: You happy?

P9: Couldn't have said it better!

S2: You said it.

P9: Nah I didn't, you said it (Laughter)!

The dialectical tension presented here between pursuing ownership, empowerment, and management desire to retain a degree of control reflected a politicised element to cultural and ideological leadership. Where meaning is politicised to meet managerial ends, any attempt to coercively manage meaning through management or cultural practices may actually reduce the experience of meaning through dissimilarities in power, autocracy, controlling the affective domain, and the use of meaning as a form of normative control (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Casey, 1999; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009).

Meaning Construction and Sensemaking Within a High Performance Sport Team

As I observed the culture in situ and players shared their personal stories with enthusiasm, the espoused meanings at play were revealed as the product of experience, and the complex relationship between personal, professional and historical contexts. The central role of experience in constructing meaning found in phase one and two reinforced that meaning construction is an enacted and embodied process (Weick, 1995), and constructed by doing and experiencing (Driver, 2007b). At the centre of giving meaning to these experiences was the interaction with others (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), whether it was personally, with immediate family and friends, or professionally with teammates, coaches and other staff. Meanings of 'representation', 'Kiwi values' and brotherhood' all reflected personal and shared experiences during various life phases (childhood, youth, and adulthood). Whereas meanings of the *professional* athlete were (re)constructed through socialisation framed by the cultural context of professional rugby league.

The influence of social interaction and inter-personal sensemaking (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) upon meaning construction is supported by the large body of sensemaking literature and reflected in Ibarra and Andrews (1993) conclusion that, "people's attitudes and perceptions do not develop in a vacuum. They are the powerfully moulded by social situations" (p. 299). Klenke (1996) argued formal and informal organisations, such as a high performance sport team, are "complex networks of relationships each with its own set of contextual parameters" (p. 18) and the relationships found within these complex networks have a strong influence upon the meaning participants make of their involvement with the team (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Many of the meanings prevailed because they were reproduced through consistent and unchallenged socialisation (Gray et al., 1985), through social conduits and the symbolic

practices of language, stories, gossip, social protocol, leadership behaviour, action taking, non-verbal signs and signals, and certain rituals (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Maitlis, 2005).

While many of the findings here support the introspective psychological processes that led to meaning (Rosso et al., 2010), the central role of experience and 'others' that emerged from phase one and two foregrounds the idea that making sense and constructing meaning within a high performance sport team is a highly social process (Maitlis, 2005). The findings support Isaksen (2000) who argued that "the process of constructing meaning is a psychological necessity that relies heavily on already-existing symbolic systems rooted in culture and language" in which a "fit between inner beliefs, desires and external events is obtained through the active organisation of the understanding of events" (p. 88). Evidence in phase one and two confirmed Bruner's (1990) understanding of meaning construction whereby meaning making is internal, personal and cognitive yet highly social, where players were proactive and collaborative agents in constructing the meaning of playing for the national team (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Phase one and two acted as practical examples of Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) model of sensemaking at work, where players did not passively receive and interpret cues from other HPU members, but were constantly exposed to cues that communicated others' appraisals of worth and the meaning of playing for the team.

Over the course of daily interaction, players actively noticed, interpreted, sought out cues and remembered what other participants did or did not do towards them or their peers. It was the actions of others that informed sensemaking and meaning in the HPU and shaped the understanding a player had about the meaning of playing for the team and who they were when they were with the HPU (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). This was demonstrated in the reported different behavioural patterns of players when they were with the HPU and their club team. While difficult to uncover but offering a plausible explanation, Harris (1994) deemed that individuals construct the meaning of their work as a product of a "contrived mental dialogues between themselves (e.g., 'I think it means this and I would be inclined towards this response') and other contextually-relevant (past or present; real or imagined) individuals or groups (e.g., 'What would my coach and teammates think about this? What would they want me to do?')" (p. 309).

While players constructed meaning from their own perceptions and internal dialogue (Rosso et al., 2010), players also came to ascribe meaning to experiences or to see particular parts of HPU membership as more or less meaningful in ways that reflected culturally or socially prescribed value systems and world-views (Berger & Luckmann, 1995; Geertz, 1988). An example of this was family metaphor; a localised (re)construction of the meaning of family or whanau in the culturally prescribed value system of the indigenous peoples of the South Pacific (Lakisa et al., 2014). Players also promoted particular meanings by seeking out interactions with teammates that would generate affirming cues and confirm their desired meaning (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). While metaphors of whanau and family were perceived to be a way of bringing people together to work as a community, the metaphor also acted as a narrative that constructed and reconstructed beliefs that impacted accountability and rationalised suboptimal performance.

The findings of phase one and two highlighted that "no matter how sedimented social conditions may appear or actually be, those conditions nonetheless are produced, maintained and changed through interpretive processes" (Maines, 2000, p. 577). Meanings in the HPU were not static but dynamic, and created, altered and destroyed in concert with others on a daily basis (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The evidence of shared experience, social negotiation,

construction and reconstruction of meaning portrays the HPU as an organisation that was not fixed or permanent, but fluid and impermanent. It was through the actions of members that the organisation and its environment was constructed (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 2009), confirming the notion that high performance sport teams continually construct, proliferate and reconstruct their own ideologies, beliefs and ways of behaving (Cruickshank et al., 2013a).

Driven by a central outcome of sustainable change, and a belief that “organisations don’t change. People change. And then people change organisations” (Richard, 1996, p. 11), collaboration with CEO and HPD (as organisational members afforded legitimate power by right of position) to author the forthcoming action phase of the project was essential (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Informed by the theoretical frameworks within this research, where ownership, autonomy, engagement and collaboration are routes to meaning (Rosso et al., 2010) and that meaning is constructed and not imposed (Carey, 2013; Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), it was necessary for organisational leaders to construct, own and drive the change initiative. It was anticipated that this would build bespoke action, shaped by the ubiquitous knowledge and experience of the people within the organisation, and have a legacy beyond this doctoral thesis. The findings of this context and issue identification phase were therefore presented to key organisational leaders to establish the next step for action and change. This was framed by the (the NZRL’s) intended outcome of promoting a high performing culture amongst the HPU.

Framing the Action: Issues of Philosophical Alignment

The cultural audit undertaken in phase one and two established the foundations for a productive facilitated planning session with CEO and HPD in April 2013. Supported by a secondary researcher (academic supervisor), the session was devoted solely to disseminating the findings of phase one and two to these key organisational leaders, and using them as the central resource to establish a shared direction and focus for the change initiative. To effectively prepare CEO and HPD for the meeting, an executive summary report of the findings was written (see Appendix A) and made available to them in the days before the meeting. The first part of the session consisted of a PowerPoint presentation of the findings (see Appendix B). This allowed for discussion, questions, elaboration and clarification, as well as a form of data check to establish a consensus and trustworthiness of the findings (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). There was general agreement by those at the meeting that the interpretations, themes and conclusions presented in the summary report were an accurate reflection of the issues at hand.

All of the themes were presented to CEO and HPD as possible foci for the research. Despite a general consensus that the Kiwis had a “great” and “unique” culture, there was perceived “room for significant improvement” (HPD, *Facilitated Planning Meeting, April, 2013*), “not to mention on-field performance” (CEO, *Facilitated Planning Meeting, April, 2013*). In discussing the focus for action, the ensuing conversations centred on the emergent conditions that influenced undesirable meanings and the existent performance culture; a ‘lack of philosophical alignment’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘responsibility, ownership and delegation’. Reflecting on the data presented and their personal experiences, both CEO and HPD focused upon the central importance of a clear and shared philosophy or purpose in promoting a high performing culture amongst the HPU. The conclusion from CEO and HPD was to direct the desired change towards establishing a shared and aligned common philosophy amongst the HPU. These key organisational leaders felt that it was essential to first address a shift towards a shared philosophy of performance, prior to addressing other themes,

It’s quite an eye-opener what you’ve presented here John. To be honest, a lot of it’s really subtle stuff, I hadn’t really thought about a lot of this stuff. So it wasn’t until you

gave me that document, then I really thought about them and now they look quite obvious. Either way, there's a hell of a lot of stuff we can certainly get better at. But I'm inclined to agree with CEO, I reckon we attack that one [pointing at philosophical alignment] first, that's got to be the most important, we need everyone on the same page if we're going to win the world cup. (HPD, Facilitated Planning Session, April 2013)

There was consensus that by addressing philosophy and purpose first would, as a natural consequence, begin to address a number of the other themes identified as influencing meaning and the performance culture. CEO and HPD's central focus upon change of purpose and guiding philosophy aligned with current definitions of strategic change, as "either a redefinition of organisational mission and purpose or a substantial shift in overall priorities and goals to reflect new emphases or direction" (Gioia et al., 1994, p. 364). HPD and CEO focused their attention to the pursuit of a shared philosophy that "*inspired and engaged*", "*that means something more*" (thus players genuinely believe in it), "*is shared by all, not just a few*" and embodied in behaviour, "*it's got to mean something for performance*" (CEO, Facilitated Planning Session, April 2013). As a loosely coupled organisational unit, led by HPD who occupied a decentralised position (in the New Zealand office), and influenced by a dominant value system that placed the economic-labour exchange above meaning and purpose (*the professional athlete*), the ability for performance and organisational leaders to work in ideological terms was crucial (Limerick, 1990).

In attempting to change the system of meanings or reframe the "interpretive scheme" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 434) underpinning the HPU's philosophies and purpose, CEO and HPD highlighted the sub-themes of a vision for high performance, the hegemony of operational discourse over strategy and the tension between the revered 'brotherhood' and performance for particular attention. They believed that the desired change should aspire to act beyond the existing reliance on the 'brotherhood' concept as the vehicle through which to deliver consistent and lasting performance, as CEO later reflected,

It's about legacy – It's about establishing a culture, processes that embed legacy...It's about creating a legacy. We need to develop the foundations for creating a culture and an environment...so that we're not boom and bust...what does that look like, how do we structure an environment, how do we create the linkage between the organisation, and I guess the elite high performance, bring that closer, values wise.

(CEO, Interview, June 2013)

This conclusion offered clarity and direction for the forthcoming action phase and was underpinned by the assumption, as highlighted throughout the chapter, work designed to promote a sense of purpose increases meaning (Grant et al., 2008) and positively impacts performance (Rosso et al., 2010).

This focus for the action phase confirmed the theories of sensemaking and meaning as central bases through which to explore the change experience. Thus, the intervention-action cycles (phase three) of the research addressed how the HPU endeavoured to develop philosophical alignment across internal stakeholders as a means of promoting a high performing culture.

Evaluation of Context and Issue Identification (Phase One and Two)

To invoke meta-learning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), the evaluation of the context and issue identification phases (phases one and two) was undertaken on multiple levels. First, a reflection of my experience of the research process (process reflection) is made. Second, I challenge the underlying assumptions and perspectives of my own learning (premise reflection). Finally, I summarise the research outcomes of this phase in relation to the research question, research content and relevant theory (content reflection).

Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning

Reflecting upon the research process, a number of conditions shaped both the journey and product of phase one and two. First, the commitment, openness, willingness and support exhibited by key agents (i.e., both former and incumbent HPD's and both former and incumbent CEO's) of both the research and my involvement ensured I was able to be an interactive, engaged participant as opposed to a distanced researcher. This facilitated the collection of in-depth data from multiple sources. The multiple stakeholder engagement and subsequent data triangulation facilitated a rich text (Geertz, 1974) and prevented the reductive issues associated with single perspective cultural narratives and the privileging of the power-laden dialogues of coaches and high performance directors (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014). At the conclusion of phase one and two, the facilitated planning session was an example of willing and open-minded leaders in their motivation to contribute and author a desired future. This openness and willingness to engage in the research was not only an encouraging aspect of phases one and two but also a critical success factor, without which the project would not have evolved.

Second, given the socially constructed masculine values that perpetuate in the codes of football (Light, 1999; 2000; 2008), my experiences revealed some of the elite players were unsurprisingly guarded and not experienced in offering personal beliefs, perspectives and feelings. Initial semi-structured interviews proved difficult to organise and players were not particularly forthcoming. Examples included players cancelling at late notice citing emergent unchangeable commitments, or could not be contacted or found at times when they had committed to an interview. While formal interview data proved a valuable source and enabled direct conversation about the phenomena of interest, the quality and depth of answers from players were at times limited. The emergent narratives should be considered against the earlier described power constructs and player agency, illustrated in C1's comment, "*Some of them [the players] are good talkers, I tell you, showmen in the media, you should see them, very charming. They're very good at telling you what you want to hear*" (C1, Interview, October 2012). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) contended that meaning is subtle and may not be verbally or overtly reflected in the public or semi-public spaces in which change initiatives are carried out. This was evidenced in the emergent issue of authenticity, whereby the meanings described by participants were not necessarily reflected through group behaviour. My experiences brings forth Margaret Mead's famous quote of "what people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things" (cited in Johnson & Kruse, 2009, p. 170).

While facilitating formal interviews proved challenging, players were comfortable with my presence in the field. I did not experience any avoidance in natural settings, such as at training camps or team hotels, where unstructured interviews regularly arose on the research topic. Indeed, I found much more authentic value in the data that emerged from these unsolicited interactions. The contested nature of the formal interview and the authentic nature of data derived from organic conversations was a major consideration in the methods and analyses used in the forthcoming action cycles. This learning further emphasised the importance of participant observation as a central data collection method in this context. While it is important to consider participants' articulated feelings and thoughts, to construct a more useful or authentic image of the culture, the behaviour and actions of participants became a central determinant and embodiment of meaning and beliefs.

Third, while data was checked with both HPD's (former and incumbent) and CEO for consensus, frequent checks with participants were more challenging to obtain. Efforts were made initially to make researcher interpretations available, however this was met with some apprehension from players. They showed limited interest and in many instances avoidance

when I approached them to discuss data transcripts. At risk of damaging rapport and trust or being perceived as obtrusive or a nuisance, my attempts to involve participants in data checks became increasingly passive. Reflecting upon the experience, I perceived this to be the product of the interplay between players' natural apprehension of the unfamiliar (style of research) coupled with their desire to avoid doing more than necessary. To mitigate this limitation in trustworthiness, I established informal data checks in-situ, while collecting data by paraphrasing questions and responses to allow participants to elaborate and confirm their interpretations and establish a degree of data consensus.

With respect to premise learning, much of the challenging of my underlying assumptions and beliefs from phase one and two is captured in Chapter Three and will be developed further in forthcoming chapters as I journeyed through the action phases. Despite the emergent peripheral methodological challenges, I am confident that the interpretations, analysis and cultural conclusions made as part of phase one and two were drawn directly from participants and their experiences. Consequently, a rich textual product is presented here drawn using diverse data collection methods and consisting of multiple participant viewpoints.

From a content learning perspective, the analysis conducted through phase one and two revealed the HPU culture as rich with meaning. Altruistic notions of representing family (or whanau), culture and the nation shaped the meanings players constructed when playing for the Kiwis. Furthermore, players cited a meaningful attachment to the highly social 'brotherhood' of the Kiwis, which was governed by 'Kiwi values' of respect, care and humility. As the analysis revealed, many of these meanings were perceived as conducive to successful personal, team and organisational performance. While citing such evocative sources of meaning, players were also pragmatic about their roles as high performance athletes, locating themselves as professionals undertaking employment in a professional and organisational context.

Amidst a complex interrelationship between personal, professional and historical contexts, meanings were constructed from consistent experiences and social interactions with significant others. Many of the dominant meanings prevailed because they were reproduced through consistent and unchallenged socialisation within the HPU culture. Despite being a culture with considerable espoused meaning, this did not prove to be a direct link to improved performance, or even hegemony of values that drive performance. As discussed a number of emergent sensemaking issues were documented that frustrated and inhibited member sensemaking, collective action, and influenced the HPU's resultant 'performance' culture. These conditions consisted of a lack of a collective 'performance focused' philosophy, inauthentic behaviours and a culture that failed to promote responsibility and ownership. The findings highlighted the complex, contested and highly social nature of the high performance athlete experience, which is bound by interpersonal, cultural and societal forces.

By engaging with literature in iterative cycles I was able to begin linking the theoretical concepts to practical issues and vice versa. The meanings players attached to playing for the Kiwis and their modes of construction fitted with the major theoretical concepts of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) and the meaning of work (Rosso et al., 2010). Furthermore, the data supported the view of the high performance sport team as a loosely-coupled unit both externally in its relationship with the wider organisation, but also internally with respect to the nature of the relationships and flows of power and influence vertically and horizontally (Limerick & Cunningham, 1993; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Figure 6 offers a schematic outline of the research outcomes for phase one and two, incorporating the cultural audit leading to issue identification. It also acknowledges the relevant theoretical concepts

utilised through these phases. The following chapter charts the first intervention-action cycle, reflecting on how the HPU leaders set about addressing philosophical alignment, the change process and the subsequent action designed to promote a high performing culture.

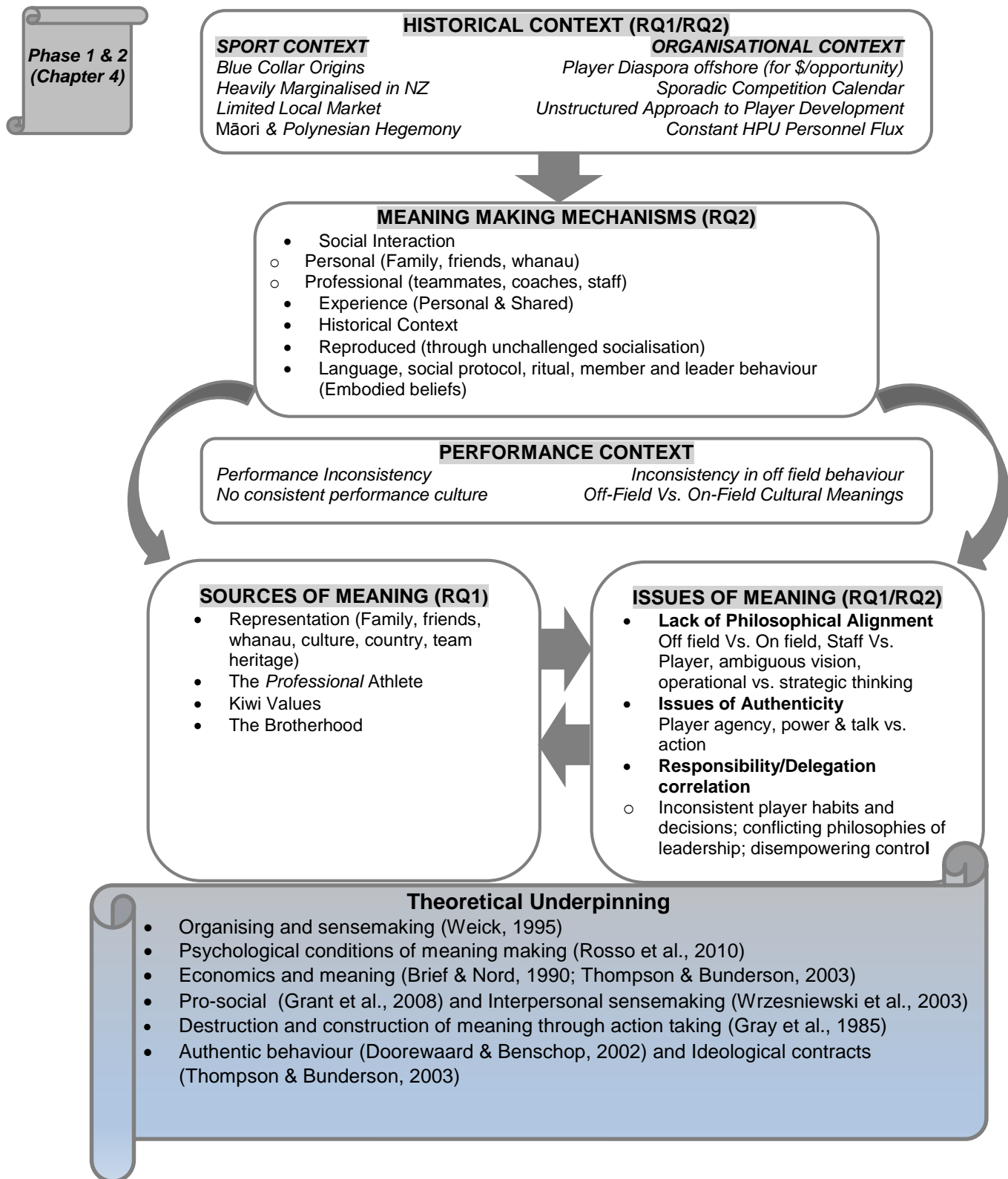


Figure 6. Summary of research outcomes for phase one and two

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH INTERVENTION 'MAKING MEANING: WHERE DO WE START?'

This chapter details the beginning of phase three (research intervention and action phase) of the EAR, as top management within the HPU began an exploratory process to align philosophies (beliefs and meanings) within the HPU and improve the performance culture of the team. An essential part of this research was the multiple iterations or 'mini-cycles' (Ferkins et al., 2009) that took place in refining the problem and solution. As the ten-month period identified as phase three progressed, multiple iterations of intervention and steps of action occurred within the HPU. This chapter charts the first intervention-action loop, a professional development trip to a regional professional sport team, which stimulated cycles of learning and action amongst HPU management as they prepared for the team's pinnacle event, the world cup. These iterations culminated in a planned cultural intervention for the team, designed to align philosophies through reframing the meanings and purpose of the HPU, to be introduced at the world cup.

The words 'intervention' and 'action' were chosen to indicate the distinction between a planned intervention and the actions or change that unfolded as a result. In using these terms, it made clear the rationale for the design of the interventions and action steps, the major steps in implementation, and key features of monitoring the attempted change process. This distinction gives further clarity and validity to the change process in attempting to answer research questions three, four and five¹⁹. Throughout this phase I engaged with these research questions (and return to research questions one and two) as I negotiated an understanding of both the context and conditions for change.

Strategies for Managed Change to Align Philosophies Amongst the HPU

Following the completion of phase one and two, CEO and HPD highlighted their desire to pursue a clearly aligned and strongly held philosophy amongst the HPU. However, upon interviewing both individuals as part of the exploration process for phase three, it was clear there was a sense of lack of direction, as CEO commented,

I'm keen to create some sustainability in the high performance area, because I think that will translate into performance in the team, and so I'm very conscious of that, we need to develop the foundations for creating a culture and an environment...so that we're not boom and bust...what does that look like, how do we structure and environment, how do we create the linkage between the organisation, and I guess the elite high performance, bring that closer, values wise...it's difficult for players to bring them along somehow, but we've got to create a closer linkage somehow, but I haven't got a clear view yet.
(CEO, Interview, June 2013)

Inadvertently, even though steps to take were undetermined, a significant learning event, a professional development (PD) trip to a regional professional sport team punctuated the daily organisational experience, catalysing sensemaking and triggering action.

Intervention One: The Professional Development (PD) Visit

Since the beginning of the year, on the recommendation of the team sport psychologist, HPD tried to establish monthly or six-weekly meetings between the HPU management to increase contact, development and collegiality outside of HPU campaigns. The meetings, termed 'topic dinners', were intended to be informal but educational, with each member of the management team assigned a date and required to organise the dinner, topic and speaker in their area of interest. The month of June belonged to S4, who through a personal contact,

¹⁹ RQ3: What actions can be taken to foster meaning and purpose?

RQ4: What are the implications of these actions?

RQ5: What constrains or enables people's ability to construct meaning?

organised a visit day for HPU management to a professional sports franchise which had achieved a notable 'turnaround' from a long period of poor performance to a period of championship winning success.

Of the twelve HPU management personnel, only seven attended, including HPD, HC, S4, S8, S5 and me. Upon arrival we were taken on a tour of the training facility and watched a training session before management split off with their counterparts, leaving me, HC, HPD and S4 to chat with the four coaches of the franchise team for the remainder of the day. Stories, struggles and notable experiences were shared, and we listened as their coaches talked of their critical events of the previous two years that were perceived as contributing to the team's newfound consistent success. A major talking point for the day became the interesting process the team had undertaken, when the four coaches joined two years earlier, to explore their identity and what it meant to represent this team and province. The rural New Zealand province had a rich Māori and colonial history that became a key driver for the team's culture. As part of this process, the franchise coaches enlisted the help of a local Māori cultural advisor.

The franchise club began to explore the heritage of the province and its cultural history along with the players' own personal histories. Traditional on-field pre-season training was replaced with hitchhiking and multi-sport team races across the province, taking in local sites of cultural or historical significance. The team also visited and learned about local Māori communities, and players were assigned decorating and construction tasks in building the team's new training facility. The resultant culture, with its own rituals (a team haka and weekly culture driven player presentations), values' system, language (slogans, names, terminology), artefacts (posters) and stories proved (according to their coaches) incredibly meaningful to all participants in their organisation, but particularly the players. The coaches felt the new culture cultivated a strong sense of identity amongst players, serving as a point of difference and became a powerful shaper of behaviour. When asked how the non-Māori players accepted such an emphasis on Māori symbols, the coach responded, it wasn't about being Māori, the intention was never to force Māori culture on people, Māoridom was merely the vehicle to facilitate people finding meaning and some shared purpose in playing for this team and representing this region. Sensing an intrigue and interest amongst HC and HPD, they offered to share the contact details of the local Māori cultural advisor, whom they spoke of with great respect and fondness.

On the trip back to Auckland, the group stopped at a pub for a meeting. Discussions soon revealed that HC and HPD were engaged and inspired by their day's experience. A particular focus was the emphasis placed on identity and representation and how it engendered such a sense of belonging and meaning amongst not only the players, but also the management and wider organisation. They were clearly interested in how this was achieved with the utilisation of the Māori cultural advisor, and Māori narratives and metaphors. As we dropped HC off at the airport, he commented,

I've got three hours on the plane now, and a lot of thinking to do, so I'm going to sit down and write up a whole bunch of things from today. I'm really interested in this stuff; I'll be in touch.
(HC, Interview, July 2013)

Action Steps for NZRL

Engaging Cultural Advisor and the Emergence of an Idea

A week or so after our PD visit to the franchise team, HPD announced he had organised a meeting with the Māori cultural advisor (CA) from the PD visit club,

I was actually surprised how close of a culture that they had to ours, and I was really impressed with how they'd managed to align everyone in such a short space of time, which makes me really interested in just listening to what he's got to say. The meaning thing interests me, and how smart they'd been on creating something that the guys truly felt part of and the consequence of the increase in responsibility that they felt in representing something bigger than themselves. Me and HC are really keen to hear his ideas and see if there's anything we can use. (HPD, Interview, July 2013)

At the meeting, CA introduced himself by talking about his heritage and background and then quietly listened to HPD reflect upon the Kiwis, and their context, where players came together from diverse personal and cultural backgrounds for a handful of games every year. As we collaborated, HPD talked of the special features of the Kiwi team's culture, the 'brotherhood', but also challenges he had experienced coaching the side in previous years. Challenges included selfish player behaviour, some questionable leadership, group factions, and players changing national allegiance. CA raised the Māori concept of Kaupapa²⁰ – *"that one thing that draws people together, that allows people to belong...that one purpose or Kaupapa"* and how culture was the *"domain of the wairua²¹ [spirit], a spiritual connection between people, but the spiritual part is sometimes forgotten coz we get carried away with everything else, attack, defence, weights, you know"* (CA, Meeting, July 2013). He also suggested that much of the success at the PD visit team centred on a clear and shared understanding of what it meant to be a club player, what it meant to represent the region, and how that became centrally meaningful to all club employees. Referring to the challenges HPD raised, he recited stories and proverbs from Māori history that acted as metaphors explaining not only the challenges themselves but also solutions. His main story centred on an early Māori king, King Tawhiao²², who in response to confiscated land, impending poverty and in the absence of traditional wood for house building, famously said to his people, he would use non-traditional wood and that it would be ok,

He said, I will fashion my own house, as I see it fit, with what we've got. And people will come from 'Nga hau e wha²³', the four winds, which means the people from the four corners of the world, like the Kiwis team. (CA, Meeting, July 2013)

He talked of how this narrative reflected the problems the Kiwis faced. CA also discussed the role of the Haka, one of the franchise team's major cultural rituals. He challenged why the Kiwis perform Haka Ka Mate²⁴ and their ownership of it,

These questions clearly heightened HPD's awareness around the role of haka, as he admitted that (even as an ex-player) whilst the players enjoyed it, and it meant different things to different people, he knew little of its intended meaning and that Ka Mate was performed because it was the traditional choice. (Reflexive Diary, July 2013)

At the close of the meeting, HPD thanked him for his time and insight and that he would ponder the advice and get back to him. Shortly after CA left, I asked HPD what he thought,

²⁰ Kaupapa Māori: "Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology – a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society" (Māori Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, in the context of this research, Kaupapa makes reference to Kaupapa Kiwi, a philosophical doctrine incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Kiwi (rugby league) society.

²¹ Wairua: Spirit, soul – spirit of a person which exists beyond death. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body. To some, the wairua resides in the heart or mind of someone while others believe it is part of the whole person and is not located at any particular part of the body (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

²² King Tawhiao: The second Māori King of the Kingitanga. Waikato leader, visionary and prophet (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

²³ 'Nga hau e wha': The four winds of Tāwhiri-matea (Maori god of weather), the north, south, east and west winds (New Plymouth District Council, n.d.).

²⁴ Haka Ka Mate: The unofficial haka of New Zealand sport teams, famously performed before rugby and rugby league matches (Collins & Jackson, 2007).

You know, don't get me wrong I love 'The Kiwi Way' and it's been a great start...we need something more, something different, something us - every NRL club will have one of those - all the words are generally the same or similar – respect, integrity, blah blah blah, and in the end it gets a bit blurred. This [the meeting discussion] is just unique to us - this is ours. The boys need something more - something unique to hang their hat on - above and beyond a value's statement or poster...I actually think the players need to grab hold of more of what we've got at the moment.... like all that stuff that you've been talking about, in terms of, what's important to the players, what does it mean to be a Kiwi, I don't think there's enough of that in what we're doing, we don't address it enough... (HPD, Interview, July 2013)

As the HPD desired to pursue it further, the next step was to gain an appraisal from others, and he requested that CA prepare something more formal from the concepts discussed to present to the HPU management at their next meeting. In addition to management, HPD invited the team's captain for a player's perspective,

You know the other day when we were in the office with CA, and mate, I got worked up, and I think you did a little bit as well, but I do often wonder if the players would? Like it's no good having a real effect on us, if it's not on the players. (HPD, Interview, July 2013)

Cultural Presentation: Sound Boarding with HPU Management

The first world cup-planning meeting was attended in person by almost all HPU management and CEO (exceptions being newly appointed C2 and S7). After completing the logistical and operational agenda, HPD introduced CA and he began his presentation (supported by a PowerPoint slideshow). Vividly, through storytelling and korero²⁵, he built upon our earlier discussion and the challenges raised,

For we will fashion this house the way we need to, and that my friends will come from all four corners of the world – and Nga Hau e Wha, the four winds, so Tonga, Samoa, Rarotonga, England, Laos, wherever you are from, [Māori King] didn't say, because you are from Laos, we're not going to take you, he said, come because you are useful, you will help us build this house. (CA, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

He continued to talk of a metaphorical merging of tribes and applied the Māori cultural concept of whakapapa²⁶ to the team's context,

We are not all from one place, we're all not one people...the merging of tribes, yes I am a man, but don't just look at me as one player, for I have my ancestors, my tupuna²⁷, my hapu²⁸, I belong to a tribe, I belong to a people, iwi, so when we get all these things together, we get this Kiwi nation, each person has their own genealogy that we want them to bring and share with this whanau, so now that you look at me, don't just look at me, when you see me out on the field, see my parents, see my tupuna, my grandparents, see my tribe or my people, whether it be Nga Puhī²⁹, or whether it be Masaga³⁰, whether I be Māori, Pākehā, Tongan or Samoan, when we come together we come as Aotearoa New Zealand...or otherwise what I call it, Te Iwi Kiwi – not Te Iwi

²⁵ Korero: To tell, say, speak, read, talk, address (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

²⁶ Whakapapa: "Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent – reciting *whakapapa* was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions" (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

²⁷ Tupuna: Ancestor, grandparent (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

²⁸ Hapu: Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe. A selection of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society. It consists of a number of whanau sharing descent from a common ancestor, usually being named after the ancestor, but sometimes from an important event in the group's history. A number of related hapu usually shared adjacent territories forming a looser tribal federation (iwi) (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

²⁹ Nga Puhī: A tribal group from Northland, New Zealand (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)

³⁰ Masaga: A family group from Samoa

Māori, Te Iwi Kiwi. Because for me, Te Iwi Kiwi is the makeup of Māori, Tongan, Laos, Cook Island, it's all these groups that make up Te Iwi³¹ Kiwi.

(CA, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

CA brought up the subject of haka, the intended cultural meaning, and then challenged the team's ownership of the traditional haka, Ka Mate "where is the player's ownership of that, where do they see themselves in that part of it?" (CA, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013). In concluding, he canvassed the idea of authoring a haka unique to the HPU and the NZRL,

What is it that you want to say, or what is it that you want to hear, because the haka is more about preparation before you go into the heat of battle than protocol, so what are those last things that you want to say – not as an individual but as a team, with that one meaning.
(CA, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

The feedback from the management was generally positive as the group collaborated and discussed CA's presentation, referring to it as "real good stuff" and a "wonderful framework" (HC, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013) and "very powerful" (CEO, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013). S2 summarised her feelings,

[There is] heaps of fantastic symbolism that we can draw on, and that will probably resonate a lot with the boys, I love that, we will fashion our house our own way, that's exactly the point that it's not somebody else's way, it's not given to them, it's grown and shaped by them, they choose it themselves and they own it themselves, they live it themselves.
(S2, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

As HPD drew the meeting to a close, he thanked CA for his contribution and concluded,

I think there's some key messages there that the players can grab hold of, and how we use that, is probably the discussion, but for me, as CA mentioned before, the buy-in, has got to be across everyone in the administration, so I wanted to give everyone here the opportunity of hearing him first...have some thoughts about how we drive that culture, or we drive 'The Kiwi Way', a little bit differently but using that, that will be our foundation...I'm confident that we can do something to help in our campaign and help with the boys.
(HPD, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

Te Iwi Kiwi: Making and Refining New Meanings

Following the initial meeting and presentation, and from collaborating with HPD and HC, it was decided to pursue a cultural intervention to reframe the meanings of the HPU by using the 'culture' concepts and ideas learned from the PD visit and subsequent interactions with CA. Between late July and the beginning of October (shortly before departing for the world cup), through a series of recurring collaborative planning meetings the intervention was constructed. The central outcome was to use Māori narratives and concepts as a vehicle to cultivate or reframe shared meaning, align philosophies (or Kaupapa) amongst the HPU and "get everyone on the same page" (HPD, Interview, July 2013). Led by HPD with CA in a consultancy style role, the meetings were interspersed with regular phone calls and emails from HC, who contributed ideas, posed questions and helped conceptualise the intervention. The five meetings followed a similar process: reviewing progress from the previous meeting, emerging ideas, thinking and questioning, and discussion between HPD and CA to refine and pose new questions and ideas for future discussion and planning. As the planning process unfolded, through a constant process of construction and refinement, new layers were added to the planned intervention building depth and elements. As the intervention began to take shape and

³¹ Iwi: Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race consisting of a number of hapu (sub-tribes) – often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor (Te: The, when referring to a whole class of people, thus, Te Iwi: The people) (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

the world cup grew closer, discussion moved from 'what' to implement (narratives, metaphors, meanings) to 'how' to implement the intervention and the required practical strategies.

The construction process began with the central narratives of 'fashioning our own house' (maaku ano e hanga I tooku nei whare) and 'the people of the four winds' (Nga hau e wha). HC emailed an image of a whareniui³² complete with some labels to represent the 'Kiwi's house'. Using HC's contribution, there was interest in pursuing a visual reminder for the players that could be carried and displayed in hotels and changing rooms. Therefore, an image that encompassed all metaphors and narratives in the intervention became a key part.

Resulting from HC's email, CA drew and began to label parts of the whareniui. All whareniui have a similar structure, whereby the integrity of the structure is held by pous³³ and both the inside and outside are adorned with traditional carvings of notable ancestors. Traditionally, the carving represents the spiritual connection between the iwi and their ancestors and thus they contain emblems of the carver's particular whakapapa or genealogy (Brown, 2009). Other key structural elements pertinent to the intervention included the koruru³⁴, the maihi³⁵, the amo³⁶, the poupou³⁷ and the pou tokomanawa³⁸.

During the meetings, CA provided a comprehensive list of Māori phrases and terminology related to the whareniui that could be used as metaphors in different aspects of game strategy and on-field performance. From the comprehensive list, HC and HPD chose to focus upon a number of core metaphors. First, the left pou was named Pou Tuturu and the right post Pou Tuhono,

Tuhono is the joining, the hononga³⁹, so that's for all our 'brothers' who are not of Māori descent, not tangata whenua⁴⁰, you know, but we can't just have a one side house, and that was my thinking in bringing us together...So you've got the home kind, tangata whenua which is [Pou] Tuturu⁴¹...they are the home people, tangata whenua which is old. And then you've got the hononga which is everyone who is not Māori, or tangata whenua. And they come together and they make our house. Without that pou, our house can't function, because we don't have a left side in our house, so with our amo (house posts) tying them together, we still got the house right there. Everybody belongs somewhere.
(CA, Intervention Planning Meeting, September 2013)

Therefore, people from different cultural backgrounds all belonged to a pou within the whareniui. Second, depending on where a player played on the field, they 'metaphorically' belonged to a

³² Whareniui: Ancestral Meeting House (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³³ Pou: Post, upright, support, pole, pillar in a traditional Māori house (whare) (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³⁴ Koruru: Carved face on the gable of a meeting house, often representing the ancestor after which the house is named (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³⁵ Maihi: Bargeboards – The facing boards on the gable of a house, the lower end of which are often ornamented with carving (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³⁶ Amo: Upright supports of the lower ends of the maihi of the front of a meeting house (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³⁷ Poupou: Post, pole, upright slabs forming the framework of the walls of a house, including carved wall figures (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³⁸ Pou Tokomanawa: Centre pole supporting the ridge pole of a meeting house (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

³⁹ Hononga/Tuhono: The joining, union, connection or relationship (Māori Dictionary, n.d.); in the context of the team, meaning those who are non-Māori (Samoan, Tonga, Laotian, Cook Islands, English, White New Zealander [Pākehā, Australian born]).

⁴⁰ Tangata Whenua: The people of the land, the first people to settle New Zealand – used to make reference to Māori.

⁴¹ Tuturu: Be fixed, permanent, real, true, actual, authentic (Māori Dictionary, n.d.); in our context meaning those with Māori heritage, tangata whenua

part of the house that supported the roof. The right field belonged to the right roof support, *Amo Rua*; the left field belong to the left roof support, *Amo Tahī*; the middle field, *Pou Tu*, supports the entire roof, and *Tikitiki* the carved figure at the apex of the roof were the 'playmakers', the 'halves' positions. Using these groupings, the intention was that they would act as mini-teams for all activities on and off the field. The intended outcome was to generate a sense of performance-related belonging, and to reinforce the collective importance of the various pou doing their jobs on the field to support the entire whareniui. Third, replacing the terms defence and attack in the team's playbook formed the metaphorical foundations of the house,

[Poua] that's a Māori name for attacking, that derives from Mau Rakau fighting as well, Kou's are blocks and Poua's are strikes, so that's what we use for attack. Tainui's used for defence, only because Tainui, what it means is the great tide, Tainui doesn't come back it only goes forward, so the great tide that never retreats, like what your defence should be.
(CA, Planning Meeting, September 2013)

Other prominent concepts included Tawhito (former players or 'warriors'), whanau (family and extended family), tupuna (ancestors), and the opetaua (war party), ihi⁴² and wana⁴³ as inner and group strength, and the concept of Kaupapa or collective purpose. One activity suggested by CA, as part of 'fashioning our house', was to physically carve a story into the whareniui using pens to write up individual and group goals on the traditional figures that adorn the pou's of the house, as is protocol in a traditional whareniui,

Because my actual initial thought was that for these [the Pous on the poster]...these are the actual players' posts too, that's the left side and the right side, when we talked about the flanks – so the amo tahi and amo rua, so if we got those made up, the size of the door, and that's there, and then the players can actually go in and can use vivid [marker pen] over the top of those sheets, to write in the things [goals/targets] of what they set in that game – so when they walk in, they can actually see their post in the house, and their goals that they've got...and then the guys will start to design and actually carve the post themselves. So the first game will be working on the korowai (cloak)⁴⁴ which is the bottom, then they'll be working on the taniko (boarder of a cloak) game 2, game 3, working on poho (stomach), game 4, starting to do the kauwae (jaw/chin), or the bottom moko, and filling up, and then grand final time, lets finish our house. The same as what you would see if you looked at a whare⁴⁵. (CA, Planning Meeting, September 2013)

Using actual Māori, Polynesian or Celtic designs with defined meanings, for example, missed tackle, try, line break, or unselfish act to 'carve the house' were discussed along with a written text of players goals, targets and reviews on their pou's. CA argued that the process would become a metaphor for this group adding their stories to the house, carving their house and shaping the way it looks as they share the journey together as whanau. He anticipated that the tapestry of the whareniui would serve as a constant reminder of the players' place in the house and their contribution to 'fashioning it'.

Shortly before the team assembled for the world cup, an image of the whareniui was printed onto an eight-foot tapestry and three large separate wood coloured blank pous were printed onto ones for hanging in hotels and changing rooms, and for 'carving' by players. The final whareniui consisted of the individual images of the players in the world cup squad 'carved' (printed) on the beams of the house. On the Maihi (bargeboards, see Footnote 33) were the surnames of all 778 Kiwi players since the first test match in 1907. Around and through the

⁴² Ihi: Essential force, excitement, power, charm, personal magnetism – psychic force as opposed to spiritual power (mana) (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

⁴³ Wana: Be exciting, thrilling, inspiring awe (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

⁴⁴ Korowai, Taniko, poho, Kauwae, Moko: Body parts of a traditional carved figure (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

⁴⁵ Whare: House, building, residence, dwelling, shed, hut, habitation (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

wharenuī were the important terms discussed above and the labels for the different posts and parts of the house. The intervention was named, *Te Iwi Kiwi*.

The final part of planning the intervention was the new haka for the NZRL. CA indicated the intention was,

I don't see it as a Kiwi's or a Junior Kiwi's haka, I see it as being Te Iwi Kiwi haka, so it belongs to New Zealand Rugby League...I think that's what I want to create is, not so much a Kiwi's haka for the Kiwi team, but to create our own haka for New Zealand Rugby League...so the haka belongs to all who pull on the black and white of New Zealand, not just the top side. Then they all bring those same qualities and those same whakapapa that we're trying to intertwine. (CA, Planning Meeting, September 2013)

While initial elements of the haka were pre-planned by CA who integrated prominent concepts from *Te Iwi Kiwi* 'wharenuī' (for example, Pou Tuturu, the Māori players, and Pou Tuhono, non-Māori), CA desired considerable input and collaboration from some players in the HPU. HP recommended three players based upon differing cultural heritages and their roles in the team. Collaboration between CA and these three players in constructing the haka marks the departure point for the next cycle of intervention and action (Chapter Six), in which the intervention, *Te Iwi Kiwi*, was introduced, with CA's involvement, to the HPU at the world cup training camp.

Monitoring and Evaluating the PD Visit Intervention and Action

To understand the managed change process, it is first necessary to explore the key agent of change's sensemaking that led to a change initiative (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). While monitoring the progress of intervention and subsequent action, the PD visit served as a strong catalyst for change,

Well he [HPD] clearly now wants to do something different because he's approached this cultural advisor off the back of that day, which arguably we probably wouldn't have if we hadn't have gone...I just got the general impression of that day really having got the ball the rolling for those guys [HC and HPD] in terms of what to do next.

(S4, Interview, July 2013)

As people negotiate their organisational lives, sensemaking occurs when people endeavour to interpret and explain salient cues from a salient experience (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Weick, 1995). The PD visit intervention served as a salient experience that challenged existing notions, and triggered sensemaking amongst HPU leaders as they sought to make meaning of their current internal and external environment (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Thomas & McDaniel, 1990). To understand the actions of HPU leaders and their intention to undertake a change intervention, it is necessary to explore the prevailing conditions that led to sensemaking and catalysed action, where new meanings were made (or not made) amongst HPU leaders.

Conditions for Leader Sensemaking and Change

A series of internal and external conditions prior to and during the PD visit framed the organisational experience for CEO, HPD and HC, and subsequently triggered sensemaking and action amongst these HPU leaders.

Internal conditions. It was clear that HPU leaders were searching for a 'Kiwi' (New Zealand) identity or a medium to facilitate one. A perceived desire for a deeper sense of meaning and identity amongst the playing group emerged when discussing the behavioural and cultural misdemeanours that impacted previous performances,

As Kiwis, the boys actually do have a real pride in where they come from, but I don't think a lot of them know how to really express it, especially in their behaviour...and, well the thing is, we've got to find that [our unique selling point]...I'm excited about it...I want to give our values, or our culture a bit more of a Kiwi identity...To me, our players, they

need some symbolism, and I think, we're always looking for something that works, or every player will have a connection to, and maybe that's our naivety about how we did it, coz we've had the Koru's, but to me it hasn't really had a deeper personal meaning.

(HPD, Interview, July 2013)

The motivated search for an identity foregrounds sensemaking as a process that derives from “the need within individuals to have a sense of identity” (Ring & Van de Ven, 1989, p. 180). The emphasis on a ‘Kiwi’ identity further highlights that who people think they are in their context shapes what is enacted and how events are interpreted (Kovoor-Misra, 2009; Thurlow & Mills, 2009; Weick et al., 2005). The desire for meaning evident reflected the human need to “realise meaningful lives by choosing from the pluralistic multiplicity of options” (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, p. 5) and that organisational identity interpretations and motivations affect patterns of organisational action over time (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). As part of the search for a Kiwi identity, leaders cited dissatisfaction with some existing aspects of the HPU’s culture,

*To me, our leadership group...it's leadership in name, really...we get together, we basically feed them stuff when we get into camp and they deliver it, but it's not really coming from them...we go, P7, what about this, we're thinking about this, 'The Kiwi Way', blah blah blah, so can you do that page, and they get together and go, "I'll talk about that, you talk about that", but it's already there, it's not like something from them...I'm not convinced with the leadership group a lot, and probably being, to be honest, we didn't give them to the tools anyway...To me we've just got to draw a line in the sand, and I go, nah...mate, [player], even though he's playing good footy⁴⁶ and I like him, and he could be [selected], but mate, I don't think he should be in our leadership group, he couldn't be ars*d turning up for the...test.* *(HPD, Interview, July 2013)*

Perceived deterioration of image is reported in the literature as an important trigger for sensemaking and action (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Furthermore, the contextual nature of international campaign style sport competition created not only urgency but also opportunity to act,

I just think it's a really good opportunity, because we've got seven weeks with the players, in terms of really developing a, it's not a culture, because we've already got a culture, in developing a system, a really strong system for the Kiwis, that will permeate beyond the world cup. Coz the good thing is we've got a young squad, so a lot of those guys will be around for another half a dozen years at least, so it's just a really good opportunity to develop strong systems. I know it's before a world cup, but I think if we don't do it, we won't win it...Mate, we've got to do something...If we don't do something, we'll just keep carrying on as we always have done (underperforming)...I also thought as a Kiwi team, we needed something, and mate, maybe that was just a personal observation, but for me, if we were going to have something on the wall, I wanted it to represent who we were, you know, not something that looked like a lot of other people.

(HPD, Interview, August 2013)

An awareness of environmental stimuli such as the perceived impact of not acting has been reported to significantly influence leader sensemaking in organisational change contexts (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). An awareness of consistent underperformance against rivals Australia and in tournaments in the UK served to further heighten leader sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Leader sensemaking was directed towards a particular dissatisfaction with elements of the psychology consultant’s intervention, ‘The Kiwi Way’,

For me the worry was that the boys, "...[The Kiwi Way] looks good, there's some good words on it" but do they buy into it? But it isn't the time to go, "right o, get that out the way, start with something new"...there is a professional sort of pride there, in terms of, well, [Psychology Consultant] built this, her thing will be are you sure you want to add something else four months out from the world cup, but I actually think we need to, we have to mate, we've just got to! *(HPD, Interview, July 2013)*

⁴⁶ Footy: Colloquial term for the game of rugby league or the ball the game is played with.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the sport and leadership psychologist was appointed to undertake cultural work with the team prior to research beginning, therefore, the challenge was that this change was already in motion. However, a conversation between HPD and one of the selectors highlighted some concerns about *'The Kiwi Way'*, describing it as *"generic"* and *"sounds plastic to me, to be honest, I'd say what's...that...the players are probably being polite though ey"* (Selector, Meeting, August 2013) and *"we need to have something that, that means something"* (HPD, Meeting, August 2013). If sensemaking focuses upon equivocality, actors search for meaning to deal with uncertainty (Weick, 1995; 2009). In challenging the internal environment, HPD's dissatisfaction was representative of explicit efforts to make meaning, termed active sensemaking, where "the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected...sensemaking is activated by the question, 'same or different?'" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414). The data also illustrates that leader sensemaking occurs in a political context and shaped by political issues (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). However, given the constructivist underpinning of sensemaking, the political landscape and issues both shape and are in turn shaped by leader sensemaking (Weick, 1995). It was evident that while the psychology consultant was brought in to influence cultural change, leadership decisions were later made in spite of her work. Yet her use and presence, and her resultant questions and actions triggered leader sensemaking towards issues that were not previously 'sensible' or conscious and subsequently motivated action (albeit, not necessarily action in the consultant's intended direction).

Given the transition in leadership earlier that year, with both a new CEO and HPD, there was evidence of new aspirations for the HPU, *"we've got a strong culture, but I think there's some aspects of it where we can obviously get better"* (HPD, Interview, June 2013). Demonstrated by the energetic language and discourse of the above quote, using the space between current and aspirational reality generates considerable creativity and optimism, and acts as significant source of energy for change in constructing an organisational future (Mascarenhas, 2011). Creativity, optimism and desire for change is fundamental in promoting openness to change and reducing change inhibiting learning anxiety (Schein, 2004). Reflecting on his previous experience in business, CEO also spoke with great enthusiasm and optimism about the need to connect desired meanings in the HPU with tangible behaviour,

We never had the values written anywhere, on a wall, nowhere, but every bastard knew what they were, because through team brief process, through rewards and recognition, you know, we would celebrate people who had delivered on those values, and I think that's an easy way to translate that straight into that team, where you go, P2 come up here mate, you delivered on leadership today, because you did, this, this, and that, and that's what being a Kiwi is all about...Well Done. Bang. It's like, wow, so that's what that means. (CEO, Interview, June 2013)

The quotes not only illustrate the influence of perceived threats, opportunities, strategy and politics on leader sensemaking but also that of pre-existing knowledge and context (Bartunek et al., 1999), accumulated through both internal (within the team) and external (intra-organisational and other organisations) experiences.

External conditions. Sensemaking is triggered by cues, for example, events, issues or situations where the meaning is ambiguous or outcomes uncertain (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). Weick (1995) explained that sensemaking is also likely to be evoked in ambitious and novel, non-routine times. If the internal conditions increased ambiguity and equivocality, the PD visit intervention served as a non-routine and novel experience that presented salient external cues and triggered significant leader sensemaking. First, the experience offered a compelling image of a better world,

Seeing them, it makes me realise, we don't have like things that actually tie players back into why we're there, really...what it means to play for this team, for New Zealand. Who we are, those sorts of things. I think we assume it's in there and we sort of talk about it here and there, but it is sort of assumed...looking back at the [PD visit], they [players and management] had a really good articulation of what it is to be a [club player], and it wasn't necessarily, and [team mascot/poster] just illustrated it, but it was almost like they didn't need that, they could just articulate this is what it means to be a [club player] and it's an earned right, and with that comes a responsibility, and I got the sense you could ask any player and they'd be able to articulate the same thing which suggests they're all on the same pages as to why they're there. The whole meaning thing interests me, and how smart they'd been on creating something that the guys truly felt part of and the consequence of the increase in responsibility that they felt in representing something bigger than themselves... I was really impressed with how they'd managed to align everyone in such a short space of time, which makes me really interested in just listening to what CA's got to say. (HPD, Interview, July 2013)

The presentation of this different or alternative worldview at the PD visit acted to destabilise HPU leaders' meanings of the organisation and required that they make some new sense of it (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). The role of disconfirming information is found as an important trigger for change across organisational literature, including Schein's (2004) managed cultural change model, Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2006) and sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In the leader-centric change literature, it is traditionally the job of the leader to cleverly present forms of "disconfirming data" (Schein, 2004, p. 320) to 'unfreeze' existing group beliefs and generate the collective awareness that change is not only unavoidable but needed. In this case, the disconfirming data and subsequent survival anxiety held by HPD and HC emerged organically from the aspirational image presented at the PD visit. This disconfirmation, however required a revised scheme to take its place (Weick, 1995). The PD visit acted as a form of sensebreaking (Mantere et al., 2012), where the experience challenged taken for granted roles, routines and beliefs (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013) and drew leaders attention to a prevailing industry discourse (how to run a high performance sport team). The experience challenged fundamental assumptions held by HPU leaders about how they should manage the HPU.

The experience challenged HPD and HC to reconsider their existing and stable sense of the HPU, question underlying assumptions and re-examine their course of action (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). The PD visit provided considerable creative energy and optimism for change amongst HPU leaders by offering a vision for what could be against the backdrop of what was (Mascarenhas, 2011). Gray et al. (1985) stated that change is most likely when new experiences challenge the valued assumptions, and "destruction of meaning has its origin in fundamental contradictions, which when raised, create the potential for individual and organisational transformation" (p. 83). When experiencing opportunity situations, like the PD visit, participant focus was positively directed to "who we could be" influencing organisational identification, learning and openness to change (Kovoor-Misra, 2009, p. 507). In comparison to the construction of 'The Kiwi Way', where focus was on 'who we want to be', the image presented at the PD visit was of 'who we could be'. It is thought that framing change in this fashion heightens change motivation and increases the likeliness of transformational changes in perceived organisational identity (Kovoor-Misra, 2009).

The potency of this alternative world image and subsequent sensemaking was also directly influenced by the nature of the messengers who 'told their tale'. The messengers were revered from pre-existing knowledge of the organisation as being successful, "If you don't know, they're a side that for 16 years basically did nothing and then first year with [coach] and [coach], with CA help turned that into a championship, and now they've won two" (HPD, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013), and their management as experienced and knowledgeable, "Look at what [coach's] achieved, with clubs and [national team]. He knows what he's doing.

Well as you know, [old boss, championship winning head coach] looks up to him and had used him for advice.” (HC, Interview, July 2013). The perceived legitimacy heightened HPU leader sensemaking during the experience, and contributed to subsequent action and learning from the work with CA.

The power of influence connected to perceived expertise is well documented in social psychology (French & Raven, 1959). Bartunek et al. (1999) found that change in response to opportunity increases dependent upon the congruence between sensemaking and sensegiving. For effective sensemaking (and resultant change), the perceived credibility or expertise of the message sender (sensegiver) held by the receiver (sensemaker) facilitates such congruency, triggering sensemaking amongst participants (Bartunek et al., 1999). Contributing to a landscape of further legitimacy, was the perceived cultural similarities between the Kiwis and the PD visit team,

We found it very similar to what we experience in a Kiwi camp, boys from all walks coming together and basically fighting for each other...That day we met them, it was highlighted how similar we were really, same sort people, same sort of culture, team culture I mean... which makes me really interested in just listening to what CAs got to say. For me, our culture is strong but CA is actually what I think the players need.

(HPD, Interview, July 2013)

Bate (1994) identified in effective culture change efforts, it is necessary to understand the contextual dimension of an organisation and assess the alignment between a culture and the wider environment, and the gap between the current culture and the ‘required’ culture. The perceived ‘cultural closeness’ by HPU leaders identified a narrow gap in the contextual dimension for change. In effective sensemaking, individuals extract cues from the environment to act as frames of reference to link ideas to “simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (Weick, 1995, p. 50). This was evident when HPU leaders made sense of their experience through their sense of identity. Such identification acted as a meaning anchor from which HPU leaders were able to review and discover what was occurring, construct credible explanations of their experience, while further constructing and re-constructing their own identity through the process (Weick, 1995; 2009). The perceived similarities engaged HPU leaders on a personally meaningful level, allowing the construction of a plausible change narrative (Weick, 1995), that confirmed this type of change was not only appropriate to the HPU, but that HPU leaders were capable of implementing it. Conditions of perceived beneficial impact, leadership capability and change intervention appropriateness are shown to be key in enabling the organisational change readiness that triggers change efforts (Armenakis, Harris, Cole, Fillmer, & Self, 2007). At the synthesis of these external and internal conditions was a noticeable affective response from HPU leaders that triggered action.

The ‘felt’ experience. When participants reflected upon their experience, they regularly made reference to the way the PD visit and resultant interaction with CA made them feel. HPU leaders demonstrated a heightened affective state as they made sense of their experience, *“that was very, very powerful, particularly for a skinny white boy from the South Island, who always looked at Māori and said I wish I had some of that, I felt now, that I could!”* (CEO Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013). HPD made reference to the ‘felt experience’ on a number of occasions when making sense of his emergent action in pursuing planning meetings with CA,

[PD Visit club] is probably the best [culture] I’ve seen so far, but to me, it resonates with me because...I feel really strongly about this...I’ve just got this feeling that it’s right for us. I asked S9, after all he’ll be driving a lot of this, he knows the boys better, he’s their confidant and he asked me “if I believed in it”, I said yeah, and then he said, “if you

*believe in something, and your gut tells you it's right, you have to go with it, we have to do it'...Are we prepared to make changes? F***ing oath, I am so...my gut feeling is we need to do it.*
(HPD, Interview, July 2013)

The presence of emotive language and affective experience supports the idea that a degree of emotional arousal is necessary for sensemaking to commence. Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) emphasised the central role of embodied emotion, “we make sense of our surroundings and experiences in sensory as well as intellectual ways...embodied and felt experiences are integral to creating plausible accounts of our experience and ourselves” (p. 83). When a situation feels different, as it did for the participants, it can be experienced as discrepancy (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), interruption (Vaara & Tienari, 2011), disconfirmation (Weick, 2009), surprise (Louis, 1980) and opportunity (Dutton, 1993). Indeed, Bartunek et al. (2006) found that participants’ felt emotions have a significant effect on whether and how they engage in sensemaking. Furthermore, Howard (2006) concluded “emotions play a central role in intentional change. They excite our interest, focus our attention, alert us to the need for change and move us to act” (p. 657).

The upbeat nature of the reflective accounts supports the idea that positive ‘felt’ emotions lead to more generative sensemaking, where sensemakers hold a broad zone of attention, and emergent cues are perceived and integrated into the constructed narrative in an open, inclusive and flexible manner (Howard, 2006). Positive emotion has been found to trigger cognitive and physiological responses that enhance an individual’s effort, motivation, flexibility, creative thinking, resilience, adaptive behaviours and optimism (Howard, 2006).

The internal conditions (a perceived need to act, dissatisfaction with the current situation and aspirations for a better future) coupled with the external circumstances (the presentation of a compelling alternative world from a perceived legitimate source) stimulated a ‘felt experience’, which as a consequence enabled new learning and energised the pursuit of a philosophical intervention for the team’s culture. A sensemaking understanding of high performance sport management celebrates the agency of performance managers (and players) in constructing the meaning of their experience (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Human agency is the capacity for people to make choices, and in particular refers to both the creativity and the motivation that drives individuals to break away from scripted patterns of behaviour (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The learning and change that resulted from the PD visit is an example of top managers beginning to author new images of how they would like the organisation to be perceived by internal (and external) stakeholders (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Through the sensemaking that resulted from these conditions, the leaders constructed plausible narratives (Weick, 2009) that satisfied change readiness conditions and stimulated action.

It is important to acknowledge the imposition of HPU leaders’ existing beliefs and ideas upon the sensemaking landscape in the construction of the change narrative. This is the fundamental underpinning of Weick’s (1995) self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby for high performance sport managers, “believing is seeing” (p. 133). As Frost and Morgan (1983) articulated, when making sense of experience, people “read into things the meanings they wish to see; they vest objects, utterances, actions and so forth with the subjective meaning which helps make their world intelligible to themselves” (p. 207). Thus, it could be argued that the HPU leaders saw what they subconsciously let themselves see, and what they let themselves see constructed the plausibility needed to rationalise a previously existing course of action (Weick et al., 2005).

Te Iwi Kiwi: Leader Sense and Making Meaning

As HPU leaders made sense of their new learning, supported by CA, they began to construct the new intervention, *Te Iwi Kiwi*. The intervention was designed to align philosophies by reframing shared meanings and guide the HPU towards a high performing culture. The process was the product of Weick's (1995) notion of enacted sensemaking, framed by the maxim "how do I know what I think until I see what I say" (p. 18). For HPD, through what began as an energised interest and curiosity, he acted, triggering sensemaking and discovering meaning, which prompted further action, sensemaking and meaning construction (Smerek, 2010). Holding the assumption that meaning is already present and found within the collective (Bennis, 2009), many of the findings from phase one and two featured in the intervention construction process. From subtly collaborating with HPU leaders, prevalent meanings, such as family, culture and the 'brotherhood', and psycho-cultural meaning and sensemaking mechanisms, such as, belonging, transcendence and identification were integrated to acknowledge the existing, deeply embedded meanings and locate the intervention within the existing meaning frameworks (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Lawson & Ventris, 1992). First, cultural narratives, storytelling and metaphors occupied a central feature in the actions steps and collaboration.

Cultural narratives, stories, allegories and metaphors. Cultural narratives, drawn from Māori language and beliefs, emerged from intervention planning as a central context for engaging participants, directing their attention and triggering meaning construction. HPD reflected on the potential for storytelling in high performance sport management,

Whether its mental skills, sport psychology, motivation or whatever, basically it's telling a story...I think it [Te Iwi Kiwi] does tell a good story about who we are...Hopefully this is gonna help blokes understand who they are and what it means to be a New Zealander and a Kiwi, and the responsibility that comes with that when they play for the Kiwis. (HPD, Interview, August 2013)

Narratives and language are essential sensemaking resources (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013) and are "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). The sense people make of reality is dependent upon vocabulary specific frameworks within which words procure meaning (Long & Mills, 2010). Rather than explicit dictation by leaders (as is normally the case), an authentic organisational identity and its meanings are revealed through the allegories, metaphors, slogans, legends and myths that constituted organisational narratives and discourse (Limerick, 1990). Through collaboration during the action steps, it was these subtle, intangible features of organisational life that formed the foundation for the everyday, tangible and prosaic realities of the HPU (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985).

The use of subtle narratives and discourse within the planned intervention reflected Smircich and Stubbart's (1985) argument that strategists invest considerable time and effort in facilitating the construction of "imaginary lines between events, objects and situations so that events, objects and situations can become meaningful for the members of an organisational world" (p. 726). In his analysis early in the planning process, CA commented,

Does this type of material win championships; does this type of material win world cups? The answer is no, people win it, but what this bit does, this bit develops people, and it's the people – so you could have the best game plan, with the best coach but not necessarily win, because it's the people that will play the game plan and they will lead, but it's the people that will be also led by the coach. (CA, Interview, August 2013)

The role of narrative in constructing the intervention reflected Limerick (1990) who argued that within discourse a "meta-strategy" (p. 28) for leadership exists that links organisational identity with purpose, strategy, structure, culture and practice. Such sensitivity to language and

narrative is viewed as a principle task of management (Carey, 2013) where particularly in times of change, the aim is “to construct a discourse of corporate coherence” (Araujo & Easton, 1996, p. 371). The prevalent features of narratives in this phase of the research included language, slogans or “catch cry” (HPD, *Meeting, August 2013*), historical legends (internal and external to the organisation), rituals, myths, stories, and metaphors and allegories (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). Metaphors and allegories (as extended metaphors) acted as important rhetorical devices that connected cues and framed experience (Gioia et al., 1994; Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick, 1995). For the HPU, the intended use of these rhetorical devices were to create order in the novel and unfamiliar situations the fragmented and sporadic team find themselves in (Cornelissen, 2012) and subsequently anchor evaluation and justification of actions (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). In Gioia et al.’s (1994) study of sensemaking and strategic change, metaphors were found to be instrumental in team members’ sensemaking and understanding of their group and the change initiative itself. Acknowledging the hegemony of Polynesian and Māori peoples in rugby league in New Zealand, the use of allegory and metaphor through ‘cultural’ (Māori) storytelling offered a meaningful way of discussing and understanding experience.

Utilising existing cultural features such as haka and tauparapara, the central narrative of ‘fashioning our own house’ and the traditional Māori ancestral meeting house, the whareniui, and the traditional home, the whare, were perceived as culturally relevant and meaningful metaphors for the HPU. The whareniui is relevant for Māori and to some extent contemporary New Zealand imagery, containing significant cultural meanings and specific cultural protocols or tikanga⁴⁷ as both a meeting place for Iwi (tribe) to discuss affairs and a sacred place of spirituality and history (Brown, 2009). Both the whareniui and the fale⁴⁸, the traditional Polynesian house, are commonly used metaphors in contemporary cultures of the Pacific. The cultural meanings associated with the traditional house (whare/fale) was used as medium through which to explain, understand, educate and communicate Māori (Durie, 1994) and Pasifika (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001) philosophies of health and wellbeing, and more recently, strategic approaches to conducting legal proceedings in land settlement claims (Nga Tuhoe, n.d.). Stories rooted in Māori history or ‘mythology’ (in the Western sense) underpinned the broad narrative to act as metaphors to construct new and relevant meanings for the culture of the HPU,

All these things pretty much come into and from the house, so I pretty much just have these [past players, playing mini-teams and positions, cultural identity, ancestors, family] into parts of the house...then also through the haka, so you hear these come through the haka as well, coz it only makes sense to have them here, and the stories come out of the house and explain things so it all makes sense to the players.

(CA, Planning Meeting, September 2013)

The alignment of metaphors and language into a coherent discourse symbolised in the whareniui, reinforced Nag, Corley, and Gioia (2007) who recommended that for effective organisational change, useable knowledge be embedded in everyday practice. The power of narratives to trigger sensemaking and guide behaviour was reported by Humphreys et al. (2012) who found antenarratives (a retrospective narrative linked to a living story) were used by leaders as templates to guide sensemaking about what it meant to be a jazz musician, what jazz was (or was not) and the meaning of team leadership. While they found informal

⁴⁷ Tikanga Māori: Correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention for Māori culture (Māori Dictionary, n.d.). In the context of this research, while drawing from some Tikanga Māori, Tikanga Kiwi was an intended outcome.

⁴⁸ Fale: A Samoan house with open sides and a thatched roof (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001).

storytelling acted as a powerful sensegiving and sensemaking mechanism, relevant to the development of *Te Iwi Kīwi* intervention, the power of the stories were reportedly dependent upon wider cultural discourse (Humphreys et al., 2012). Rouleau (2005) contended, “sensemaking and sensegiving cannot be dissociated from socio-cultural forms of tacit knowledge as much as from its semantic form” (p. 1416). Negotiating meaning is facilitated by a community’s stored narrative resources (Bruner, 1990). Indeed, Humphreys et al. (2012) concluded storytelling was only perceived meaningful because of the cultural oral traditional storytelling to jazz musicians to organise performance.

Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) found that different patterns of expectations arose in different cultural contexts in response to the same metaphors and narratives, and consequently conflict arises if leaders choose inappropriate or culturally ignorant metaphors and language. It was planned that the adoption of the Māori narratives and oral stories as an underlying theme for the intervention would offer the required cultural appropriateness and appeal to the Māori-Pasifika hegemony in New Zealand rugby league. However, the literature does suggest that managers working in multi and cross-cultural settings, like the HPU, cannot assume that their own meanings will be shared through the same narratives (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001; 2002). However, it is reported that the sensegiving power of a narrative and its associated stories and metaphors depend on whether or not they attempt to counter or compete with a dominant discourse (Humphreys et al., 2012). Indeed, the emergence of the Māori narrative, metaphor and language in the intervention drew upon a body of common knowledge, communicated beliefs and meanings rooted in the existing HPU culture. Mirroring the legitimacy HPD gave to sensegivers on the PD visit, he drew on CA’s authenticity as a source of his legitimacy when making sense of his influence upon action,

I do think he does bring an authenticity to what he talks about, that’s what I got, there’s no, “um.... maybe this will work”, there’s nothing like, he was basically pulling things out of the air as we went through the conversation...and obviously he’s done a lot of study and he knows his stuff, but to me he was just authentic, and I think the boys will get that...and [former player] we’ve used him for culture speeches before and it’s been really effective, but I just see something special in what CA is saying.

(HPD, Interview, August 2013)

When addressing issues of meaning, Driver (2007b) explained, “organisational spaces have to be created in which meaning making can take place” where “a space has to be created in which meaning is neither managed nor appropriated by others, be it for instrumental gain or simply control” (p. 260). The metaphors and narratives served to create that space. Language should not be viewed as a tool for change, but as “the context within which change happens from the perspective of identity construction, the enactment of discourse (values, beliefs and experiences) and the privileging of extracted cues” (Thurlow & Mills, 2009, p. 476). It is regarded that too often leaders incorrectly impose a top-down vision on their organisations and their members (Bennis, 2009; Raelin, 2006). While organisational narratives must start somewhere, they become negotiated and co-constructed between change agents and recipients to reach a shared narrative (Abolafia, 2010). From a leadership perspective, effective meaning making is often credited to leaders for having uncovered a unique vision, however meaning is often already present (Bennis, 2009). As Raelin (2006) summarised, the “best leaders identify and express the meaning that is inherent in the organisations work” (p. 64) and this can be facilitated through the context of language and metaphor and the emergent discourse (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). The narratives and metaphors that emerged during this action phase and formed the basis for the forthcoming intervention sought to create the context for change and express the meanings implicit and inherent in HPU membership. The narratives and metaphors framed change and meaning in aspirational terms

(Gioia & Thomas, 1996), embedding narrative into a multitude of everyday practices (Nag et al., 2007) whilst being sensitive to the existing cultural context (Humphreys et al., 2012).

Identity and identification. Underpinning the content and discourse of the Māori narratives and metaphors was the construct of identity and identification. While emphasising the team's 'Kiwi' identity, the intervention leveraged perceived point of difference, diversity and uniqueness as a significant contributor to meaning and attachment to the HPU (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), as a management member identified with *Te Iwi Kiwi*,

I love all that stuff. A lot of Māori concepts are quintessentially associated with New Zealand. Kia Ora, haka, hongi, you know. They have deep connection and resonance with New Zealand whether you like it or not, it's part of who we are and what we grew up with.
(S10, Interview, July 2013)

As HPD made sense of the planning meetings, he identified with the stories and concepts CA brought up,

It's new, which appeals, but more importantly, it represents who we are...so it's a little bit different to what they're doing in the NRL every week, but ever better, that something that is actually Kiwi...What our uniqueness is, is our Polynesian culture I suppose, whether that's [Pacific] Island or Māori, there's a definite link and to me that's what a lot of New Zealanders especially in rugby league can grab hold of...because the Kiwi is us, the Kiwi is rugby league, and when you talk about Iwi, family or tribe, we are just a small family...
(HPD, Interview, October 2013)

The intervention built on the existing meanings identified as prevalent within the culture in phase one and two. Identity and the role of identity construction through sensemaking is seen to be a major factor that distinguishes sensemaking from basic cognitive psychology (Gilliland & Day, 2000). The Māori narratives and metaphors served not only as a site for identification, but also identity reconstruction. In particular, a team haka was perceived a significance vehicle for players to not only just identify with the team but also reconstruct identity,

CA spoke about putting one together that...meant something to the Kiwis, which told a story about the New Zealand team and where we come from, rather than Ka Mate, actually making something personalised so that it actually...means more...[we had a new haka before] but it wasn't our story, we just got given a haka and it looked fancy, it looked flash, but I don't think the boys, they didn't buy into the meaning of it, they bought into the actions of it, "oh it's a new haka, this will look different"...and when I think back now, that was the big thing about it, we didn't tell a story about us in the haka, so the boys, when they were doing it, it didn't have any meaning.

(HPD, Meeting, August 2013)

In a study of multiple culture change efforts, Helms-Mills (2003) made the argument that identity construction is "at the root of sensemaking and influences how other aspects or properties of the sensemaking process are understood" (p. 55). Who we think we are as organisational actors shape what we enact and how we interpret (Weick, 2009), and the importance of players identifying with the intervention was perceived as central to its efficacy.

Co-construction. The action steps in constructing the intervention and its inherent meanings were highly collaborative between HPD, CA, and albeit to a lesser extent, HC and the developing the intervention was very much a negotiated and shared practice,

HPD: I wanted to talk to CA about some sort of progression through the weeks with some sort of key words that we might think about using over the 6/7 weeks, and actually getting them all printed up before we go and hopefully using them in the order they were supposed to but being able to be a little bit flexible in it.

HC: Yeah, yeah with what the week might throw at us, or the previous week might throw at us...might be another word...that might be more appropriate for that week.

HPD: ...I'll talk to CA about it, I'm going to catch up with him, I'm going to ring him tomorrow...we might go with 10 – 12 sort of themes that we may use while we're up there, but like you say, there's plenty we can use, but it's how we make it relevant to the week, or what we think would be relevant to what we think we need to be focusing on.

(Planning Meeting, August 2013)

As part of the collaboration process, HPD and HC demonstrated the influence of existing power bases by requesting that the new initiative integrate some of the meanings from the earlier 'The Kiwi Way' initiative. In unison with practices to facilitate understanding, the shared experience that results from collaborative social exchanges was also perceived as an important condition for constructing meaning, "I think they will have a real understanding of where they come from, but they've never really been told the story or they haven't collectively shared it together." (HPD, Planning Meeting, August 2013). This was planned into the intervention in activities such as authoring and practicing the haka, and interpersonal exchanges with CA,

The biggest thing mate, is the interpersonal, the personal interaction with the players because they are...very inquisitive, you'll get a lot of guys coming to you, asking about why and that to me is the biggest thing is just spending time with them.

(HPD, Planning Meeting, September 2013)

And enacting behavioural standards through cultural practices,

I'm just looking at, because usually in Māori protocol, when somebody stands up to speak the waiata [song] comes in to follow, the waiata kinaki⁴⁹. So for me, for us would be a good way, when CEO finishes [his presentation to the players], we get the Junior Kiwis up and maybe a couple of the senior players and we do the haka there and then, to support our Kaumatua, which is CEO...so for me that follows Māori protocol. It may be the first time that it gets done [in public] on the field, but the most important time is when it's going to be first done at the dinner, in support of our Kaumatua or our kaikorero⁵⁰...that's the first time, and that's the right time for me to do, because it's not on a field, and it's not done for that purpose, it's done to be a haka for Te Iwi Kiwi, and we're doing it in support of, and it's better for me that its CEO, rather than a Kaumatua or a Māori man, because then it takes it away that it's a Māori kaupapa, now it's a New Zealand Rugby League kaupapa. So it puts all the ticks in the right places for me.

(CA, Intervention Planning Meeting, September 2013)

These quotes serve to illustrate that triggering sensemaking is a social endeavour that honours the agency of the individuals with the organisation (Maitlis, 2005). As Weick (1995) explained, if shared meaning is the end goal, people need to share experience, then talk about that experience to construct a shared understanding and meaning of that experience. Collaboration is a method of collective interpretation of equivocal and ambiguous experiences that connects people's belief systems and facilitates and sustains shared meaning making (Markow & Klenke, 2005). Rentsch (1990) concluded that people who interacted with each other had similar interpretations of events, and conversely different groups attached different meanings to the same events. Organisational practice reportedly needs to be developed to facilitate collaboration between members and the opportunity to openly engage with reality, share organisational ambiguity and dilemmas together, and meaningfully reach a shared common conclusion (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009).

As part of collaborative practices, the intervention and its meanings were not viewed as fixed or static, but requiring visual and visceral enactment in a collective setting, "I reckon for this to work it will need continual reinforcement and the leadership group driving it, along with the players" (HPD, Interview, October 2013). Sensemaking theories imply that once players experienced the planned intervention, they would be faced with a consequential moment, that

⁴⁹ Waiata Kinaki: Supporting song (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

⁵⁰ Kaikorero: Speaker, narrator (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

is, what do we do now with what we now (Weick, 1995). Any shared interpretation that arises from collaborative endeavours form the basis for the stability that generates and sustains collective action while also providing flexibility of meaning for future interpretation and reconstruction (Choo, 1996). Given that sensemaking is an enacted and embodied activity (Weick, 2009), leadership and management were required to facilitate opportunities for enactment of the new espoused meanings (Markow & Klenke, 2005) to facilitate a “collective consciousness” (Raelin, 2006, p. 68). It was suggested that a move to collaborative practices would alter the internal information processing environments amongst the players to maximise the potential for effective and sustained change (Thomas et al., 1993). Activities such as assigning different playing positions and players to different posts (pou) within the wharenuī, pou goal setting and reviewing, and players responding to performances by adding designs and content to the tapestry of the house were all planned to visually and viscerally construct, enact and embody the desired narrative of ‘fashioning our house’,

You know, once the players had added something, and added it together, that's then a part of our house, and in doing that, we can start to give our pou some Wairua, some spirit, you know, give it some sweat! And that's our house; their actions are part of it.

(CA, Planning Meeting, September 2013)

In collaborating with HPU leaders to construct the intervention with CA, meanings of belonging, transcendence and ownership emerged as key mechanisms triggering sensemaking, and subsequently became central meanings within *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention.

Belonging and transcendence: ‘Being part of something greater’. Using the narratives of ‘fashioning our own house’ with ‘people from the ‘four winds’, notions of belonging became a significant thread and a celebration of both the diverse individual identities within the team but also the collective, as a selector commented,

I think what he's really doing, because we're talking about the players in the Kiwis team, the hope is to have them all united in the one jersey, and just because the team is wearing the same uniform it doesn't necessarily mean they are a team. So what this is designed to do is to bring all the blood lines, who associate with the whenua, which is the land here, he's using a concept that's bringing all the bloodlines into the one kaupapa [purpose]
(Selectors, Meeting, August 2013)

Giving players a pou in the wharenuī based upon their cultural heritage was also planned to facilitate meanings of belonging by ensuring everyone had a place within the Kiwi house, “You just need to worry about belonging to your pou...you always belong to that one pou” (CA, Planning Meeting, August 2013). Recognising diversity was argued to act as a common ground for ownership of the team’s culture,

[Fashioning our house] is talking about the different places, the coming together and the merging of different tribes, because we are not all from one place, we're all not one people, and then we'd have ownership from them...because they belong to this house, they fashion this house, they own this house, and this house will be the face for all of Aotearoa, for all of New Zealand, Te Iwi Kiwi, the Kiwi face.

(CA, Management Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

The planned intervention also continued to examine and build on the existing meanings of transcendent purpose evident throughout phase one and two (family, teammates, cultures and nations). CA evocatively connected the prominent Māori cultural concepts of mana⁵¹,

⁵¹ Mana: Holds meanings of prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, and spiritual power, charisma - Mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object. It is highly culturally and spiritual powerful yet complex concept that cannot be reduced to a precise definition. For further information see (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

whakapapa and whanau to discuss transcendent purpose and the subsequent responsibility that comes with playing for the team,

CA: [The haka is about] preparation, saying out loud, this is everyone that comes with us – you don't just protect your brother, you carry the expectation of his family, his tribe, his history and he does yours. It becomes deeper than "yeah bro, I got you're back", you genuinely have his back because you carry the mana of your family behind you, and his family too – and you don't hurt the mana of the histories. This gives not only strength but responsibility...what we see, once all these people bring what they have, their own unique whakapapa, or genealogy, they belong to this big thing, this big thing called this Kiwi whanau, or otherwise what I call it, Te Iwi Kiwi. Who do you play for brother?

P4: Yeah family, all what you were talking about, obviously, past and present, I think, yeah the more you know about your own and each other's family, it makes you want to play for them also...And also, I've found with any group, when you can relate to not just them, but their partners, or kids, or parents, then you feel, more responsible for them on the field, yeah, definitely, hold you more accountable, and makes you want to play a lot more for whoever you're playing alongside on the field.

(Management Meeting/Cultural Presentation, July 2013)

Meanings and narratives of transcendent purpose formed a powerful mechanism through which players constructed the meaning of playing for the team (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Through the action steps, the intervention was designed to be inclusive of players from all backgrounds and locations, so that they could all “see themselves in the house, and contribute to its kaupapa [purpose]” (CA, Interview, September 2013). This was recognised as particularly relevant given the expatriate nature of most of the players (and some management personnel), and the distinct cultural diversity of the HPU. HPD and HC intended transcendent purposes would engender greater levels of attachment and emotional bonds to the team, and commitment from the players (Markow & Klenke, 2005) and in doing so generate meaningful organisational identity construction (Grant et al., 2008). Indeed, appealing to transcendence shifts the meaning of team membership and performance towards a higher purpose, encouraging players to see their place in the team as more than a job or personal achievement, but a means to use their talents in meaningful ways and contribute to deeply to important goals and values (Cardador & Rupp, 2010) while preventing the meaninglessness that results from reducing performance to an economic endeavour (Chalofsky, 2003). In synthesis and unison with a collective sense of belonging and transcendent purpose, and reflecting phase one and two, the concepts of ownership, buy-in and responsibility was also prevalent in the dialogue, action steps and resultant plans.

Ownership, buy-in and responsibility. When collaborating with HPD and discussing how this intervention may influence beliefs and behaviour, he cited meanings of ownership as a critical success factor, “We've just got to keep driving it, with the senior players obviously too, but that's the important part, they've, and that includes all the players have got to want to drive it” (HPD, Interview, October 2013). The narratives and metaphors were planned to cultivate a sense of ownership of the team and the team's performance through appealing to meanings of identity and uniqueness (Rosso et al., 2010), belonging (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) and transcendent purpose (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). The narratives of ‘fashioning one's house’ and ‘the people from the four winds’ also intended to engender collective and personal ownership amongst participants. The planned authoring of a unique NZRL haka for the Kiwis featured strongly as a facilitator for ownership of the team.

By players setting goals for the pou that they belonged to, the intention was to cultivate both ownership and collective responsibility on and off the field, where “the stats and how we analyse performance can come out of this. For the players, the pou becomes a reminder of

their role on the team or in the house, and also a measure of their previous performance and future ones” (HPD, Planning Meeting, September 2013).

These initiatives were designed to trigger sensemaking and meaning through not only enactment (Weick, 1995) but also the autonomy, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and self-determination that comes with having responsibility or control over a task (Ryan & Deci, 2002). These processes are at the centre of ownership, whereby meaning results from the creation of “something that has come through my own hands” (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009, p. 504) and moreover the hands of the collective. Authoring the haka and carving the pous of the wharenui were planned as ownership practices that could trigger meaning making, and have a significant impact upon commitment and performance through identifying with the collective, and (re)constructing identities where the individual and collective become no longer separable (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

The concept of ownership was used interchangeably with ‘buy-in’, and ‘selling’ the idea, *“how would you sell this to senior players? Get them to buy it? How’s [CA] going to sell it to you, how’s he going to get the captain to [buy-in]...?” (HC, Management Meeting/Cultural Presentation, July 2013).* The terms ‘buying’ and ‘selling’ highlighted the HPU management’s understanding that sensemaking is both a negotiated and enacted practice between sensegivers and sensemakers where neither are passive recipients of experience, but active actors (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1995). However, the coercive nature of the language conflicts with the idea of organic and authentic meaning construction (Weick, 1995), and instead reflected the concerns highlighted in phase one and two regarding conflicting leadership paradigms. This was further evidenced in the management meeting where HC’s language implied a fear of player resistance when HPD broached the subject of giving players genuine ownership over tactical and technical areas of team performance as part of ‘fashioning our house’,

*P4: ...you mean with players taking preparation stuff for the game away from coaches?
HC: Not so much away...we’ll [coaches and management] still do all the work, and you’ll present [to the team], ok this is what’s important for us this week”
(Management Meeting/Cultural Presentation, July 2013)*

The apparent fear of losing control or giving players responsibility held by HC risked contradicting the nature of ownership and the very meaning of ‘fashioning our house’. While the struggle to fully empower people in the work place is increasingly documented (Lips-Wiersma, 2002a), implementing a new system of meanings rooted to ‘fashioning our house’, yet not being accompanied by the appropriate feelings of autonomy or self-determination to ‘fashion your own house’ risked the perceptions of superficial practice that can undermine both intended meanings and a change initiative (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). The psychology consultant raised her concerns with the degree of leadership authoring of *Te Iwi Kiwi* and the consequent relationship with ownership (and perhaps her not owning the change either),

It’s very interesting, but I’m not convinced. I think the team have already got all that connectivity, love for each other, clear idea of what it is to be a Kiwi, we just need to be careful with it that we don’t over manufacture it or it becomes too trite. It needs to come from them...I am a little sceptical to be honest, and conscious of not over working it.

(Psychology Consultant, Interview, July 2013)

Highlighting the construction an alternative plausible narrative for the experience (cultural presentation), this quote reinforces the role of identity in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The psychology consultant was a cultural outsider and therefore did not have the similar historical experiences that other members of management had. Indeed, her personal connection with the ‘*The Kiwi Way*’ as initiator, highlighted a power discourse amongst sensemaking and the

selective reconstruction of the meaning of an experience (Long & Mills, 2010). Likewise, HPD perceived the potential for tension between the two consultants and their ideologies. He too (re)constructed his own (alternative) narrative to rationalise his decisions to pursue the use of CA and the development of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention, and in doing so enacted the environment he faced,

I would say HC is already sold on it, I'll be interested to see what [Psychology Consultants] reaction is...the biggest concern staff wise is that we'll be perceived as going away a little bit from what we've put in place over the last 12 months, to me, the benefits far outweigh the negatives, in some way they're related anyway, but they're just expressed differently, but to me they're going to be expressed in a way that our players will appreciate more, or buy into it more, so that's probably, there is a little bit of fear there in terms of how it's perceived and how it is taken, but sometimes when you think something is right, you've just got to go with it. (HPD, Interview, July 2013)

These power-ridden narratives highlight the important issue of multiple meanings. With the '*The Kiwi Way*' initiative and its associated meanings, values and beliefs only one-year old, the psychology consultant called into question a concern for the potential for too many meanings in the cultural landscape. The introduction of multiple meanings from multiple sensegivers risks too much ambiguity and equivocality (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Too many meanings presents too many possibilities and too few certainties, and inhibits sensemaking by rendering people unable or unwilling to choose, act or justify from the multiplicity of options (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, too many meanings is also shown to inhibit collective action by leading individuals to hold multiple and conflicting interpretations of a situation (Maitlis, 2005).

Evaluation of First Intervention-Action Phase (Phase Three)

The evaluation of this first intervention-action cycle (phase three) reflects upon the action research cycle itself (process reflection), my own learning (premise reflection) and links the findings to the research question and appropriate theory (content reflection) to contribute to the overarching pedagogical strategy of meta-learning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning

On a personal level, as a participant, the construction of *Te Iwi Kiwi* presented an evocative narrative that engaged me. Even as a Pākehā, non-New Zealander and cultural outsider, I identified with the meaning and the content as the intervention was co-constructed. However, despite such a visceral engagement with the collaborative process, from a premise learning standpoint, the dispassionate, distanced and conscious researcher-self challenged some underlying assumptions and retrospective perspectives held through the action cycle.

The PD visit acted as an informal coach learning experience that triggered leader sensemaking, reinforcing the understanding that high performance coaches learn from other coaches by talking about coaching experiences (Kidman & Penney, 2014). However, the nature of participant responses from the PD visit intervention experience, highlighted an embodiment of Nietzsche's notion of the "seeing from a perspective" (cited in Grbich, 2004, p. 11) and the consequential differentiated sensemaking from the same experience (Weick, 1995). From individual, unstructured interviews following the PD visit, it was clear that not everyone saw the same thing or made the same sense from the day,

After chatting with staff individually about what they took away from the day, it was clear, that whilst we'd all 'seen' and 'heard' the same thing, we hadn't necessarily 'seen' and 'heard' the same thing. I was seeing through my lens, with experience as a development coach, academic and educator with a privileged knowledge of the subject content. HC reflected upon tangible things he could 'see', that he identified with, such as the use of Māori terminology in tactical systems. He also focused upon the team values poster and the fact the players all used note books in meetings. For HPD, his

perspective focused upon how culturally similar they were to us, how engaged the players were, how hard they worked in training and how they did their own game analysis and presented back to their team and coaches; maybe this was a reflection of his own background in performance analysis and his desire to see players enjoy their training following a period working in challenging circumstances at club level...what was evident to me, was much of the discussion centred on observations that tended to be superficial and in my opinion, had the tendency to over simplify the whole cultural picture or reduce it to superficial tangibles - you don't see the whole story with a snapshot.
(Reflexive Diary, July 2013)

The diverse, multiple perspectives also acted as evidence that while people reflected individually on the day, the group did not collectively or deeply discuss the shared experiences and what we saw (Weick, 1995). As a result, the shared experience was not translated into shared understanding of events and shared meaning. Given the role collaboration and co-construction played in constructing the meanings of *Te Iwi Kiwi*, making sense of the PD visit experience had little co-construction or collaboration. This led to disparate and fragmented interpretations. While the common professional development venture of visiting other clubs and coaches offered a significant learning opportunity for HPU management, as a cultural learning tool, it had some potential shortcomings.

Reflecting on the differing depth and breadth of interpretations from participants on the PD visit, it was clear that these styles of learning visits have the potential to misrepresent culture. As evidenced here, they can ignore the intangible features of organisational life, and reduce culture to tangible surface architecture and systemic issues. Smircich and Stubbart (1985) argued that the reduction of meaning and culture to tangible architecture is risky for leaders facilitating change. Organising and organisational life is a not discrete system but a "flow of experience in which action is embedded" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 419). In the presentation of a 'cleaned up' snapshot of an organisation and/or team's culture, there is the risk that interpretations are made out of context and plausible narratives too easily constructed. Viewing a team's or organisation's culture as a snapshot potentially distorts the cultural picture, constraining sensemaking, rendering individuals 'insensible' to the subtle drivers of change present and leading to a 'thin' interpretation of culture (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008).

Considering the risk factors associated with the snapshot interpretation of culture constructed from the PD visit, the architectural paradigm described by Smircich and Stubbart (1985) was reflected in the action steps that followed. During the planning processes that led to the construction of *Te Iwi Kiwi*, HPD and HC spent large proportions of time focusing upon functional and practical aspects of the intervention, the what; rather than how, who or why. Attention was given to tangible issues such as the banner, its design and "*where does this bit go in the house?*" and "*what's that bit called again?*" (HPD, Planning Meeting, August 2013), rather than ideological features surrounding its meaning or how it may be enacted. Subsequently, an over simplification of culture was also reflected in the degree of authoring and manufacturing of the wharenui and *Te Iwi Kiwi* banner, offering a dialectical tension with the central narrative of the team 'building their house' and collective ownership,

Building our house? Who's building the house? Building our house, Te Iwi Kiwi, at a meaning level is about ownership, responsibility and understanding, but the posters, pictures, diagrams, ideas all from HPD and HC...C2 doesn't even know anything about it, and HC's collaboration has been at the end of a phone or email - he hasn't experienced the conversations, visits and knowledge building that HPD has experienced, but as CA commented, "the most important thing for first, is for HC and HPD to have ownership and secondly, for them [the players] to have ownership.

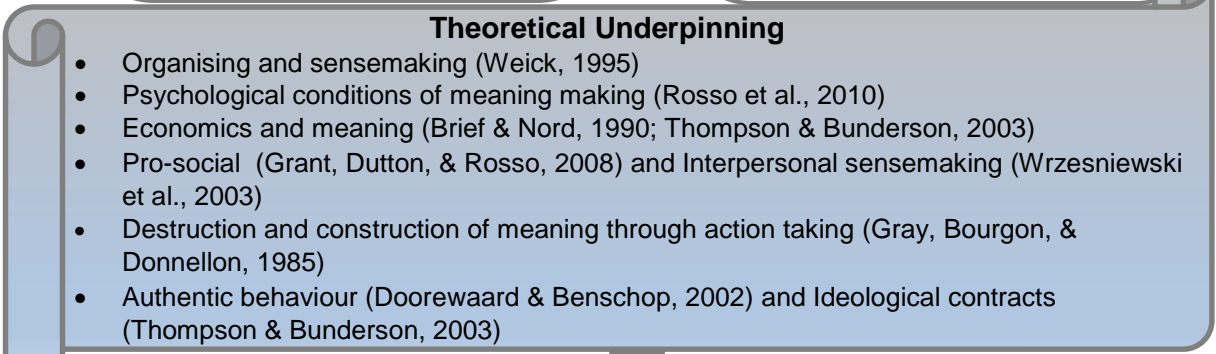
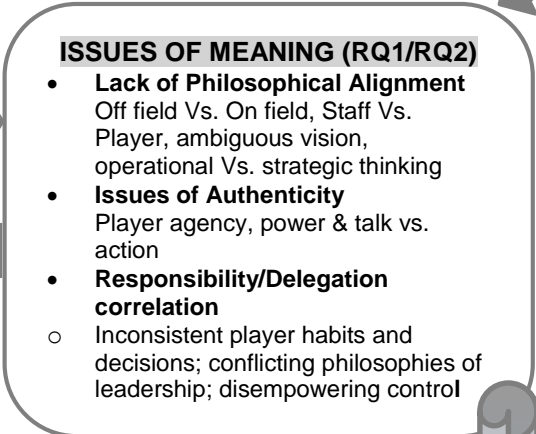
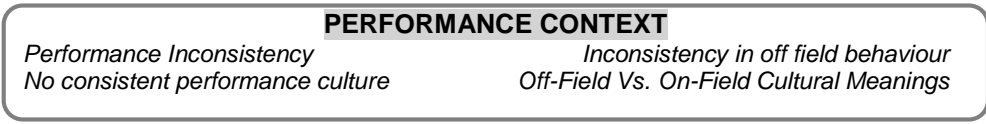
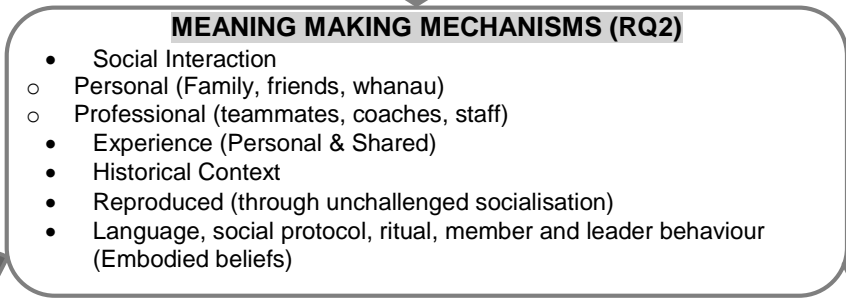
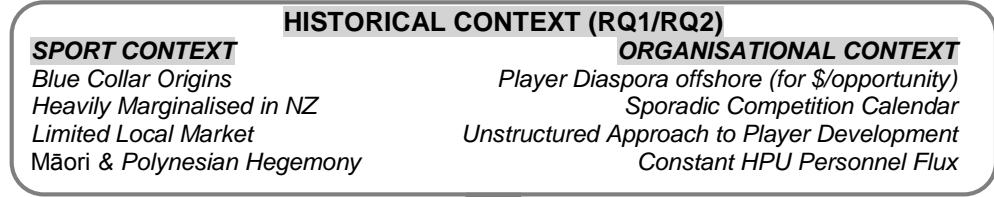
(Reflexive Diary, September 2013)

Proceeding from a desire to align philosophies (meanings and beliefs) amongst the HPU, this phase explored an intervention, the PD trip to a professional sports club, which served as a powerful catalyst for sensemaking and new learning amongst the HPU leaders that stimulated action. Considering content learning, the intervention was framed by a series of internal and external conditions that stimulated a 'felt experience' amongst the HPU leaders, triggering sensemaking, new learning and action amongst the HPU leaders. The result of that experience and subsequent learning was the engagement of CA and a series of cyclical and action steps of collaborative planning, reflection and meaning construction that resulted in collective sensemaking and evocative meaning (new and existing) (re)construction. The product, a cultural intervention, *Te Iwi Kiwi*, was developed to begin the process of philosophical alignment with the HPU at the forthcoming world cup. *Te Iwi Kiwi* was heavily informed by Māori (and Pasifika) culture, beliefs and practices and used narratives and allegories to promote and reframe existing meanings of responsibility, ownership, belonging and transcendent purpose. Making use of existing meanings and cultural features such as the haka and introducing new features such as the whareniui and associated narratives, the intervention presented a coherent, culturally sound, well-aligned and plausible narrative to the HPU leaders in their preparations for the rugby league world cup.

Theories of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and meaning (Rosso et al., 2010) remained relevant to explain the impact of the PD visit, and the resultant learning and emergent co-constructed meanings as leaders developed *Te Iwi Kiwi*. Unlike some of traditional retrospective accounts of sensemaking (Grant et al., 2008), this phase offered an insight into sensemaking in action as I accompanied and collaborated with the HPU leaders through the unfolding experiences that followed the PD visit. Leaders not only made sense of their experience but also made meaning and narrated their future in constructing *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention. Organisational theory contributed in explaining the central triggers for sensemaking and meaning construction amongst the HPU leaders, including identity and identification (Weick, 1995), sensebreaking (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), the felt experience (Bartunek et al., 2006) and narratives (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Figure 7 offers a schematic outline of the research outcomes and relevant theoretical concepts utilised for this first cycle of intervention and action (phase three) along with the underpinning research outcomes from phase one and two.

Pursuing *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention was a significant step in beginning to not only address the focus for the change; aligning philosophies within the HPU to promote a high performing culture, but also address some of the salient issues emerging from phase one and two. The ideological focus firmly grounded the new learning and emergent intervention with the intention of aligning philosophies through framing meaning and constructing a meaningful team culture. The response to the PD visit and the subsequent chain of action steps demonstrated considerable commitment to and ownership of the prioritised focus from phase one and two particularly at executive level from HPD but also national team level from HC. The open-minded and curious posture adopted by HPD, HC and CEO enabled the beginning of a collaborative dialogue to answer the issues of philosophical alignment in the HPU. The subsequent chapter reports the implementation of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention in the rugby league world cup campaign as the next phase of intervention and action.

Phase 1 & 2
(Chapter 4)



**Phase 3
(Chapter 5)**

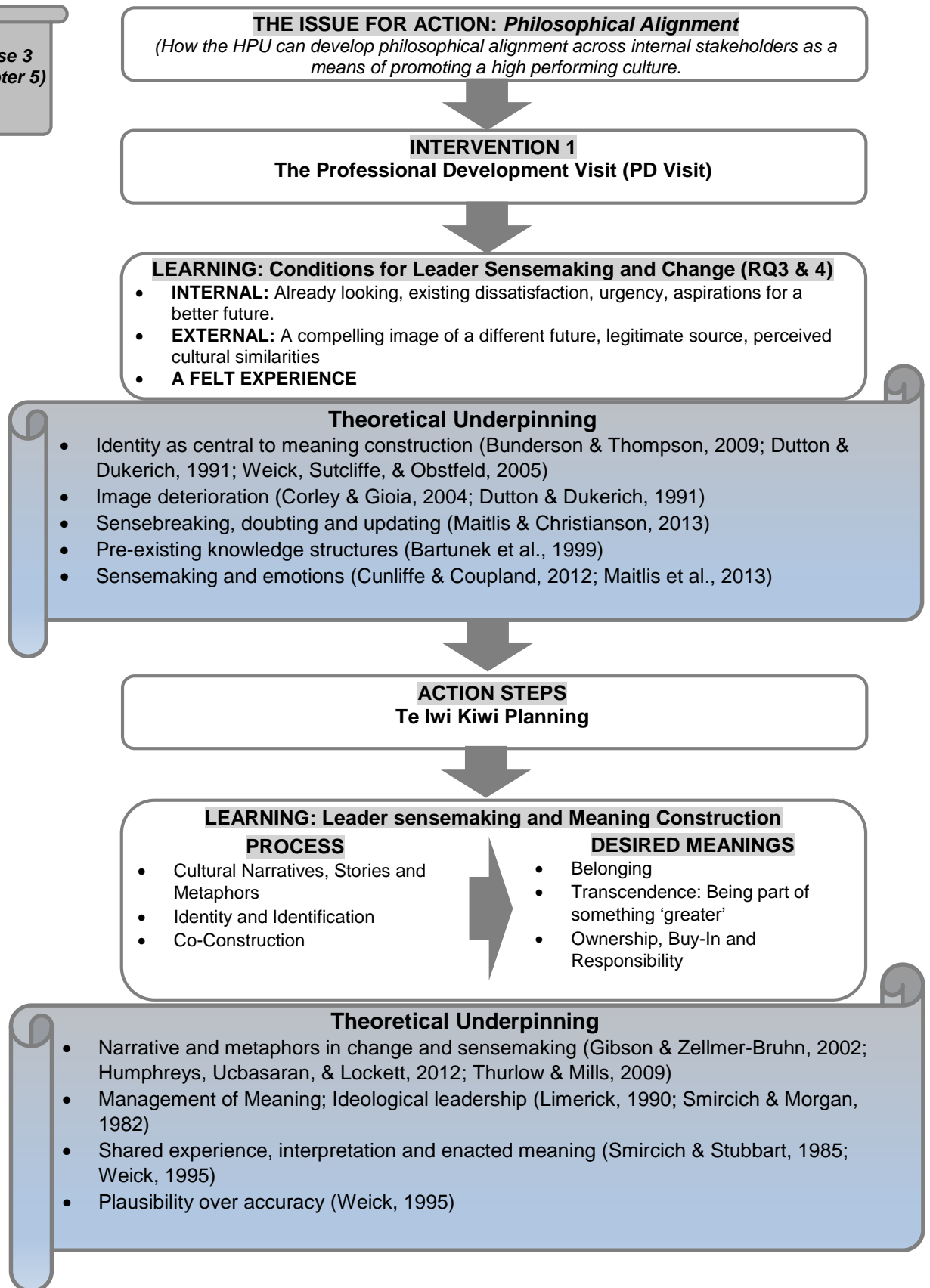


Figure 7. Summary of research outcomes for phase one, two, and the first intervention-action cycle (phase 3)

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH INTERVENTION 'TE IWI KIWI: SENSEGIVING, SENSEMAKING AND INFLUENCE IN CONTEXT'

This chapter details the means by which the cultural intervention that emerged from the first intervention-action cycle (Chapter Five), *Te Iwi Kiwi*, was communicated, championed and influenced with the HPU. It also details how sensegiving and sensemaking occurred as the HPU prepared for and competed in the 2013 Rugby League World Cup. The implementation of the cultural initiative with the HPU, and in particular the players, was the first major step in this action phase. This chapter charts the action steps and resultant learning undertaken by the HPU between October and December 2013 (the world cup campaign). This chapter is presented as a chronological narrative with excerpts of appropriate data to give voice to the participants as they journeyed through the world cup. The chapter also illustrates significant incidents and thematic development as guided by the research questions. The intervention and resultant action is explained and grounded in empirical theory and the chapter concludes with researcher reflections and an evaluation of this second loop of intervention and action.

Intervention Two: *Te Iwi Kiwi*

The first action when implementing this initiative was the collaboration between selected players and CA to create or 'compose' the team's new haka.

World Cup Action Steps

Composing the Haka

Two weeks before the team was due to assemble for the world cup, CA met with two players (one Māori and one Pasifika) to discuss the idea of constructing a new, unique haka for the team, and for these players to contribute to composing it. The two culturally different players were chosen with the intention of obtaining both a Māori and Pasifika perspective,

What I'm talking about is to try and get buy-in and what you want to say, and I spoke to HPD about not just the Māori boys, but getting some input from somebody who's non-Māori, so they get that buy-in too. (CA, Interview, October 2013)

The intention of this shared authorship was to move the haka from not only a Māori enterprise to a Kiwi one. The player's input and perspectives authored much of the spoken content and intended meaning, for example, acknowledging players from all cultures, playing for your family and your teammates, "your 'brothers' past and present" (P15 & P12, Haka Meeting, October 2013),

We spoke about, and I'd written down a few ideas of what I'd had, and explained to them, and they said, "that's pretty much what we consider we're about...we're about our families, we're about the 'brotherhood', and the interesting thing is, they also wanted to have ruthless statements about how, both of them identified how Māoris used to be back in the day, about how they went to war, they weren't going there to be friendly or anything like that, and they wanted to finish off on having a big statement, you know, along the lines of, we're here for war, and that means death for you – or something along those lines... I spoke a little bit about the whare, and building the house, I had to because the words I put into the haka come from our house, just to give them a little background, I showed them what I'd written and then showed P12 the fale, so he could see all the non-Māori and Māori coming together to make this house...interesting for me was that P12 said, [the previous haka] was just put upon them, and they really didn't have ownership or anything towards it...that's the big difference for me, it's not about me trying make this haka look better than any other thing, it's about you having ownership of this haka, and I said, for me, simplicity is the best, because first and foremost, you're football players and they went "I totally agree with you", P12 goes "yeah, that's good on simplicity because" P12 felt for him, the last time with (haka composer), they felt like they were doing more haka when they should have been focusing on football. (CA, Interview, October 2013)

HPD reflected on the collaboration,

*I spoke to the two players that CA spoke to yesterday about Te Iwi Kiwi, and the plans that we could do, and in particular, the haka. You know P11, [a senior player], said "...mate...this is what I was thinking when you told me that I had to speak to some guy about a bloody haka – you remember when we did that haka with the Kiwis in 08, and it got complicated it became a pain in the ar*e – and then last year at the [club] they went and gave us this haka which nobody followed! – So I thought here we go again". But he said, once he'd met CA, he just had a way of using story to relate ideas and concepts back to the Māori people, and then the Māori people back to the Kiwis and Te Iwi Kiwi, and S11 said it made absolute sense...[S11] said CA just had this way of telling real stories to relate whatever the issue was at hand back to the Kiwis to make it relevant and meaningful. And S15 (who is Māori), said he just loved it, he said he just had this way of pulling things together under this banner of Te Iwi Kiwi and the Māori people.*

(HPD, Interview, October 2013)

Following collaborating with these two players, the final part of constructing *Te Iwi Kiwi* haka was for CA to meet with the kai (haka leader),

HPD: Like P12 and P15 said, I'm pretty keen on you talking to P11 because to be fair P11 will lead it and drive a lot of this, so we'll go and see him middle of next week"

CA: I'll leave some lines, depending on what P11 says, I just wanted to allow him to have that input to it as well, especially coz he's the leader.

(Planning Meeting, October 2013)

A week before the squad assembled for the world cup, CA, HPD and I visited P11 at his home, met his wife and children before discussing the haka, gaining his input and authoring the whole haka. CA recognised that this was an important process in building trust and rapport with the player to assist in his ownership of the haka. P11 and CA spent several hours discussing, authoring and practicing the haka. The player was clearly enthused and motivated by the experience,

I see how all the Iwi can come into it in a merging of tribes. Not only just me as one player, but my whole whakapapa is out there and we're all underneath the same roof...Hey that's mean, so none of us forget exactly who we're representing, and to not let down...and that Māori and the people of the four winds coming together and saying, get over it, go out and represent and all the other boys are jumping on board...It's good because its basic and the boys don't have to go and practice all the time... Well you're not going to raise our ancestors for a cup of tea!...If you're getting yourself ready for war...that's good....Mean Māori Mean!...I know heaps of the boys will be getting into it... Well we've made our own whare, so we're sort of creating history as we walk...That's good for me bro, that's our haka! (P11, Haka Meeting, October 2013)

The intention was always that this haka would belong to *Te Iwi Kiwi*/New Zealand Rugby League and considerable thought was given to when and who should perform it first (especially given the Junior Kiwis (NZ U20) had a test match two days before the Kiwis left for the world cup). It was planned that the first performance not be on the field, before a game, but for the Juniors (U20) to perform it for the Kiwis at their test dinner,

...the Kiwi's may be the face, but all players belong to this house, the younger sides will look up to the Kiwis team when they do the haka, but for the Kiwis to see their young brothers perform it, first in support of CEO and his speech but then for them in support as they leave on their world cup journey, is not only good Māori protocol but they'll see that Te Iwi Kiwi is bigger than then and that they all belong, and they have a responsibility to it...so they all have ownership of this haka.

(CA, Planning Meeting, October 2013)

Against this backdrop, CA introduced *Te Iwi Kiwi* to the Junior Kiwis (U20s), who were based in Sydney, preparing for a test against Australia, and sharing the same accommodation and training facility as the Kiwis world cup squad. This acted as both a medium for CA to pilot some

of the intervention prior to introducing it to the HPU, and for HPD to begin some performance department-wide meaning alignment,

I'm really keen for what we put in the Kiwis, goes right through the Juniors [U20s] and eventually the 18s and 16s. What we have planned for [CA] in terms of the Kiwis, and I thought to me it just, well it needs to happen with the JKs, it's a perfect way to do it. That's why I'm really keen on having [CA] spend some time with the JKs, we're starting to tie everybody into it...it'll be really good for the under 18's boys as well...Now I know I've spoken to you before about the Junior Kiwis doing it [the haka]...And even HC is a little bit hesitant about doing it, my thoughts are...the kids that we've picked for this JKs team are actually our future...I thought if they did it, with the seniors, it might just resonate and be meaningful for them...these kids are, this is almost part of, it's not the past but it's the future, you know. (HPD, Planning Meeting, October 2013)

The same day CA and P11 finished authoring the new Kiwi haka, and four days before the HPU were due to assemble for the Rugby League World Cup was squad announcement day. The playing squad of twenty-four was announced by HC and CEO at a press conference in Auckland, while some of the HPU management, including the HPD were based in Sydney preparing for the forthcoming campaign. Players had been informed of their selection, travel logistics confirmed, and for some of them, parents, wives, families and friends began booking flights to Europe to follow the team. The HPU was attempting to retain the world cup, and things were moving as planned and intended. That evening, a high profile championship winning player, who had not played for the team for a long time and a week earlier withdrew himself from selection, contacted HC to request that he be reconsidered for the world cup squad; even though it was twelve hours after the deadline and squad announcement. Following an emergency selectors' meeting and vote, it was decided at three votes to one to include this player in the squad of twenty-four. This meant that an already selected player would be withdrawn from the squad. That player was a young uncapped player. The event and decision cultivated a landscape of conflicting and mixed emotions amongst team management,

*I'm just not sure I agree with it. Think of poor [withdrawn player]. Did you hear his parents were so excited he got selected - they organised time off work, booked flights and hotels to follow the whole world cup. P18 hasn't even played for the team since 2008, he withdrew from the Anzac [test], is he committed to us, or he is just doing his own thing? I tell you what, if that was my boy and this happened, I'd be like, you bunch of pr**ks. You wonder what they talk about at selectors meetings, what are their values? Makes you wonder if things like this happened to some of those Kiwi boys who've gone to play for Aussie now.* (S3, Interview, October 2013)

Externally, in the media, ex-players, coaches, administrators and fans challenged the integrity of the decision, the 'bending of the rules' for this high profile player, the manner in which it was carried out and the potential impact upon the team. This public drama created an unforeseen position from which to launch the team's world cup preparations. Shortly before the team arrived, CA shared his thoughts on the selection scenario in relation to *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention,

The key part is the buy-in to this Kaupapa, now he's coming. The challenge to us is not that the decision was made but how we include this in our house without damaging it. It's about the wood we have chosen to use-it could have been a kauri tree or a totara tree, but today we've chosen a P18 tree to support our house.

(CA, Interview, October 2013)

Whaikorero⁵²

The morning the HPU met in Sydney, HPU leaders, CA and I met to talk through a plan for the afternoon's presentation and the launch of *Te Iwi Kiwi*. The intervention was introduced to the HPU that afternoon in the first team meeting after the world cup squad assembled. HC

⁵² Whaikorero: Formal speeches, oratory, oration (Korero Māori, n.d.)

opened with the traditional tauparapara⁵³ about warriors in watchtowers protecting a village. CA followed with a presentation similar to the one he delivered to the HPU management and Junior Kiwis. Entering the room performing a traditional Māori postural dance and chanting he immediately engaged the room,

First and foremost I would like to thank HPD for the opportunity, coming here to be part of this family, be a part of this house and the house that we build today, and of course the captain of our waka⁵⁴, Ki a Koe HC, nga te a mihi, and what we are about to do today is very exciting. First and foremost it is an honour to be here, to be a part of Te Iwi Kiwi. Te Iwi Kiwi which is the people of the Kiwi, which you belong to, and that's what we are about building today.

(CA, Team Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

To begin the presentation, CA requested that we perform an exercise. He asked the HPU to imagine the room was a map of New Zealand with Cape Reinga (most northern part) at one end and Invercargill and Stewart Island (most southern) at the other end. He then requested that we go and stand on the place that is our connection to New Zealand, a birthplace, a hometown, where our family were from,

One by one...you're going to answer the questions; you're going to say who you are, where you're from, what's your heritage - just what you are... Pākehā, England, if you got a bit of Irish in you, put that out there too, and who's that person when you're out there and you're thinking this is why I'm doing it, this is why I'm here, this is who I play for, so we can all see here, this is who I am, this is why I do what I do, and you're standing in that place where you've got that link too in Aotearoa New Zealand, and this is why you play and this is why you put on the black jersey...coz we're all from different places, you know, links back into Samoa, Tonga.

(CA, Team Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

Progressing from the bottom of the south island moving north, each player and member of management responded with their answers to these questions of meaning and purpose. CA then moved onto his central presentation to the HPU. He introduced the concepts of the wharenuī and 'building our house', *Te Iwi Kiwi*, people from the four winds (all over the world), and discussed haka, raising the idea of an alternative haka to Haka Ka Mate. He used korero (speaking/oral story) grounded in engaging historical and cultural narratives of Māori kings and warriors to explain the meanings within the house, and how that applied to the players. He talked of the merging of tribes for one purpose (Kaupapa), to represent family (whanau), including parents, spouses, own children and grandparents, ancestors (tupuna) and ex-players (tawhito⁵⁵) and how players from many cultures, nationalities and backgrounds shared this connection and belonging to *Te Iwi Kiwi*,

So no matter where you are from, this is your post in the house, you're carving your post; you belong to this house, to this kiwi house – Te Iwi Kiwi. Nga hau e wha, whether you be from Tonga, Samoa, Rarotonga, England, Laos, you are all there, because you are the face of our people back home, you're also the face of your family, the people you're representing even though they don't live there. With one team, one kaupapa, 'The Kiwi Way', this thing we call Te Iwi Kiwi, a nation of kiwis. He hononga a Iwi, means the merging of tribes, people coming together with all your different backgrounds, it means don't just see me as a player, don't just see that one person there, you've heard their story, why they're here, where they're from, why they play, with them comes their ancestors, their tribe, their people. A kiwi nation, Te Iwi Kiwi, what we'll build our house with, the way we build our house.

(CA, Team Presentation and Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

⁵³ Tauparapara (ritual chant): See Footnote 11)

⁵⁴ Waka: Canoe or war canoe, vehicle, conveyance, spirit medium (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

⁵⁵ Tawhito: Wise person, expert, experienced person, authority (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

He deconstructed the word 'Kiwi' emphasising 'iwi' (tribe, people) to give further meaning to the concept of *Te Iwi Kiwi* and introduced the poster of *Te Iwi Kiwi* whareniui. He talked about people's place in the house and their belonging to the pous of the house; the post of Māori heritage, Pou Tuturu, and the post that joins non-Māori, Pou Tuhono, so that "everybody who comes together to play, now when they say where are you? I'm right here, this is my post in the house, this is my link back into this house" (CA, Team Presentation and Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013). Throughout his presentation, CA made continual reference to responsibility players held in 'carving or building their house' and that over time, their actions will serve to carve the posts of the house, as is protocol or tikanga Māori in a traditional whareniui.

Haka Practice

Following a short break CA introduced the team's new haka, '*Haka Te Iwi Kiwi*'. He talked of how he collaborated with three of the squad to author the words and actions to the haka and emphasised the group's collective ownership,

I went and spoke to P12, because first and foremost I wanted somebody who is non-Māori, because it's not a Māori thing, it's a Kiwi thing, where everybody has ownership of it...I spoke to them and spoke about some of the things that they done, and within the haka we talk about why do we do this, and it's your family, all of you said it is for my family, it's for my 'brothers', because we're the ones out there doing it, so that's what it's about, and it's also, it's not a Māori haka, it's a kiwi haka, it's about you saying yes, I'm Tongan and I'm in this team and I'm proud to be from Tonga, because I know you are going to have to stand up and play against the Tongan team or, you be Samoan playing against Samoan, but be proud of that because that's what you bring with you.

(CA, Team Presentation and Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

He reiterated the purpose and meaning of haka as Māori cultural practice, and explained the connection between the 'new' haka and *Te Iwi Kiwi* whareniui, locating elements from the house in the haka, such 'building a house', the pous and whanau. He took time and care to explain the meaning and significance of each line, and regularly challenged the players to articulate their understanding of the words,

...This haka is not to try and be better than any other haka, we're not trying to get into a competition with the All Blacks or anything like that, this haka is about you saying why you're there and it's about your preparation. And this is the reason why you chose to play for this team...tena poua, tena poua means the posts in the house, let's start building, start building the house with what we need. Then it says Pou Tuturu, these pous that pou in your house that you're about to build, ru ruwana...here comes the shake, we're about to bring our ancestors and everything that comes with us, Pou Tuhono, my 'brothers' from the islands, from England, from wherever they're from, they've come here to join the battle, and we're all one party, and we're sons of war, Tumatauenga. Then it says, Te Opetaua, the opetaua is a war party, who's the war party – Te Kappa Kiwi.

(CA, Team Presentation and Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

The final meaning CA introduced was the physical formation of the haka into an arrowhead using a historical narrative of an iconic Māori warrior chief. The HPU talked about who should stand at the front and either side of the arrowhead, and CA suggested having a Māori player one side and a non-Māori the other to reflect pride in cultural diversity. I reflected in my diary,

Whilst the concepts haven't been constructed initially by the players, they are familiar-concepts identified from phase one and two, but framed in a meaningful way and introduced in a way that allows the construction of a consistent shared meaning with flexibility for players to bring them to life. The process of learning the haka was a subtle way of constructing meaning, purpose and togetherness. Like with the Juniors [U20s], through the process [of learning the haka together] you could see the team starting to grow; they had to talk about issues, each other, laugh, work and learn together.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week One, October 2014)

At the Junior Kiwis test dinner, attended by the HPU, CEO and the Junior Kiwis team and management and following traditional tikanga Māori (protocol) as planned, in response to CEO's presentation, the Junior Kiwis first performed *Haka Te Iwi Kiwi* as tautoko⁵⁶. As part of the tautoko, CA talked again about 'fashioning our Kiwi house',

Just on behalf of Te Iwi Kiwi, we would like to thank you for putting your presentation together, and [mai nga tai nga kia kotou tena tuakana], from the Juniors, to you the top team, and the whole kaupapa that Te Iwi Kiwi and everything that it embraces, [Māori] to all the management and to all the staff [tena te whakataui, iti haka, Te Iwi Kiwi]. This is one of the beautiful things about creating something that belongs to you, as Te Iwi Kiwi, New Zealand Rugby League, and having that haka done here for this time, and from your younger 'brothers' to the older 'brothers', this is one thing that we want to create and take that step forward about the haka.

(CA, Junior Kiwis Test Dinner, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

I commented in my reflexive diary,

The Juniors' haka silenced the room, the senior boys seemed engaged and impressed and I could sense their excitement to do it. In the evening you could hear small groups of players chanting the words to the haka, or practicing the actions; the haka became a shared site for collective learning and interaction.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

Away from the formal setting, CA engaged with players on a personal level to discuss the haka and the wharehenui. I witnessed him building relationships with players (and management) through humour and using culture and heritage as a pathway. He informally chatted about tattoos, tribal histories, family and connections to New Zealand. I spoke with CA and P9 that evening and recorded our conversation in my diary,

He said...straight after practice, boys were coming up to me saying they like it all because they all had a place in the house and they knew what the haka meant for them. He also said it was cool that the island boys and the Pākehās gave good feedback, questioning for more information about the meaning...P9 had a couple of chats with me, and he loves the concepts, the house and the haka, feels it sums us up, who were are, what we're about, feels comfortable with the haka. He said most of them said, "bro that's it, that's about me, me and my family"...I wonder whether CA represents something personally familiar - an uncle, uso (brother) or a cuzzie (cousin) maybe.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

Poua & Tainui

The following day, the HPU met for the team's first training session. As part of the preparation for the session, HC introduced the concepts of 'Tainui' and 'Poua' as part of the team's game plan, "so the words we want to use whilst we are away, part of building our house, tainui for defence, and poua is our attack" (HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013). This was followed by korero about these concepts and their meanings,

Tai is the tide, and nui is the greatest tide that there can be. So this tide that comes up, it only goes back a small amount and then it pushes forward up again, so that's why, hence the idea – te mau tata ke tera whakapapa ke te ra korero, that we go with that, because there's no greater defence than a tainui tide, it's a great tide pushing up all the time, and poua derives from the warrior and when he learns his art in going to war and poua is what we learn, what we call our strikes, and our attacks, so hence the idea that we go with poua and tainui. Tainui defence, great tide, and Poua when you're holding a rakau and you're on the attack, and you are just in, you're ruthless, you're there to kill, and do the job, so Poua attack and Tainui defence.

(CA, Team Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

⁵⁶ Tautoko: Support, often provided to leaders or speakers in formal settings in the form of a waiata (song) or haka (Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

Over the course of the first three days of training (one week before the world cup warm up game), elements of the new language had crept into use amongst players and management,

I want you all to think about our whare, about building our house boys. I'm talking diet habits, weight gains and daily training habits, the stuff I know you all call the one percenters....all that contributes to our house, and whether you like it or not, your individual choices and efforts affect the rest of us. So it depends on what sort of house you wanna live in, but like it or not, that stuff is what builds our foundations - and we've got to make sure it's a strong house, coz we all go to live in it, and only a strong house will stand the test in winning the world cup.

(S6, Team Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

A senior player referred to 'building a house' in a press interview,

We just had a two-day camp and the big thing was our defence...We have a concept were using at the moment and it's to build a house. The first thing for us is our foundation and defence is a key there in us winning the world cup.

(P14, Press Interview, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

At the conclusion of the first three days of training, prior to leaving Australia for the UK, I reflected on initial impressions from management,

The whole concept and meaning behind Te Iwi Kiwi is incredibly powerful, unique to our game and [CEO's] keen to pursue the concept as a central theme organisation wide-one family..."You can't get much more Kiwi than a haka and a Marae!" (S7)...Chatting with S4 he offered his thoughts. As a teacher of the haka he thought it was excellent, but is interested how it grows from here. HPD has definitively grabbed the concept. S4s perception was that the intervention for this group was mainly centred around the haka, so for me (as researcher) it will be interesting to see if it this becomes more than just a new haka, and if it becomes an all-encompassing philosophy, vision or kaupapa...Despite a generally positive reception to the intervention, there are a few nagging cultural thoughts. First, things didn't quite seem complete given C2 and S2, two of the senior HPU staff were not present; what's their role in this from when they arrive? Second was the issue of players' requests to leave or miss parts of the camp. One player thoughtfully went to the effort to request formal leave from a team event weeks prior to the camp to attend his brother's wedding. However once there, other players were asking to stay off site, leave early, skip a team function and meet at the airport rather than attend some light morning training. Even worse upon checking the car park on the evening, it was evident that some players had left anyway.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

After these three days, the HPU (including me) flew to the UK for the world cup and CA returned home to New Zealand.

Week to Week Preparation and 'Game Focuses' [sic]

The team assembled in Doncaster, UK, five days prior to the first game, a warm up game against the Cook Islands. A typical week's preparation was organised to generally include, one or two, one-hour field training sessions, one strength session, a video review meeting, a video preview meeting and a captain's run the day prior to any match. Non-selected players for the particular week's game were required to complete a further training session the morning of the game. As professionals and representatives of NZRL, there was an expectation that each player made a fair and equal contribution to media and community responsibilities such as visiting schools, sport centres and charities, and interviews with both broadcast and/or print media. These responsibilities were organised by S4 on a rotation basis. Away from rugby league, meal times were relatively flexible; the team ate out (from the hotel) together once a week, had a weekly formal test dinner (the night before each game) and initially took part in a weekly HPU event or outing. At each new host town there was a compulsory team function with local dignitaries from the region, for example, gala dinners, mayoral lunches, civic receptions

with Rugby League federations and local councils. At the first team meeting, after arriving in the UK, the *Te Iwi Kiwi* wharenuī banners were hung in the team room, and after collaboration between HPU leaders and myself, portfolios consisting of the team's playbook along with a picture of the wharenuī and the words to the haka were developed and given to each player. As part of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention, a weekly action step was that of 'Game Focuses' [sic].

In the weekly test preview meetings, players were given a tip sheet (information on the opposition and key coaching points for the game) from the coaches. In conjunction with the tip sheet and the coaches presentation, in positional groups, Pou Tu (midfield players), Amo Tahī (left field) and Amo Rua (right field), players were required to set game focuses, or goals, for the forthcoming game for 'Tainui' (defence) and 'Poua' (attack). These focuses were intended to be set collaboratively by the players, shared with everyone, made visible on walls of the team room and reviewed by players and coaches as part of the post-test review meeting and 'carved' onto the wharenuī tapestry,

Once we've gone through the preview, then I want us to split into edges and tights [positional groupings], and come up with a focus for your groups for us. Again, keeping in mind what we said last week, and what we didn't get to last week and then all of us will come up with a team focus for poua and tainui, yep?

(HC, Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

The team won the warm up game against the Cook Islands comfortably. Despite a convincing score line, the subsequent review meeting revealed a lot to improve on,

Kick pressure, so 20%; if they make 10 tackles, we put kick pressure on twice. The first half, we didn't have any kick pressure...so again, that's...not good enough...I want to ask tights and edges, you know, if I'm going to look at our poua and our tainui for both, if we would give ourselves a tick or a cross for those actions from the weekend.

(HC, Review Meeting, RLWC Week Two, October 2013)

The game was of particular relevance to the research as it was the first time *Te Iwi Kiwi* haka was performed in public and reported in both the UK and New Zealand media:

The Kiwis have maintained their strong start at the Rugby League World Cup and an iconic new haka appears to be firing the team up perfectly. *Te Iwi Kiwi* was revealed as the new haka the team have created specifically for this campaign after it was kept under wraps prior to the tournament. The iconic *Te Iwi Haka* has definitely lifted the spirits in the Kiwi camp and is proving an intimidating challenge for opposing teams (Davies, 2013).

Off the field, the team enjoyed a poker evening at a local pub, where playing tables were divided up into mini-teams of the pous within the wharenuī (Pou Tu, Pou Tūturū and Pou Tuhono). However, a couple of important events occurred over the course of the week. One player was required for media commitments and proceeded to be filmed and photographed making swearing hand gestures at the cameras. I recorded a second event in my reflexive journal,

I was staying up late to finish some game analysis. I couldn't work in my room because my roommate was sleeping, so I worked downstairs in the foyer. At midnight, I watched the porter take a large pot of coffee and a large box of biscuits upstairs. Over the next two hours, the porter repeated this task twice. Around 2am, I got up to go to bed, following the porter on another coffee and biscuit trip. I followed him up the stairs to the door at the end of my corridor – the door was opened to find 6 of the squad in the room chatting and playing cards, drinking coffee and eating cookies.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

The next day,

...we had 3 boys who didn't turn up to haka practice, because they were asleep, so that's an awareness for us, we're two days into it, P16, P17 and P21 forgot to turn up. All right? That's not acceptable. Like I said right at the beginning, we want to build our house, build our whare on rock, and turning up to meetings, that's the easy part, getting that stuff done should be a no brainer.

(HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

A fourth notable event occurred after the game, where a group of players proceeded to go out into the city and failed to make breakfast with two missing the recovery session. It was reported by management that players had a strong smell of alcohol on their breath the following day. The team moved to Liverpool to start the world cup campaign. Prior to the opening game against Samoa, the PD visit club team (Chapter Five) sent through a good luck message that was played at the Test dinner. The PD visit club's head coach spoke of their cultural journey, what it means to be part of their team, and the central role CA had with them. This was followed by a speech from a former Kiwi player. The team beat Samoa in the opening pool group game, only after the Samoans had "given us a scare" (HC, Review Meeting, RLWC Week Two, October 2013) in a very poor 20 minutes post half time,

Our first half was probably a lot better than the second half, yeah we definitely didn't pass our part of it, yeah we got 68% and we aimed for 75, so, yeah, it wasn't good enough.

(P7, Test Review Meeting, RLWC Week Two, October 2013)

HC offered his thoughts to the players,

*When the momentum started to go against us, we lost our cool, and we lost our train of thought, didn't pay attention to detail, and all of a sudden, we just couldn't stop it. All right. And what I want to also bring up in reflection....when we played against Australia for the last couple of years...it's that type of period, you know which lets us down, if we want to match them in four weeks' time, and England in four weeks' time, and Australia in five weeks' time, we've got to be (punches hand again) better than that. That's why I was pi**ed off after the game.*

(HC, Test Review Meeting, RLWC Week Two, October 2013)

During this second week, C2 and S2 joined the HPU following prior commitments, and C2 was introduced to the playing group for the first time. Away from training and competing, we were invited to a Toi moko⁵⁷ repatriation ceremony at a local town hall. Spiritually significant to Māori and culturally relevant to New Zealand, this was one of two ceremonies that took place in the UK. Originally planned to be a team commitment, HPU management decided the repatriation was not to be offered to players on the grounds that it might be perceived as a chore or impact rest and recovery. The event was optional for management and five of the eleven on the management team (HPD, S3, S6, S10 and I) attended.

A couple of other notable incidents occurred over the course of this week. The night before the game, a number of the management team went out for a beer to relax. Upon returning to the hotel at 1am, they found a handful of players on the nightclub dance floor on the ground floor of the hotel. While the players insisted they were not drinking, they were firmly scolded by HC.

Following the week in Liverpool, the HPU flew to Avignon in the south of France to play France. The team won the game convincingly,

⁵⁷ Toi moko: Tattooed preserved head - In the nineteenth century *Toi moko* were traded with Pākehā. As body parts, they are spiritually significant to Māori and in recent years, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa undertook a repatriation process with museums around the world to bring these ancestors home (Māori Dictionary, n.d.; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, n.d.).

We were...real keen not to let them over our try line, which was a really good effort. The little things that you can see there [referencing video] - there were guys there that were in the mid-80s in terms of their wrestle percentage. You know, for me that was the difference on the night, in comparison to the week before, there was an effort and there was an energy, to want to and get yourself into the tackle...particularly with the guys, you look at the boys that come off the bench, you know...making sure that they're working really hard in the contact, you know to have them pinned down...So I thought that was a real improvement for us.

(HC, Test Review Meeting, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)

Despite playing well, the week saw little attention given by leaders or players to *Te Iwi Kiwi*. With the exception of the routine haka performance, an inexpressive and superficial use of Poua and Tainui, and the setting and reviewing of positional 'game focuses', little reference was made to the wharenui or its elements. While the importance of collaboration and ownership permeated much of the intervention planning and pre-campaign discourse, very few ownership and collaborative practices were undertaken to facilitate shared understanding and sustain the intervention. It became clear that the coaching environment was rather prescriptive and players were largely passive recipients of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention. The original plans to metaphorically *build our house* together were reduced to superficial links made by coaches through the vocabulary of the intervention. '*The Kiwi Way*' narrative continued its presence with posters on the team room walls alongside *Te Iwi Kiwi* banner, and players and HPU leaders continued to reference to it (if a little superficial and limited). In France, in collaboration with HC (but with no player input), S10 began a weekly routine of putting a different motivational quote on the wall of the team room in the hotel. The quotes were made by popular (non-sporting) historical figures and were occasionally referred to by coaches during meetings.

Following the France game, the team spent the weekend in Nice prior to returning to the UK. Before leaving Avignon for Nice, two players were given leave from the squad to visit friends, with one returning the world cup car with two speeding tickets. While in Nice some players took trips to Monaco, and the team enjoyed a lively late night 'bonding' session at a local bar consisting of karaoke fines for humorous incidents, some drinking games and a 'boat race' (a team drinking contest). It was during this week, that some nutrition issues emerged, whereby players were found to be missing breakfast and eating takeaways from fast food chains.

After leaving Nice, the HPU flew to the north of England to spend two weeks in Leeds for the final pool group game and quarterfinal. The team were reminded before they left,

*Right we had a good time in Nice, relaxed for a couple of days, we've had our fun and from now on it's back to work. That doesn't mean we can't enjoy each other's company, but I just want you to be mindful of why we're here and what we're fighting for. We're here to work – no f***ing about and being late, forgetting s**t, staying up late playing cards and f***ing around – that all stops now, you're thinking about next week's game, then the week after, and all our energy and effort is going into preparing as best as we can for the next game. (HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)*

At the next meeting, despite HC's reminder, two players were late because they had slept in and needed to be woken up. At this point, the SLG held a meeting, and the players, decided on a team 'alcohol ban' for the remainder of the tournament. Despite this, some of the off-field behaviours became more consistent over the time in Leeds; for example, players were found playing cards until the early hours of the morning and then missing breakfast. A couple of players bought ball bearing guns and complaints were lodged by hotel guests that they could not sleep because of the noise from gun fights in the hotel corridors at 3am. During downtime away from training, the team took a trip to Old Trafford to watch Manchester United in the premier soccer league.

The final pool group game was against Papua New Guinea. In similar fashion to the French game the team won convincingly. Perspectives amongst the players were positive, “*first half was pretty awesome, our line speed we were getting up in their faces, shutting down whatever they were throwing at us*” (P13, Test Review Meeting, RLWC Week Five, November 2013). However, according to participants, the post half time period continued to be a cause for concern, “*I reckon the first half was alright, then we kind of dropped off. When we got pressured, it sort of, threw us off a bit, and our performance showed*” (P15, Test Review Meeting, RLWC Week Five, November 2013). The team drew Scotland in the quarterfinal. Again, the team won convincingly, drawing England in the semi-final in London. Following the game, some behaviour arose again when during a live post-match interview, a New Zealand player was ‘down trousered’ (had his shorts pulled down) by one of his teammates on live TV. It also emerged that certain players had partaken in some questionable recovery practices in nightclubs recreationally using sleeping medication. The senior players called a player only meeting to discuss the issue before the HPU left for London. During the week’s preparation for the semi-final against England, it became clear that tensions were beginning to develop amongst the playing group,

Before leaving for a team outing, players called a second meeting, staff weren't invited again and the meeting lasted 50 minutes. There was some confusion at the start as to whether the staff were invited, but we gauged that we weren't because HC and HPD weren't leaving or signalling that we were needed. S8 said, “I wish they didn't keep having these secret meetings, or at least we should be briefed as to what's going on because I haven't got a clue”. S6 commented, “But it's showing them that we trust them to sort things out”. Judging by the looks on players' faces it was a heated meeting, as players got on the bus, usually cheery players were glum faced and quiet. Reading in between the lines some of the thrust of the meeting is likely to have been directed at this particular player, who proceeded to isolate himself, not really speaking and sulking throughout the team outing. On the outing, lots of hush hush alleyway conversations were going on; with S9 was working round key individuals, and having 'hush hush' conversations with players. (Reflexive Diary, RLCW Week Six, November 2013)

The following day, HPD and HC concluded the team meeting with this summary,

*We've said this already this trip, but we think it's important to say it again; we need to draw a line between the past and what's coming. Whatever's happened has happened, and whatever was good enough before won't be good enough now. So we need to tighten things up, raise our standards. So no more playing cards til 3am and sleeping in til 12, missing breakfast, lateness, and bulls**t. Yeah we've played well on the most part this trip, but things have become too loose in certain areas. We just want you to be mindful of this coz this is a huge week.*

(HPD, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Six, November 2013)

Further compounding player tensions, an argument broke out during massage time, and the team trained poorly that week as C2 reflected,

This week's training was nowhere near our first four; it wasn't sharp, balls going down, pretty ugly to be honest. Take [senior player], he couldn't put a foot wrong [in the first four weeks], he couldn't catch a cold all week. I don't think I saw him drop a ball all tour, then this week, I'm not sure I saw him catch one.

(C2, Interview, RLWC Week Six, November 2013)

While much of the leader discourse revisited a need to raise standards, there was no revisiting of *Te Iwi Kiwi* or its implied meanings. The culturally meaningful narratives and allegories were missing. The only residuals of *Te Iwi Kiwi* remaining were the haka, posters of the whareniui, the perfunctory use of Poua and Tainui and the occasional reference to building a house. One of the few references made by a player to *Te Iwi Kiwi* was at the end of the final training session that week, where P14, a player leader, spoke to the playing group, and said “*It's been a tough few days but we're back on the field, training, and back building our whare, so the word today is*

whare, so 1, 2, 3, whare” (Team Training Session, RLWC Week Six, November 2013). Following the disruptive week, the team took the field in front of 70 000 fans to play England in the semi-final of the world cup, not having beaten them in England since 2005. The team had a serendipitous end to the game, undeservedly winning against the run of play. The team progressed to the Rugby League World Cup final.

World Cup Final Week and ‘Who do you play for?’

World cup final preparation week was based at a rural health retreat and hotel on the outskirts of Manchester. The final was at Old Trafford, the home of Manchester United soccer club, the same ground the team had all been to watch a premier league game weeks earlier. This week the HPU attended the annual RLIF⁵⁸ International Awards gala dinner where three HPU players made the ‘International Team of the Year’ and one player was selected as ‘RLIF Player of the Year’. The winning Kiwi player commented in his acceptance speech when asked what has been the special moment for him at the world cup,

For me, probably just the ‘brotherhood’ of the Kiwis, coming back into camp, it’s been a long time since I felt that and it’s just been an awesome feeling...getting to know all the boys, and we really have a strong connection, and...win or lose this weekend, we’ll be ‘brothers’ for life, so just that’s probably the best thing I’ve gained this tournament.

(P18, Awards Presentation, RLWC Week Seven, November 2013)

In tautoko (support) of the player, the team performed a rousing and passionate *Te Iwi Kiwi* haka. A final major action initiative occurred in this final week, whereby HC gave every player a sheet entitled ‘Brothers: 2013 W.C. Final’,

*What I want you to have a think about...there’s a sheet here, and it covers off what we spoke about in Sydney, who do I play for, ok, remember when we stood up in the line from Invercargill up to Far North, alright, three questions - Who do I play for? What does this game mean to me? And what will I see, or what will you see?... So you have to put that on the piece of paper and on Friday, you’ll read that out to the team, and we’ll put up there [gesturing to *Te Iwi Kiwi* wharenuī banner], we’ll put it up on our whare. And that’s everyone, the ones who aren’t playing this weekend and the 17 that are going to go out there and jump in the watchtowers for us.*

(HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Seven, November 2013)

At Friday’s meeting, the sheets were never attached to *Te Iwi Kiwi* wharenuī as planned, yet each player did stand up to give their answers to the three questions. As players reflected, their answers came back to the central meanings evident throughout the research project; parents, children, family, ‘brothers’, the people of New Zealand, a desire to represent and make people proud and embodied through hard work and effort. HC concluded the meeting,

*Boys, I think there’s some beautiful words there, I think for us, it’s really important now, as we’ve all spoken about, the sacrifices we’ve all made over the last six, seven weeks, and that’s just what you see here, there’s been a lot of sacrifice which has gone on for...ages, from everyone. What it boils down to is 80 minutes tomorrow. We’ve talked about our actions, you know, you’ve got to feel those names on the whare there (points to ex-players names on *Te Iwi Kiwi* banner), with you, they’re helping you defend, your family too, you know, that’s where you’ve got to get that desire that P19 talks about, that hunger to get the job done. (HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Seven, November 2013)*

The emotional day concluded shirt presentations and a series of surprise good luck video messages from wives, children, family and friends at the final test dinner.

Despite an emphatic victory in the semi-final, the acknowledgement of HPU players at the awards and an emotionally charged conclusion to the week, injury clouds hung over two

⁵⁸ RLIF: Rugby League International Federation; the international governing body for the game of rugby league.

players and a few issues arose amongst the week's preparation. Training was poor, imprecise and sloppy. Players had deduced who was likely to play and who was not and some began to lose focus in practice, *"playing silly buggers...messaging around at training"* (C2, Interview, RLWC Week Seven, November 2013). In addition,

Coaches continued to raise the concern around the players mixing [sleeping] meds and energy drinks, drinking too much coffee and honey and the lack of sleep. S8 commented, "I'm not sure it has stopped". A number of players are reportedly not able to sleep or not getting to sleep until 5 in the morning, HPD woke up to hear players still up. C2 said, "the concern being are that they are like zombies for the a couple of days after, I'm concerned that it affected preparation last week and caused a rift amongst the group, one that I thought was addressed with that players' meeting last week but maybe not".
(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week Seven, November 2013)

Other cultural issues included one player who confided in HPD that he was struggling to sleep and rest because his roommate had had up to four friends and family sleeping on his bed or on the floor since they arrived in London. Management later found out another player spent his final four nights out of the team hotel staying with his partner. Finally, the night before the world cup final, S2 overheard the non-playing players telling others that they were planning on going out into Manchester for the night.

Despite these issues, the team left the hotel one last time for the Grand Final, focused and determined. It was a sell-out, world record crowd for a rugby league test match. While the team had not beaten Australia since 2010, and only three times in the last 10 years, media, fans and management had speculated that it was a most talented Kiwi's team on paper. In the second minute, a Kiwi rookie, who had been an outstanding performer all tournament suffered a broken leg and was taken from the field. With no position specialist on the reserve's bench, the team awkwardly reshuffled positions. From here, Australia scored shortly after, and again after that, the team *"never even got in the game, we looked lost, confused and half asleep"* (C2, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). The team failed in the defence of the world cup and world champion's title. It was the largest losing margin between the Kiwis and Australians since the 1988 World Cup Final.

In the changing rooms after the game, there was a sense of calm, a sense of acceptance that the team had been completely and utterly outplayed in all areas of the game. A sense of 'ah well, there's always next time' seemed to pervade. I did not see many of the players after that until the next day. The HPU split into smaller units and did their own thing. Some ate with management and families at the team hotel. Some staff went to bed early and the remaining staff sang a few songs in the bar before retiring to bed not long.

Post World Cup Final and Team Meeting

A sombre team took the bus to London the following morning after saying goodbye to a couple of players who were remaining in the UK. This bus trip was the players' last official 'Kiwis' commitment of the 2013 Rugby League World Cup. There was no plan for meetings with the players after the world cup final, and despite subtly attempting to collaborate with the HPU leaders, no plan was made to revisit the meanings implied within *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention. Upon arriving in London, HC and HPD requested a management meeting in the hotel lobby. The meeting served initially as an informal campaign debrief, but quickly focused solely upon the emergent sleeping medication issue. Management expressed various degrees of emotional anger at the issue, the way it unfolded and its potential impact upon the grand final performance. Yet no reference was made to the meanings of the intervention or efforts to promote them,

HC started by saying he thought the first four weeks were outstanding and the boys hummed along quite nicely, but then post quarter final something changed, and we had the emergence of off-field issues and whilst we tried, through the players and SLG to address it, it didn't seem like it had much effect – whilst the players assured staff of nothing going on, behavioural traits were still noticeable and low levels of performance were witnessed in training. S2 questioned the moral fibre of some of the players and felt it was a significant area of concern. S11 and C2 reported that they were really upset by the experience, and that they perceived a sense of entitlement amongst some players, that they weren't accountable to their actions and their positions were always safe, and as a result their position in the squad and team became a right rather than a privilege and this manifested in the way the team trained, behaved and prepared over the weeks building to the semi and final. S8 commented that he gets quite close to the players with the [injury] treatment and injury prep[aration] stuff, and all the talk through the week was about how amazing it was going to be when it was all over, what they were going to do on Saturday night and before they left for Australia and holidays after that. He concluded it seemed all the focus was on the party afterward – he didn't know if that was complacency and they were thinking they'd already won it, or they really were more interested in the party rather than the performance.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

It had also become evident that knowledge of the sleeping medication issue was wider than the HPU extending into the Australian and English clubs and the game's administrative bodies. There was understandable concern that it was only a matter of time before parts of the story emerged in the press. Continuing the trend, no reference was made to *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention or its cultural meanings, however, the outcome of this meeting was to organise a final HPU meeting to address the issue, talk collaboratively about it and highlight the stances the organisation will take from herein before players disappeared across London or on the various flights back to the Antipodes (however it should be noted three players had already departed), *"This isn't going to be an easy talk, ok, but it needs to be an honest one, because there is too much at stake with the black jumper, for it not to be honest"* (HPD, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013).

A tense meeting ensued in which management and some players challenged what the team stood for, *"the pride of the jumper"* (HPD, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013) and the impact player off-field choices and behaviour had upon the management team, the HPU culture and performance. In light of player behaviours, the meaninglessness of *Te Iwi Kiwi*, and the *"the whare we've built"* (HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013) was raised, along with value issues of broken trust and selfishness, as certain players *"valued their self above the team, have valued their self-interest above the jumper"* (S2, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). The meeting created a clear fracture between management and many of the playing group, in which some players confessed, while other adopted defensive or ignorant positions. HPD concluded,

It's not going to be tolerated again, ok, we just can't do it, black jumper, I know it means a lot to you boys, but...this old house could fall down in the next week....but it can't happen again, and it's not going to happen here again. And we'll put measures in place, next time we get together boys, as HC said, you don't want to be part of it, sweet. But we've got to get that trust back, you've got to earn that trust back...It was never going to be an easy talk, but it was something that we had to say before we split. Alright, you all need to have a think about what it means to be here, there's a chance to be together again back in January, Anzac test isn't far away, but between now and then, think about whether you want to be part of the group and the sacrifices that you'll need to make.
(HPD, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

The meeting served as a significant site for sensemaking and sensegiving as people challenged the ideological foundations of the team (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), and ensuing uncertainty and ambiguity polarised people (Weick, 1995). The meeting left players and management

fragmented, frustrated and angry, with some players appearing paranoid, edgy or volatile with the events and confrontation. Certain players perceived it to be a 'witch hunt' or an exercise in finger pointing, maintaining the belief that it should not matter as long as you train hard and deliver the goods on the field, while another refused to speak to or shake hands with management before leaving,

They're in denial, [senior player] hasn't spoken to any staff since, he ignored [S7] and refused to shake your hand when getting in a taxi for the airport – he failed to look me and S6 in the eyes when shaking ours...he feels it's our problem and we haven't handled it well and have made a huge issue out of nothing. He's in denial.

(HPD, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

One player commented that the final meeting “*killed everyone's buzz and the whole enjoyment of the trip. Most people split last night and went off on their own, in small groups, rather than as a group*” (P19, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). This episode raised confronting questions as to whether intention of the intervention, a framework of meanings that facilitated a shared and well-aligned performance philosophy and belief system had been achieved within the HPU.

Monitoring and Evaluating *Te Iwi Kiwi* Intervention and Action

Whereas monitoring action during Chapter Five focused almost exclusively on the sensemaking and action of HPU leaders in response to the PD visit, monitoring the implementation of *Te Iwi Kiwi* with the HPU focused upon understanding both the sensegiving and sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005) of participants (including HPU leaders) as they made sense of the intervention in the context of competing for a world championship. The data highlighted that *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention, in the way it was implemented and revisited (or not revisited) had little observable influence upon players' shared meanings, beliefs, behaviours and practices during the length of this action cycle.

Analysis revealed participants' sensemaking (and sensegiving) and consequently meaning of the intervention was influenced by an interrelation between HPU leaders' mediated sensegiving (conscious efforts to influence participant sensemaking) and unmediated sensegiving (unconscious actions that influenced participant sensemaking). The sensemaking context in which *Te Iwi Kiwi* was implemented was also framed and shaped by the extant meaning systems both internal and external to the HPU, and emergent power structures, particularly player power and agency. Sensemaking emerged as a subtle process (Weick et al., 2005) where perceived insignificant social encounters and events obstructed the intended meanings and efficacy of the intervention, and over time gathered momentum and became unmanageable. First it is important to analyse the impact of sensegiving attempts linked to the intervention.

Sensegiving Practices

Mediated sensegiving. Following the start in Sydney, where the intervention was introduced in a collaborative and engaging fashion, despite good intentions on behalf of HC and HPD, little meaningful sensegiving was mediated by these change agents once the team arrived in the UK. The three-day camp in Sydney was a period where mediated sensegiving towards the intervention and its meanings were overt, clear and sustained. However, after CA's departure at the end of those three days, this early intervention energy and enthusiasm ceased once the team arrived in the UK. While the intervention was referenced periodically throughout, the meanings were not revisited or overtly practiced at all during the eight weeks of the world cup campaign.

Attempts at mediated sensegiving first included players exploring their connection to New Zealand and what it meant to be part of the team. Second, they were introduced to the *Te Iwi Kiwi* wharenui and the banners featuring each player, their heritage and place in the wharenui, that were hung up in all team rooms and changing rooms. Third, the players learned, practiced and performed the new haka. Fourth, the coaches and later players generally used *Tainui* and *Poua* in place of attack and defence and positional groups had some say in setting goals for performance and reviewing them. Finally, players met and heard speeches from ex-players. However in response to the intervention and these mediated sensegiving attempts, there was little evidence of the required shared sensemaking needed to construct the desired shared meanings (Weick, 2009), and subsequently there was no identifiable behaviour or discourse change.

Despite attempts as subtle influence and collaboration on behalf the researcher, the central idea of players belonging to a pou within the wharenui and the pous being responsible for certain parts of on-field performance was not actioned. Neither were the planned off-field events where players belonged to or worked as their pou. Holding the assumption that co-construction is at the fulcrum of the collective sensemaking that frames shared meaning (Abolafia, 2010), a major missing link was a shared constructed interpretation of the actual meaning of the intervention. It appeared that the haka was the only 'meaning' actioned. If meaning is constructed through doing and experiencing (Driver, 2007b) and relationships between self and others (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), the data supported research in both the corporate and the high performance sport arenas recommending that involving change recipients in meaning construction is essential if managed change efforts are to be successful (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Cruickshank et al., 2014). The importance placed upon collaboration and ownership during the intervention planning did not materialise and therefore the intervention and change was not sustained. Players became passive recipients of the intervention in a largely prescriptive coaching environment where the *Te Iwi Kiwi* was reduced to superficial links made by coaches and players through vocabulary. It has been suggested that collective meaning is the product of a homogenous schema (Ericson, 2001), and that people bracket certain environmental cues over others (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Considering this, collaboration and co-construction was a critical missing part (Abolafia, 2010) for participants to be able to bracket the same issue, label it with the same meaning and share that understanding (Ericson, 2001; Weick, 2009). The findings reflect earlier research that reported effective sensemaking and meaning transformation as the product of practice that goes beyond actions taken by leaders and engages those whose daily life will be affected by change, in this case, the players (Nag et al., 2007). Resulting from a lack of collaboration and engagement, players seldom enacted the intervention, shared the same interpretation of events, constructed shared meaning of the intervention and sustained the desired change,

As for Te Iwi Kiwi, it seems to have died a death, the only remaining relic is the new haka, which does seem to a pretty powerful symbol of the team's league identity but do the boys like it because they like haka or do they understand and believe in its meaning? As for the whare, the poster and the pous, it's slowly died. No one talks about it really, just throwaway terms. We've just got to Leeds (week four of seven), there's no whare poster up and concepts are referred to less and less, the pou idea has fallen away, no teams, no group analysis.

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)

For participants, this manifested as a sense of lost ownership and meaning, and subsequently inhibited the sustainability of the intervention and desired change,

Once we left [CA] or he left us, it was like I think that means that, yeah I'm pretty sure, but we just kept referring to it, oh yeah, here's our house, here's our pou, but then, after it was like what does that mean again?...I think we probably needed to keep reiterating

what it stood for, because I think we didn't even, you know, we would say, this is our house, that's our house, but what does that mean though?...Like even me, and I'm Māori, if I think back I think, I know it meant something, but I couldn't tell you exactly what...
(S3, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Where collaboration and member engagement is high, meaning negotiations are complex. Iterative constructions between members takes time, however once members negotiate a shared understanding, these meanings become enduring (Maitlis, 2005). It is important to note that while some of the meanings of the intervention were shared and sustained (e.g., the haka), others held at first a tacit and superficial interpretation, which later became non-evident.

The data offered an example of minimal sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005) which is classified by little engagement between stakeholders, low levels of emotive action towards issues open to sensemaking and low control by leaders and members associated with the process. Due to minimal sensegiving from leaders and members, the flow of information and awareness about the intervention was limited, and as the data highlighted, few participants knew the details (meanings) of the intervention. Prescriptive leadership interspersed with occasional superficial leader sensegiving presented a completed construction of the 'wharenuī', which considering previous research is likely to have been perceived by participants as an issue near resolution, thus not important for challenging, questioning or doubting; the triggers for sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 2010).

A technocratic approach to change and sensegiving was documented. Technocratic approaches are reported to fail in acknowledging the importance of middle manager and change recipient meaning constructions in the change process, and subsequently marginalise the idea of organisations as an emotional and social arena (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). The resultant mediated sensegiving, primarily by HPU leaders, and later by players used abstract vocabulary and neutral, anodyne verbal performances, stories and actions. Consequently, the intervention and its resultant narrative lacked the richness of CA's accounts and contributions during planning and the three days he spent with the HPU. Mediated sensegiving practices with the HPU were devoid of emotionality, expression and deeper meaning, and contributed to little "cultural thickness", offered little intensity of symbolic meanings (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008, p. 99) and subsequently failed to trigger sensemaking (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) and collective action (Weick, 1995; 2009).

Minimal sensemaking seemed to be compounded by the continued unintentional iteration of 'The Kiwi Way' narrative by management and players and HC's introduction of well-intended but new meanings unrelated to the intervention, such as the motivational quotes in the team room. These unrelated meanings further marginalised and obscured *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention as I reflected on my own sensemaking,

You've got 'The Kiwi Way', I still hear players and HC refer to it as "that's not 'The Kiwi way'", and now you've got the random motivational quotes in the meeting rooms. Great quotes but so what? What do they mean, what's the reference to the overall theme of 'building a whare' and Te Iwi Kiwi – why are we adding extra things when we haven't even discussed or practiced the meaning of the whare? They're not in conflict but they are competing for a narrative. I asked a few players, some hadn't noticed the quotes whilst one said "we love posters don't we, have a look around".

(Reflexive Diary, RLWC Week Three, October 2013)

Highlighted in Chapters' Four and Five, the presence of too many meanings inhibited and restricted sensemaking as it increased equivocality rather than reduced it (Weick, 1995). As a result of minimal sensemaking, participants failed to offer spontaneous constructions of issues, whilst leaders neither encouraged them or put forward their own interpretations (Maitlis, 2005),

I think to be lived and breathed and talk it and walk it. We didn't have that, so we just got hey, this is this, this is what it means, we do our haka, and see you on your journey, well wishes and always think to refer back to this but, it was the next step it broke down. I saw a lot of potential in it, I really did, but we just didn't come back to "what does this mean".
(P11, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Interpretations or accounts are the product of engaged sensemaking and act as discursive resources for organisational members to make sense of an experience (Weick, 1993). Minimal sensemaking produced "nominal accounts" amongst participants, ones that provided a token understanding and a weak, limited foundation for collective action (Maitlis, 2005, p. 42),

To be honest with you mate, I don't think the building a house, whare (Māori house), what do you call it; Te Iwi Kiwi thing has taken off. It's just another poster on the wall really. It's interesting and that but what does it really mean? The haka has been better; the boys have definitely bought into that...can't really put my finger on it, but, to be honest. Who doesn't like a haka? (P11, Interview, RLWC Week Three, October 2013)

The data highlighted that nominal accounts do little to cultivate either reasons for action (motivation) or creativity in problem solving (imagination) (Maitlis, 2005) as the intervention became perceived as a 'one-off' event (Brooks & Bate, 1994).

Sensebreaking forms an important part of sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013), motivating people to re-consider the existing meanings and underlying assumptions. Supporting earlier work (Brooks & Bate, 1994), the mediated sensegiving underpinning the intervention did little to disrupt the normal flow of daily events, or trigger sensebreaking. Thus there was no recognition that existing behaviours were not working. With little 'felt' need to change, the intervention as a change catalyst was dismissed.

As part of facilitating a shared interpretation of *Te Iwi Kiwi*, the lack of a tangible link between the intervention and on-field performance inhibited sensemaking amongst participants,

What's the point in having it if it's not linked to performance and we don't recognise who lives it? What's Te Iwi Kiwi? I've got a sense it kind of resonates with the boys, but what I think is missing is the behaviours that flick out of it, what does Te Iwi Kiwi look like for us in terms of on and off-field performance? How do we live and breathe what's on the wall? At the moment, it doesn't mean anything. Well it doesn't to me anyway, and it doesn't to us as a group, it will mean some things to boys individually I'm sure.

(P12, Interview, RLWC Week Six, November 2013)

It could be argued that the vagueness amongst participants about what the intervention meant for tangible action, behaviour and performance created a meaning vacuum that influenced the lack of energy to embrace the intervention and also participants' readiness to contribute their own interpretations. Developing the link between the intervention and on-field performance would have offered the HPU leaders an opportunity to triangulate desired meanings and interpretations about what was held important, rather than leaving participants to speculate (Frontiera, 2010). Indeed, in high performance sport culture research, it has been reported that in successful culture change that sustains a high performing culture, performance leaders (coaches, performance directors and CEOs) continuously link all elements of performance (processes, systems and structures) to the new or reconstructed meanings, beliefs and norms (Cruickshank et al., 2014).

The importance of linking the intervention to on-field performance was highlighted in P11's assessment, "*I don't give a s**t about all of that [the wharenui]. I know it's important for some players or some players like that sort I'd thing, but really mate, to be honest, I just want to win, that's why I'm here, you see it in all the good players*" (Interview, RLWC Week Three, November 2013). If sensemaking is an enacted experience, players did not experience the intervention in an embodied sense (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). In sensemaking and strategic

change, what is done as a collective is as important as the cognitive dimension (members beliefs) of organisational meaning (sensegiving) (Nag et al., 2007). Through the intervention, leaders failed to clearly establish the critical link between who the team's identity (who they wanted to be) and behaviour (how they did things) (Nag et al., 2007). Similarly, the data highlighted very little change in the daily or structural operations of the team.

The ineffectiveness in triggering meaning construction from mediated sensegiving efforts was the reflection of insufficient attention and resources devoted to process by the HPU leaders (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). This also highlighted the importance of process, and how leaders might mediate sensegiving to construct or renegotiate meanings.

Unmediated sensegiving. While efforts were made to facilitate sensemaking through leader-mediated sensegiving (narrative, metaphors, posters and language), unmediated sensegiving was the most significant trigger for sensemaking with the HPU. Behaviour and actions formed powerful triggers, as P12 commented, *"I'm a firm believer that behaviour drives everything. We all see what people do."* (Interview, RLWC Week Four, November 2013). As previously highlighted, sensemaking starts with noticing and bracketing, and then labelling an experience (Weick et al., 2005). It is essential for high performance sport organisations to delineate what types of actions draw participant attention before a belief structure can be imposed on the action to generate meaning (Carey, 2013). Participants were most sensitive to the behavioural cues of others, as P11 summarised, *"you know what, it's not what anyone says, it's what they do, well actually, sometimes more importantly, what they don't do"* (Interview, RLWC Week Three, November 2013). The findings support Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory that places either the action or the outcome as the starting point for any sensemaking, as beliefs are altered to construct a sensible interpretation for the outcome or the action. As participants made sense of experience, players' behaviour fulfilled roles as both an unmediated triggers for noticing, and also sites for questioning, doubting and updating beliefs (Weick, 2010). For example, the late selection decision,

You gotta ask why is he here? Why has he done it this way round? Is he committed to the team? What does it mean for our brother who's been left out? I don't know. But we'll find out by the way he acts now we're all here together.

(P14, Interview, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

Behaviour acted as a symbolic record of action (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985) and highlighted that organisational members actively interpreted and remembered what people did or did not do towards them (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). The role of behaviour as a central sensemaking trigger is pertinent when considering that actions and beliefs are synergistic (Weick, 2009), meanings are destroyed through action taking, and in particular, action taking that contradicts pre-existing or espoused meanings (Gray et al., 1985). The central role of behaviour reinforces that organisations are enacted (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985) and that meaning is constructed by doing and experiencing (Driver, 2007b; Weick et al., 2005). Players were not passive agents, watching and interpreting from a distance, they were actively involved, talking, gossiping and questioning each other's and management's behaviour,

I wonder sometimes whether coaches are scared of upsetting players or the way they may react, that certain players need a cuddle. There is some truth in that but you can't treat players differently for the same mistake, you either treat everyone fairly with some tough love and people get tough or you cuddle everyone and we all get soft.

(P12, Interview, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)

For Wrzesniewski et al. (2003), behaviour acts as affirming or disaffirming interpersonal cues that organisational members use to assign meaning to an equivocal situation. The power of behaviour as cue for sensemaking within a high performance team lies in its public, irrevocable

and volitional nature (Weick, 1988). Where actions are not visible or permanent, they can be casually explained with transient interpretations, however where actions are more public, such as behaviour, explanations are less casual and harder to disown (Weick, 1988),

*Good players might not believe in something the coach does but will follow through with it because of the wider impacts of moaning on the rest of the team – they address it in the right way – or they go a different way around it rather than moaning...Again, you need leaders who lead well. It's not what they say; it's what they do. You're pushing s**t uphill if you've got leaders/senior players of influence who do not set absolute standards of performance.* (P11, Interview, RLWC Week Three, November 2013)

Notable staff absences in pre-world cup teleconferences, the beginning of the campaign, and the Toi moko ceremony served as another example of unmediated sensegiving through behavioural clues. These behaviours were pertinent unmediated sensegiving triggers because they allowed participants to connect the abstract and presumed, for example, “*this is what we stand for*” (HC, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Two, October 2013) with the concrete behaviour of participants (Weick et al., 2005). Behaviour offered a tangible anchor for sensemaking amongst fragmented and multiple interpretations (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). The role of behaviour in sensemaking highlighted the “everyday, embodied moment-to-moment” ways players (and management) made sense of their experience in the team through interacting with others and often in mundane situations (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 83).

Despite considerable effort and thought given to the design and implementation of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention, perception of actions and behaviour highlighted that any event may be interpreted (Choo, 1996; Rentsch, 1990) and that high performance sport managers need to be sensitive to subtle events such as behaviour. Indeed, particular participant attention was directed towards the sensegiving influence of the coaches’ (and to a lesser extent HPD’s) behaviours and actions. It was clear participants looked to the decisions and actions of HC in particular to guide their interpretations and communicate meaning,

Players all look to the head coach for the behavioural test. Why would they not! After all, he's the one that selects us. He communicates what's acceptable and what's not. I like to think coz I'm older, I've been around, I know what's right and wrong, but I'm probably as bad as the rest of them taking the lead of the head coach.

(P14, Interview, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)

The symbolic impact of a positional leader’s behaviour upon sensemaking (Carey, 2013), culture (Frontiera, 2010) and effective meaning change is widely reported in the literature. In the eyes of the participants, the coaches and HPD assumed the role of cultural architects and were central in the efficacy of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention. It was reported that any cultural intervention needed to be “*leader driven, or in our case, driven by the head coach*” (S3, Interview, RLWC Week Six, November 2013) and “*To me, for a head coach, driving culture is as important if not more important than driving the football stuff*” (S6, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). Considering the sensegiving influence of the actions and behaviours of HC, it was also reported that the intervention was impeded by a lack of leadership when implementing it,

The key drivers for the house had to be HC and HPD because they are probably our leaders, C2 was more like a caretaker, I would see him in that role, not so much as there long enough to have that mantle...but there wasn't that someone that when they spoke it, you could go, oh yeah, I feel that...then it was just a “yeah this is it, Te Iwi Kiwi. Cheers let go train”...it's part of everything. You live it, breathe it, talk it, and I always envisaged this [Te Iwi Kiwi] permeating through the football, you know...if we all did it, if we all really did it, being led by someone driving it, then it could have had a totally different effect. But I think at the end of it, we paid it lip service in the end. It just became a poster on the wall. (S3, Interview, RLWC Week Five, November 2013)

By right of job role, a coach is endowed with “declarative powers” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 143) and holds a privileged position where his or her actions have a strong symbolic component that serves to facilitate change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, it is reported that leaders are not always cognisant of what is interpreted and what is not and its effect upon meaning construction (Rentsch, 1990). For a high performance sport team, it is clear that the head coach is both a sensemaker and sensegiver and occupies a significantly important strategic role (Carey, 2013). The findings echo Limerick’s (1990) research which reported that “the influence of the top person in the organisation is quite frightening really” (p. 30). Whilst many of the findings of this phase reinforced the understanding that sensemaking is a complex dialogic process rather than a top-down imposition (Carey, 2013), the data also highlighted the synergistic relationship existed between member sensemaking and the sensegiving influence of the head coach, assistant coach and team manager’s (unmediated/unconscious) behaviours and actions.

It is clear that highly visible, self-modelling of the intervention by the head coach (and HPD) would have been a powerful sensegiving trigger (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Hope, 2010). In doing so, he would have come to embody, through the planned symbolic discourse, the desired meanings and values conducive to organisational change and enhanced performance (Armenakis & Harris, 2009),

We shouldn’t underestimate the importance of the leadership of HPD and HC in culture and change, they need to help narrate it, it won’t just happen, they need to constantly frame the day within the ideas and go back to them – but in way more detail and way more strategically than they are now – it’s not enough to just keep saying build our house – they, in particular need to bring that to life – and to do that, they have to say why more – to allow everybody to gain some consensus on why something is what it is.

(S2, Interview, RLWC Week Three, October 2013)

Self-modelling communicates the belief that the formal leader is committed to the success of an intervention and “that it is not going to be another passing fad or program of the month” (Armenakis & Harris, 2009, p. 129), as S3 commented, “*if it doesn’t become part of our programme, then it just disappears into nothing – and first and foremost that’s got to be driven by the head coach*” (S3, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) documented that to achieve sustainable change leaders need to “keep cultural themes on the agenda, there is a need for ongoing work” and to “avoid ‘ticking off’ culture work” (p. 179). While this could be perceived as leveraging power to author a desired interpretation (Long & Mills, 2010), exercising positional power to communicate ideological beliefs has been shown to mitigate subversive subculture development and trigger sensemaking amongst front line employees (Hope, 2010). In the context of culture change in high performance sport, a leader regulated power-based social system alongside enduring management of multi-directional stakeholder perceptions is seen as essential for optimal change efforts (Cruickshank et al., 2014).

Building on the perceptions of participants that the intervention needed to be driven by the head coach (and to a lesser extent the team manager/HPD), with the introduction of both the first consultant and the second consultant, there was some ambiguity surrounding the responsibility for cultural leadership, as HPD commented “*after all she’s [psychology consultant] driving our culture really*” (HPD, Interview, RLWC Week One, October 2013) and “*when he [CA] didn’t come, we had no-one who could really drive it [Te Iwi Kiwi] intervention*” (HPD, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). Furthermore, HPD reflected upon some perceived pragmatic challenges faced by a contemporary professional rugby league coach,

When I was assistant coach you weren't actually thinking about it [culture]...you get very tunnel vision in terms of right...we got a game coming up, we need to be working on this, and you actually forget about the big picture. You lose sight of all the stuff we planned and what we said we'd do [in relation to the intervention].

(HPD, Interview, RLWC Week Six, November 2013)

The outsourcing of cultural leadership to consultants coupled with a narrow role perception held by coaches risked the subconscious abdication of responsibility for the subtle but integral task of symbolic leadership (Hope, 2010; Limerick, 1990; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). For a head coach, as a driver of intentional change (Goosby-Smith, 2009), it is clear, he (or she) cannot avoid the responsibility of communicating meaning because by positional default their behaviours and interpretations become events that organisational members interpret (Limerick, 1990; Schein, 2004; Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

Actions from the cultural architects (HC, C2 and HPD) that gave rise to ambiguity and inconsistency triggered unmediated sensegiving that focused attention and heightened emotion, but inhibited shared sensemaking and collective action. Linking with behaviour, ambiguity about behavioural standards was interpreted through player selection,

I reckon the biggest card a coach has got to change behaviour is selection, if a blokes not selected he'll soon change, especially if it's made clear and shared openly, I reckon when it's like that you have less behaviour issues, drinking and that, missing recovery and stuff. But you need to be clear as to why – “you missed 2 tackles, you're not playing”, at least if that is what matters and we all know, and its open and clear, then you know how to get better and why you haven't been selected...a lot of egos, so you have to be crystal clear about stuff and why players aren't picked.

(P11, Interview, RLWC Week Three, October 2013)

And also by management,

*I'm still looking for clarity over things. I'm unsure what matters because it hasn't been raised or discussed openly. For example, players buying burger king and lollies for themselves and others, eating poorly postgame, and buying s**t food at the service station, I went to the effort of searching and finding that service station because it had healthy food options. I don't know whether it's my place to pull these things up or whether it really matters to those higher up...The root of a lot of these issues, for me, is poor communication from HC, and S9...and if there is, it lacks clarity and is broad and brief, this leads to issues raised in the moment-assumption and educated guesswork...I've just had no feedback, little direction, any direction was late and rushed or secondary feedback from the reactions to his work. I just feel HC is warm and humorous with the players yet quite cold and stand offish with me. You just can't get a read, especially for new staff, you just don't know where the goal posts are.*

(S6, Interview, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)

For the intervention to change the existing culture, leaders of the HPU needed to present a consistent and credible value system (Cardador & Rupp, 2010). This is contextualised in the high performance sport literature, where it is essential that performance staff are able to present a consistent united front so that athletes remain confident in the quality of service and support they are receiving (Collins et al., 2013). The interpretations from participants suggested perceived contradictions, part-truths and platitudes. Participants did not explicitly notice meaning, what they did not notice was violations of meaning. Weick et al. (2005) warned that without careful thought, clarity and consistency, what is plausible for one group, for example, the coaches, may prove implausible for another group, such as players. As Balogun and Johnson (2005) found, actors have to translate top-down intent into their own realities, therefore managing change should not focus upon detail but a clear, consistent and shared understanding of purpose, expectations and conditions. This is reported in the high performance sport literature where a lack of clarity of role purpose amongst performance staff

and the ensuing ambiguity leads to negative conflict that negatively impacts performance (Collins et al., 2013). The mediated sensegiving towards the intervention by HC did not trigger player sensemaking and the desired meaning construction. This significantly limited the efficacy of the intervention in promoting a high performing culture within the HPU.

As much of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention was not actioned as planned, I also focused my attention on the messages, actions and statements that covertly shaped the sensemaking landscape and triggered participant meaning construction. It was quickly evident that players' participation in the HPU did not exist in a vacuum (Hardy et al., 1996); they were connected to a broader, deeply embedded system of meanings both internal and external to the HPU.

Extant Meaning Systems

The intervention appeared to be perceived as so similar to the existing meanings that this failed to trigger sensemaking and meaning change since participants were not required to question, doubt or update existing understandings (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Weick, 2010). It was not surprising that there was a congruence of meanings reflecting the findings of phase one and two, where players talked of representing family, 'brothers' and country. However, embedded meanings both internal and external to the HPU shaped the players' reception and sensemaking of the intervention.

External. The reported relationships between the HPU members, players and management, and the meanings they attach to the national team were evidence of loose-couplings in organisations (Douglas & Weick, 1990). Players (and management) did not join the HPU in isolation; they brought existing meanings from their own personal social construction and experience from diverse backgrounds and domestic clubs, where "*players are a reflection of their clubs*" (HPD, Interview, RLWC Week Two, October 2013). The efficacy of the intervention was framed by external meanings, such as how the culture of rugby league treats young players as superstars, the impact of club failure or success upon players' attitudes and behaviours and management personnel attitude to change,

Each athlete and staff member brings with them deeply held habits and cultural norms and we ask them to shift to 'The Kiwi Way' immediately. For some this represents more independence or discipline, for others, less. People's habits around self-management, lifestyle, and resilience are more visible, and individual values, beliefs and interests are more likely to come to the fore over six or seven week stints...There are always multiple cultures or value combinations at play in a squad that can complement but also compete with the overall 'organisational' (Kiwi) culture. For the Kiwi squad, those multiple cultures included the overarching NRL culture, individual club cultures, as well as personal and family cultures of players and staff.

(S2, Report, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Tsoukas and Chia (2002) highlighted the importance of understanding local circumstances and the social background when making sense of a group's shared experience. The meanings players brought with them from their clubs served as a form of cultural inertia and resistance that served to attenuate the intervention (Scott et al., 2003). Not only did the "old schemata" or existing ways of thinking frame sensemaking (Balogun & Johnson, 2005, p. 1586), the external meanings indicated that not only actors within the HPU but outside its boundaries engaged in sensegiving with participants that shaped their meanings, beliefs and interpretation of the *Te Iwi Kiwi* (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). These well-established and enduring meaning frameworks inhibited sensemaking for participants and proved a challenge to the manager-led change intervention (Bartunek et al., 1999; Brooks & Bate, 1994). The coaches were not immune, unintentionally demonstrating pre-existing meanings through the accidental use of club vocabulary and jargon that conflicted with the intervention's cultural narrative. Despite coaches'

efforts to use new language to reframe discourse and meaning, language in a change effort does not enter a discursive vacuum, the effect of narrative is dependent upon its interaction with the existing cultural objects and subjects (Dunford & Jones, 2000).

As part of the wider social context of meanings, previous external experience framed and shaped sensemaking and resultant beliefs and action (Weick, 1995) about rugby league, *“Warm ups weren’t NRL standard and the facilities weren’t up to NRL standards either”* (P21, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). It is clear that pre-existing participant knowledge shaped sensemaking and the impact of *Te Iwi Kiwi* initiative (Mantere et al., 2012) and the participants reconstruction and communication of it (Rouleau, 2005). Of particular relevance was how players’ previous experience of ‘cultural interventions’ influenced their sensemaking, especially considering this was the second cultural intervention and external ‘culture’ consultant used within three campaigns,

*Senior boys will be more difficult than these boys in terms of grabbing hold of it [Te Iwi Kiwi] because they got their minds full of heaps of other stuff. They’d have done a lot of this sort of stuff before; they’ll be cautious and sceptical. If they’ve got bad experiences or if a few aren’t into this, it could become a bit of a p*sstake. Which is not what we want.*
(HPD, Interview, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

In situations of managed change, previous sensemaking experiences and past history influence the present on the acceptance and rejection of symbolic management (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Mantere et al. (2012) found that the previous strategies and interventions communicated by managers persist as ‘meaning residuals’ in the minds of organisation members and constrained future symbolic actions; “what managers say and do today to change an organisation, they will encounter in their change endeavours tomorrow” (p. 189).

At a macro sport cultural level, there was evidence of prevailing meanings embedded within rugby league impacting sensemaking within the HPU. An off-field behavioural ‘looseness’ was normalised and located within the cultural fabric of rugby league, as further evidenced by off-field incidents amongst other international and professional teams (Jackson, 2014; Laybourn, 2013). These beliefs were rationalised and reconstructed by participants and leaders while making sense of the player recreational use of sleeping medication,

It’s a practice that is commonly used in terms of recovery, not by all players but certainly a number of players throughout our whole competition, NRL competition even. I guess it’s to help them come down at stages after games.

(HC, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

And the prevailing beliefs attached to ‘team bonding’, the role of alcohol in this cultural practice and the performance benefits,

[Australia] they had significant ‘release’ [drinking] sessions immediately after games all the way to the final. I think these sessions are important especially away from home. I thought we missed these after our quarter and semi-final victories.

(HC, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

S2 reflected on the broader context of rugby league culture and its unavoidable influence upon participant sensemaking and the team’s culture,

Athletes are also indoctrinated into culture where ‘extreme’ is normalised, in training, playing and recovery...The ‘work hard, play hard’ mantra has long been associated with sport...‘Loose’ behaviour off field in terms of intoxication and release has been seen as part of bonding, fun, ‘proving’ of character, ‘earned reward’, induction of new team members, celebrating victory or commiserating defeat and simply a catharsis from the metaphorical battle of the day.
(S2, Report, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Accompanying these culturally defined meanings was a set of prescribed beliefs and behaviours,

I'm not even sure if they can see it, or draw links – it's like the alcohol ban, they all agreed on this alcohol ban and abstaining from drinking but did they really understand why it was important or the reasons behind it, or did they all do it because they felt or thought it was the right thing to do? Coz that's what high performance team do? Similar to the prayer concept – before the game, suddenly they're all religious – they ain't – they just come in because they feel that's what they should do. I just don't think they see it – they just go along with it because that's what they think us as coaches and staff want, and what they should do because they've heard of other teams doing it.

(C2, Management Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

The data highlighted that even when discrepant cues challenged the groups identity or goals, this still did not trigger sensemaking because the existing culture mitigated against it (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). These prevailing external discourses highlight the interaction between local and macro social contexts, and question whether the loosely-coupled meanings of team members were actually open to influence by managerial intervention (Shamir, 1991). It is reported that many organisational meanings, roles, practices and behaviours reproduce social judgement and values that originate to some extent outside the organisation (Scott et al., 2003; Shamir, 1991). Professional values and beliefs affirmed over years of socialisation are embedded in the fabric of organisations and industries and are resilient enough to frustrate attempts to manage change, particularly from above (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). These institutionalised external cultural expectations and beliefs contributed considerable cultural inertia that inhibited the intervention and desired change.

Internal. Continuing the theme of a cultural infrastructure and inertia created by existing meanings, internally, the existing 'brotherhood' narrative (Chapter Four) influenced the efficacy of the intervention as it constructed a strong positive identity for HPU members and a deeply held set of beliefs, where *"team chemistry and cohesion – that's what we're about; everyone was very close which helped on the field"* (P9, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). Sensemaking is inhibited when individual or collective identity is strong and positive because "individuals and collectives become buffered from potential sensegiving triggers" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013, p. 78). The emotion invested in a particular narrative or meaning system can derail sensemaking. Previous studies reported existing dominant cultural orientations to act as a social defence to change, manifesting not as resistance or avoidance but, as reported here, disregard and unstudied indifference (Brooks & Bate, 1994). In some instances strong identities create severe decoupling and disconnections in terms of the sensemaking of key actors (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008), and normalise and accommodate discrepant cues (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). While the positive emotions attached to the 'brotherhood' discourse provided valuable cultural energy, its intensity and temporally transcendent nature meant it was blinding to leaders and members (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The loyalty and bond shared amongst players manifested in what S2 referred to as the 'shush club',

The 'shush club' is certainly a force that works against forced accountability. Being disloyal or 'throwing someone under the bus' is an absolute no-go zone in many teams and this is exaggerated greatly for players that are young or less established in talent or tenure than others...In the Kiwi camp this strong bond of player's loyalty thwarted the management's ability to get the facts and not leap at shadows once suspicions started to arise. In reality, it was only the extent of the positive relationships and shared agenda between the staff and some of the players that broke this nexus in the final weeks.
(S2, Report, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

The 'shush club' was a working example of Argyris and Schön's (1974) cognitive rationality, where individuals withhold information and suppress feelings to protect others. Cognitive

rationality is a learned process that is embedded in the shared expectations about how a culture operates. The loyalty to the 'brotherhood' demonstrated by players was an example of the strength and sacred nature of ideological commitments and how they can constrain an organisation's ability to adapt to environmental jolts and events (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003).

Power Flows and Player Agency

As the intervention with the HPU unfolded, it became evident that power flows and player agency shaped the sensemaking and sensegiving of participants,

I'm not worried about [the intervention], just cautious and a little concerned...because of the unknown quantity that is player behaviour...P12 and P14 are on my radar, because they have the potential to, if they don't buy-in or perceive [Te Iwi Kiwi's] meaning, they're so influential that they could in part derail the whole...thing.

(HPD, Interview, RLWC Week One, October 2013)

Sensemaking and sensegiving are inherently political activities as they focus upon privileging certain meanings and discourses (Long & Mills, 2010) and controlling definitions of social reality and meaning construction for others (Hope, 2010). As the world cup progressed, some players were cognisant to the issue of player power and agency in the team's performance,

There's lot of ego in a national team that you don't tend to get so much in a club environment...you get to this level, you know how good you are...[at club level] you get guys who are just grateful to be there, so those blokes will do whatever it takes, say yes to coaches and support staff and work so hard, a) because they have to but b) because they appreciate being there. (P12, Interview, RLWC Week Four, November 2013)

Another player brought up power and player agency through personal agendas when asked about the intervention,

Bought into it, oh yeah...most, not all, everyone's got their agendas bro...what people say and what people think isn't always the same. I suppose it's just finding a way to line all those agendas up [making an arrowhead with his hands] and face them in the same direction, if that's possible. (P15, Interview, RLWC Week Six, November 2013)

Continuing from phase one and two, player agency and power continued to manifest in the perception of selfish behaviours, with some players possessing a sense of entitlement,

...[Players] weren't accountable for their actions and their positions were always safe, and as a result their position in the squad and team became a right rather than a privilege and this manifested in the way the team trained, behaved and prepared over the weeks building to the semi and final.

(C2, Management Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

S2 reflected upon these issues when speaking to the players in the final team meeting,

...everything that you're speaking about is about values, so people who've chosen to be slack or take [sleeping medication] or whatever else, have valued yourself above the team, have valued their self-interest above the jumper...and that's what you've got to reflect on, because you can continue to do that, but you won't have a legacy of success, a country that's proud, all of those other things, you certainly didn't get a win, and you may have been beaten on the day by a superior opponent anyway but you'll never know what could have happened yesterday, because you didn't give yourself the chance and it's all about your values. (S2, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Despite the HPU leaders provided a 'blueprint for change', given that "those lower down the organisation are active shapers of the way initiatives develop" (Balogun & Johnson, 2005, p. 1596), any sense and subsequent behavioural routines in response to the intervention were created by the players through their interpretation. The contested nature of sensemaking highlighted an inherent instability in the meanings of organisational actions (Fiss & Zajac, 2006) and consequently meaning construction itself became a political and complex struggle where

individuals and groups sought legitimacy to gain power over the meaning that shaped perception, cognition and action (Hope, 2010). Whilst rarely overt, player power and agency remained subtle, obscure and buried in daily social life,

What I've noticed with him P18 is he knows what side his bread's buttered, and he says all the right things to all the right people...I saw him P18 saying to the boys, they were getting into the lift and they knew we had a meeting in five minutes, and he was saying come with me to my room, and they were like, no we've got a meeting in five minutes, and he was like come with me to my room man, stuff the meeting, and two of them went...I don't think they're thinking about Te Iwi Kiwi.

(S3, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Considering the subtle nature of player power within the HPU, Gray et al. (1985) argued that in planned change, participants can, despite explicitly indicating cohesion, togetherness and cooperation, resist authority and certain autocratic flows of power, such as those from management or formal player leaders. The social processes inherent within team life, including social practices (such as the off-field behaviours) mediated between intended change and the individual interpretation process (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Power flowed through those social processes and practices to legitimise and privilege particular discourses at the expense of the intended narrative of *Te Iwi Kiwi*. This was in part due to management's recognition of the performance impacting nature of players and the importance of "keeping the boys on-side" (HPD, Interview, RLWC Week Two, October 2013). Power was not located in the control of people by others (French & Raven, 1959) but in collective organisational and cultural (or sub-cultural) practices that enacted and afforded power to counter the formal discourses, (Nag et al., 2007) such as *Te Iwi Kiwi*. As part of power imbued cultural practice, the emergence of a sub-culture, centred on players from one particular club who had been very successful that year, contributed to the sensemaking landscape for participants, influencing team meanings that diverted from *Te Iwi Kiwi*,

I saw, even in that first week in Doncaster, they'd moved all the beds out of one of the rooms, had just the mattresses on the floor, and they were calling it the whare. It was all those boys for that one club. They were walking around barefoot, lying all over the floor, saying no shoes in my whare bro. It was quite funny but it was very matey, social as opposed to having standards in our house, sort of thing. Maybe it had taken on a life of its own within the walls of that group of players....And it became about taking the piss, having a laugh, being cool, eating biscuits at three in the morning and staying up late...They did and have trained well on the whole, but I just walked past the whare, same guys in there who were late for meetings. It's a little subculture I suppose or clique.

(S6, Interview, RLWC Week Five, November 2013)

The actions of individuals and the emergent 'off-field' subculture contributed to hindering the change intervention. This was demonstrated overtly, in some instances, by resisting the desired cultural narrative, but more significantly, indirectly and subtly by constructing alternative or contradictory meanings and engaging in subsequent behaviours with team members (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012). Buchanan (2008) found organisational politics are stimulated in situations where uncertainty and ambivalence are high and where meanings are inconsistent and open to interpretation. The circumstances were evident during the introduction of the intervention in Sydney and through the early stages of the campaign when the HPU first assembled. The sub-culture of players became informal but powerful meaning managers (Smircich & Morgan, 1982), indirectly assuming responsibility for communicating meaning because their behaviours became events that participants interpreted and gave meaning to (Rentsch, 1990; Schein, 2004; Weick, 1995; 2009),

Whilst a longer campaign like the world cup offers a significant advantage over one-off test in terms of coaches' ability to prepare a team, imbue a game style, and develop a team's cohesiveness, it also leaves much more room for 'sub-cultures' to appear than a one-off test match... Whether the 'sub-culture' values get much traction within the

squad will depend on the amount of influence that the people in the 'sub culture' have. If it is the big dogs and most prominent personalities that pull in a different direction, the sub culture is more likely to influence outcomes, and vice-versa. I guess our case was the former. (S2, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Power and resultant player agency and sub-culturalisation contributed to limiting the influence of the positional 'middle managers', the captain and SLG, where,

...we had the emergence of off-field issues and whilst we tried, through the players and SLG to address it, it didn't seem like it had much effect. The players didn't listen to the players, which was one of the most disappointing things.

(HC, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Middle managers are shown to be a central sensemaking and sensegiving conduits during change efforts (Hope, 2010). Previous studies indicate that successful change is more likely when change advocates were perceived by organisational members as middle level leaders rather than executives (Rouleau, 2005). Middle managers have been shown to influence the sensemaking of others by mobilising resource power, such as expertise, as a significant platform for controlling change (Hope, 2010). However, the data highlighted that while formal player leadership (middle manager) roles were ascribed, it was the flow of informal power that was able to influence player sensemaking. Highly experienced senior players were still unable to influence team members' sensemaking, shape behaviour and meaning,

*If we're going to win this world cup, we'd have to give ourselves the best chance, and we didn't, like HC said. And it's pretty s**t, especially with P4 who poured his heart out to all the boys, and you [the team] pretty much just pi**ed on him too, it's not good enough, you know that.* (P14, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

While those in positions of legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959), like managers or 'senior leaders', were empowered institutionally to introduce new meanings and facilitate forms of change, sensemaking and meaning was constrained by change recipient agency and power over sensemaking and sensegiving (Hope, 2010; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). The evidence here contradicts the traditional idea that sensegiving is a top-down and lateral process (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993), instead reframing sensegiving as multidirectional, with the behaviours of players also acting in upward direction, influencing the sensemaking of superiors, namely the SLG and senior management (Hope, 2010).

The agency shown by players highlighted the loosely coupled nature of the team (Douglas & Weick, 1990; Limerick & Cunningham, 1993) where participants had great degrees of freedom in interpreting meaning and implementing change (Weick, 1995; 2009). However, the documented player power and agency supports Hope's (2010) conclusion that in organisations the tight coupling between power and politics, and sensemaking and sensegiving, subsequently influences change outcomes. The actions of these emergent sub-cultures facilitated the construction of a discourse that shaped the performance culture. These sub-cultures assumed powerful positions that inhibited the construction of the intended *Te Iwi Kiwi* narrative and subverted (albeit not openly) the formal leadership and culture of the HPU, "*It did divide the group a bit. One thing that we've worked on so very, very hard with, is the culture, and there's no doubt it took a kick in the guts*" (HC, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). These cultural and social flows of power highlighted the inherent weakness and limitation of the intervention's design, one that intended to be collaborative, but quickly became a top-down approach to change (Brooks & Bate, 1994). Alongside the existing meanings and power structures, the success of the team created a sensemaking landscape which also frustrated change and the promotion of a high performing culture.

The Success Illusion (A Cultural Snowball)

The final contributor to the efficacy of the intervention and the team's performance culture was the team's own success during the tournament and its desensitising effect upon sensemaking,

Until about the 20 minute mark of the first half of the WC final, everyone outside of the Kiwi camp had good reason to applaud the performance, progress and culture of the 2013 Kiwi team. They had not lost a game through the campaign, conceded few points, avoided negative headlines for poor conduct off the field, presented themselves favourably with hosts, sponsors and international media, entertained and engaged their hordes of fans and supporters on and off-field, had significant presence in the international rugby league annual awards, and shown fantastic sportsmanship in the dressing rooms of their opposition on more than one occasion.

(S2, Report, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

The team's success afforded the construction of a plausible and positive narrative by players and management that the team was performing. Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) referred to this as "the success syndrome" and a "managerial trap" (p. 17), whereby organisational success facilitates complacency and arrogance and this cultural inertia then becomes a significant barrier to change. The success illusion overplayed the level of the team's performance and underplayed subtle and emerging cultural issues. These issues only became exposed when faced with more significant behavioural issues at the end of the tournament and a disappointing performance, *"I thought we played well on the whole but bad results expose cultural issues – it's only then you see how strong your culture is"* (HC, Interview, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013). It was clear through repeated cycles of justification, participants enacted a sensible world that matched their beliefs (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003), a world that was clearly not in need of change. As Long and Mills (2010) argued, "it is not the meaning per se of an event that matters as much as the faith we place in our interpretation of it, because it is faith that shapes action and gives rise to a constructed reality" (p. 330).

People are required to challenge, question, doubt a situation and to trigger sensemaking and update pre-existing knowledge and meaning structures (Weick, 2010). In similar fashion to the plausible narrative surrounding the importance of the 'brotherhood', the team's success created no challenges, questions or doubts amongst participants and so failed to trigger new sensemaking and created a false sense of cultural security (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 2010). Verbal reminders of the context of the team's performance by coaches in team meetings and training sessions, and to *"not take it for granted because we're winning, they didn't throw a lot at us"* (C2, Test Review Meeting, RLWC Week Four, November 2013), failed to trigger questioning or doubting as the players actions created both the opportunities and the constraints the team faced (Weick, 1995). Participants constructed the plausible success narrative because of the immediacy and relatively ease of winning results. These acted as confirming data (Schein, 2004) and facilitated an aura of accuracy of interpretation. From a cultural change perspective, the game results and performances understandably did not trigger the affective dissonance and subsequent survival anxiety that precedes meaning change (Frontiera, 2010; Schein, 2004; Schroeder, 2010a).

The success illusion rendered participants' sensemaking desensitised to the meanings and beliefs underpinning *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention. Unlike the heightened sensemaking HPD and HC experienced through the PD visit intervention, the environmental conditions at the world cup meant the remainder of the HPU did not experience the juxtaposition of current and aspirational states. Players and management did not experience the discomfort of disconfirming data (Schein, 2004) brought on by poor or losing performances (Frontiera, 2010) or the negative media exposure that followed some teams (Laybourn, 2013; Prosenko, 2013). Thus

participants had little reason to question or doubt the status quo of meanings at play within the culture. Furthermore, the relatively immediate success prevented players' enactment of *Te Iwi Kiwi* (as intended) and they were not able experience an explicit relationship with the intervention and positive on-field results (Frontiera, 2010).

As Choo (1996) highlighted, the enacted environment is the product of the meaning-construction process, serving as a reasonable, plausible guide for action. The enactment of the environment (for example, we are winning, so we must be fine, let's keep doing what we're doing) leads to what Weick (1979) termed "consequential moments" (p. 229), where people face the question of what to do with what they know. These moments are where individuals are either accepting of the organisational narrative or challenge it (Weick, 2009). While the dominant success narrative rendered certain subtle cultural issues 'insensible', consequential moments occurred in the final two weeks once these issues became overt and unmanageable. Some management personnel reported some of these issues early on, but the dominant success narrative meant they were not considered or questioned by management and players,

In my opinion, the whole magnitude of the issues and how they moved out of control began as a case of standards and expectations. For me it all started with eating habits – standards and expectations set by staff, it started with slack eating habits, the players eating Maccas [McDonalds], buying lollies, not getting consistent sleep, and I did bring this up early on but it was met with resistance from management staff, like they thought I was being too uptight and serious.

(S6, Interview, RLWC Week Seven, November 2013)

It is clear that the success illusion narrative constructed by participants and propagated by HPU leaders shaped attitudes towards commitment and expectations, and subsequently enacted the very environment that came to constrain collective team action and eventually performance (Weick, 1988). Management (and later players') dismissal of highlighted issues was evidence that "managers construct, rearrange, single out and demolish many 'objective' features of their surroundings. When people act they unrandomise variables, insert vestiges of orderliness and literally create their own constraints" (Weick, 1979, p. 164).

The lack of collective awareness resulting from the perceived success was particularly evident when making sense of the off-field behaviours. Local cultural beliefs caused myopia (Harris, 1994) or "collective blindness" (Brooks & Bate, 1994, p. 177) that prevented management (and players) from recognising not only significant issues but also the significance of the change intervention. In making sense of the off-field behaviours as the events of the final two weeks unfolded, a snowball effect upon standards was revealed, where issues at first (amidst the landscape of apparent success) deemed insignificant to require action, consequently snowballed into significant problems,

I think we're missing the point here, I think, it can become a, become a cancer, and you know, I didn't do everything right, I went hard for my first two games, but I'll be honest, when I sort of thought that I wasn't going to play, I went off the rails a bit, and that added to it but, it's something that we have nip in the bud.

(P20, Team Meeting, RLWC Week Eight, December 2013)

Problems beginning as inconspicuous issues highlighted that sensemaking in organisational settings "comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general and the sustained" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410).

As coaches and senior players attempted to intervene later in the tournament and address "*looseness in certain areas...and raise professional standards*" (HPD, Team Meeting,

RLWC Week Six, November 2013), it was clear the emergent habits and behaviours had undermined the intended meanings of the intervention. Choo (1996) argued that the shared interpretations that arise from sensemaking are a compromise between organisational stability and flexibility. Some equivocal elements must remain amongst meanings, however, so that the organisation can regularly doubt and update meanings to adapt to changing and different futures. The lack of regular doubting and updating influenced by the plausible success illusion narrative rendered the HPU unable to adapt to the challenges faced both on and off the field as the tournament progressed (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). These findings also highlighted the subtlety of sensemaking and that while incidents may be perceived as small, their impact upon meaning can be far reaching, as “smallness does not equate with insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have large consequences” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). Through HPU leaders dismissal of ‘small issues’ such as sleeping and dietary habits, they in fact enacted the problems that constrained them later in the tournament with respect to escalating off-field behaviour issues (Weick, 1988). The practical implication for those managing high performance sport teams or programmes is the need to be cognisant that any event is open to interpretation and even small events, such as eating habits or lateness, can carry big messages and hold big implications for performance (Weick et al., 2005).

Evaluation of Second Action-Intervention Phase (Phase Three)

From a reflective perspective, as a collaborative and embedded researcher, this second action-intervention cycle was highly thought provoking. It offered an authentic and highly organic examination of the lived experiences of members of a national sport team as they competed in a pinnacle event. This cycle allowed me to link the months of thinking, meeting, planning and collaboration on the behalf of team management, with the enactment of such plans with the national team. The result was a rich aperture to the practical challenges and highly contested environment faced by high performance sport managers in their day-to-day roles, as they endeavoured to lead a national team to international success.

Researcher Reflections: Process, Premise and Content Learning

The opportunity presented by this research phase stimulated two key content and premise learnings. First, the experience revealed the risk associated with planning change interventions for a ‘campaign’ sport team. The way the intervention unfolded with the playing team exposed the potential vulnerability of planning efforts by those leading and managing national sport teams. National sport teams are disconnected and fragmented cultures that assemble a couple of times per year for competitions. Therefore, any planning efforts by high performance sport managers are often undertaken separate to the context within which the team operates. Linking the experiences from this second intervention-action cycle with the reflections from the first intervention-action cycle, this contextual decoupling between the planning efforts and the intervention implementation was clearly evident and influential in the efficacy of the intervention. The positive experience resulting from the considerable effort, energy, time and thought given to developing the intervention constructed a grand narrative, complete with its supporting cultural architecture and built around a tight coupling between implementing the plan and member belief change. However, as revealed, the template alone was not enough, no matter how plausible it seemed to leaders. The perceived aspirational potential and optimism desensitised leaders to the importance of and attention to process, context and the influences of internal social dynamics. The result was a change intervention that was authored by HPU leaders and imposed upon participants. The subsequent initiatives were unable to significantly influence member sensemaking, prove meaningful for change recipients (players and management) or facilitate collective meaning driven behaviour. The decoupling between the plan and the practice reinforced the notion that change agents should

avoid getting caught in the “huge gap between ideals and reality...the basis of cultural change should be the meanings and orientations of the large group of employees, not the dream worlds of senior managers and consultants with little contact with the meanings and orientations expressed in everyday organisational life” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008, p. 176).

The second reflection occurred while we were training at Leeds Rhinos rugby league club and was a particularly pertinent learning moment. This was a time where as the researcher I was recording undesirable off-field behaviours rather than the impact of the intervention, and as a practitioner I was facing interpersonal challenges and ambiguity on the management team. I walked into the media room at the stadium to see quotes from former coaches and players on the wall. One particular quote struck me, made by the current England rugby union coach, Stuart Lancaster, it read,

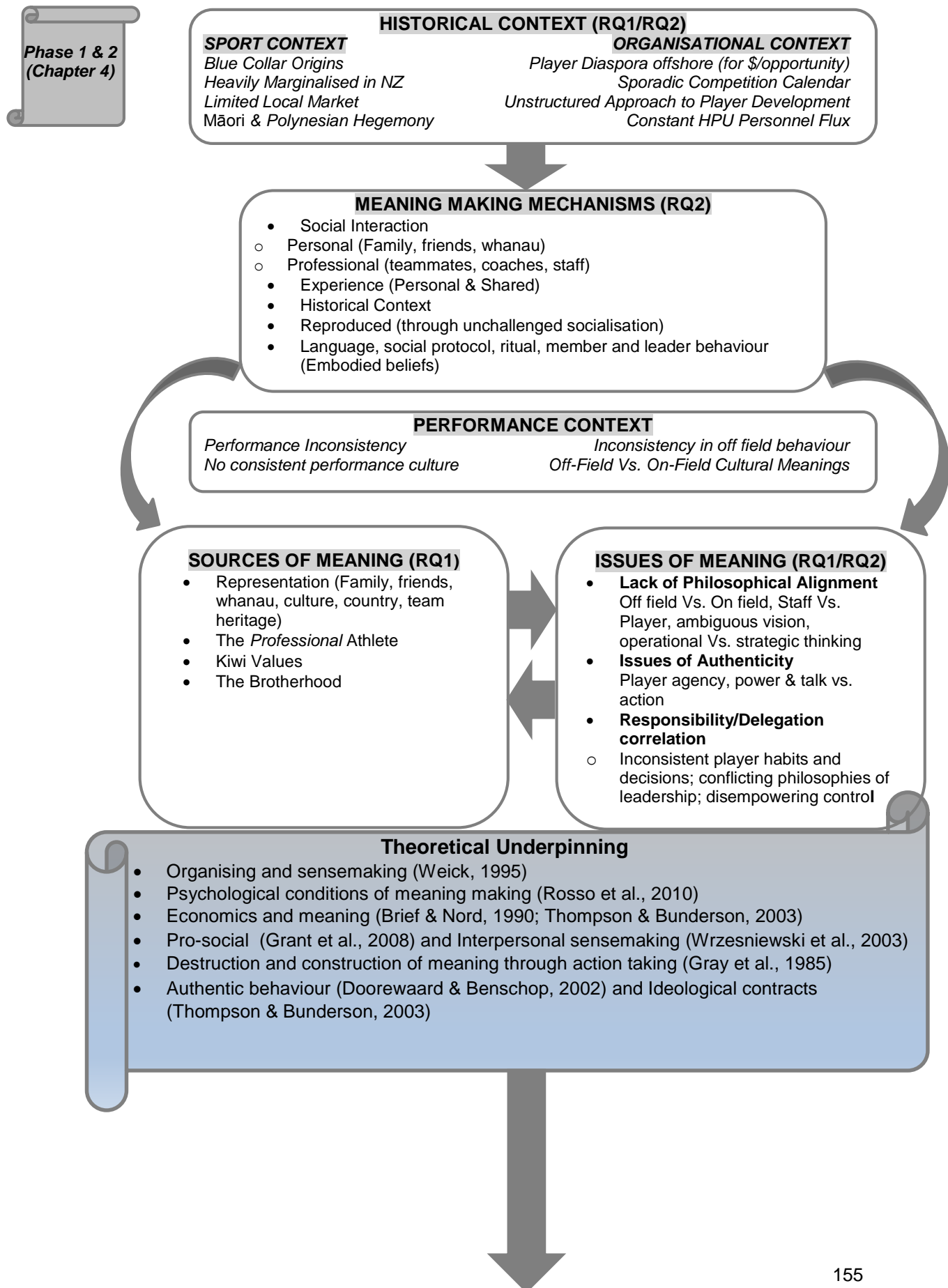
“It's the little things that make a cultural shift, not one big thing”

Given the experience I was immersed in at that point in time and the phenomena I was researching, I reflected upon the nature of the change the organisation wanted and the solution developed. While I was recording the limited influence of the intervention, I could see little events and issues, not sensible to management (and some players) affecting other players and management. These little issues led to considerable equivocality, ambiguity, disparate meaning and stuttered collective action. This highlighted first, that small events and issues should not be underestimated as they can have profound cultural impacts, positive and negative. Second, with this in mind, the change intervention privileged the grand narrative as the ‘solution’ over micro practices and local endeavour, Lancaster’s “little things”. In reflecting upon this, I challenged the dominant practice models of change in a high performance sport team where stability is normal and change is episodic, occurring in a linear fashion through successive planned and managed stages (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Weick & Quinn, 1999). While the intervention adopted an episodic design, it was the subtle events and emergent issues punctuating day-to-day experience that triggered or inhibited sensemaking. Indeed, the lens of continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999) becomes more suitable in affecting organisational change in this context. There is potential for reframing change in high performance sport teams as a process of collective becoming, and manifesting in practice as subterranean and occurring naturally, incrementally and subtly, where priority is given to daily, “microscopic change” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 580).

From a content learning perspective, the action steps undertaken by leaders acted as a form of mediated sensegiving that attempted to influence the meanings and beliefs amongst the HPU. Despite altering some practical elements of the culture (team haka, playbook vocabulary, artefacts), at the conclusion of the world cup and this research phase, it was concluded that the intervention had little observable impact upon the meanings and beliefs amongst players, and consequently, no significant influence (negative or positive) upon the performance culture of the HPU. Despite identifying existing meanings from the HPU (Chapter Four) and integrating them in a historically and culturally (Māori and Pasifika) relevant, well founded and seemingly plausible intervention (Chapter Five), the process of triggering collective sensemaking to construct new or alternative meanings was highly contextual and subject to complex and dynamic local circumstances.

The findings offered a rich application of the theories of sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), sensegiving (Bartunek et al., 1999; Humphreys et al., 2012; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) and change management (Brooks & Bate, 1994) in the context of a high performance sport team. A schematic outline of the research outcomes and relevant theoretical concepts used in this second intervention-action cycle (phase three), along with the

underpinning research outcomes from the first action cycle, and phase one and two, can be found in Figure 8.



**Phase 3
(Chapter 5)**

THE ISSUE FOR ACTION: *Philosophical Alignment*
(How the HPU can develop philosophical alignment across internal stakeholders as a means of promoting a high performing culture.

INTERVENTION 1
The Professional Development Visit (PD Visit)

LEARNING: Conditions for Leader Sensemaking and Change (RQ3 & 4)

- **INTERNAL:** Already looking, existing dissatisfaction, urgency, aspirations for a better future.
- **EXTERNAL:** A compelling image of a different future, legitimate source, perceived cultural similarities
- **A FELT EXPERIENCE**

Theoretical Underpinning

- Identity as central to meaning construction (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Weick et al., 2005)
- Image deterioration (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991)
- Sensebreaking, doubting and updating (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013)
- Pre-existing knowledge structures (Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999)
- Sensemaking and emotions (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013)

ACTION STEPS
Te Iwi Kiwi Planning

LEARNING: Leader sensemaking and Meaning Construction

PROCESS

- Cultural Narratives, Stories and Metaphors
- Identity and Identification
- Co-Construction

DESIRED MEANINGS

- Belonging
- Transcendence: Being part of something 'greater'
- Ownership, Buy-In and Responsibility

Theoretical Underpinning

- Narrative and metaphors in change and sensemaking (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2002; Humphreys et al., 2012; Thurlow & Mills, 2009)
- Management of Meaning; Ideological leadership (Limerick, 1990; Smircich & Morgan, 1982)
- Shared experience, interpretation and enacted meaning (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 1995)
- Plausibility over accuracy (Weick, 1995)

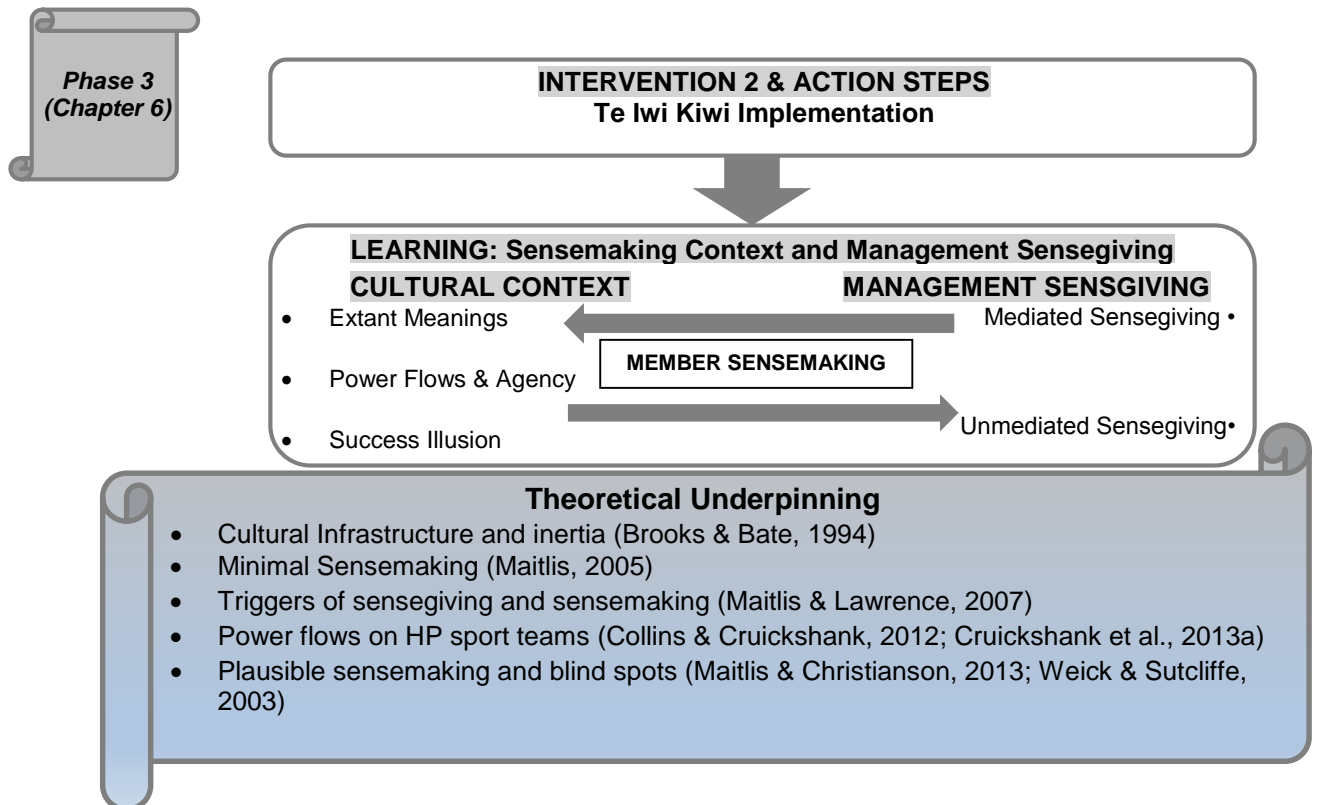


Figure 8. Summary of research outcomes for phase one, two and three

Over the course of the world cup, learning highlighted the social processes, both mediated and unmediated, that triggered and inhibited sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) and contributed to the efficacy of the intervention. Mediated sensegiving by the HPU leaders as part of the actions intended to foster meaning and purpose, did little to trigger sensemaking. While unmediated sensegiving by both the HPU leaders and participants triggered sensemaking (albeit not in the direction of the intervention). The complex and diverse landscape of extant meanings existed as prevailing discourses and infrastructure, unavoidably framed the sensemaking of cultural members and leaders, and constraining desired meaning making (Brooks & Bate, 1994). Power structures at play within the culture acted to inhibit collective sensegiving and sensemaking towards the change intervention (Hope, 2010), yet engaged members in sensemaking at individual and fragmented levels. Finally, the success of the team during the first five weeks of the world cup created an environment that numbed sensemaking, particularly towards the intervention, and created an illusion of success. This blinded members and particularly management to events of cultural and meaning significance.

The subsequent chapter reports the final phase of the EAR model, evaluation of intervention and action. Chapter Seven documents participants' sensemaking and learning with a particular emphasis upon the core group of change agents, the HPU leaders, as they sought to reflect, evaluate and make sense of their experiences of the research project. In exploring the experiences, the HPU leaders sought to capture the perspectives of other stakeholders in the HPU to construct in-depth, practical knowledge to drive future cultural and meaning making decisions.

CHAPTER 7: EVALUATION OF INTERVENTIONS AND ACTION

This chapter discusses the evaluation phase of the EAR project. It begins with the methods used to evaluate the intervention and action with the HPU, followed by a discussion of the outcome of this process. Building on the evidence established in Chapter Six of a limited impact of the planned change upon the players, the evaluation phase attempts to establish if and what change occurred in response to the intervention and action, coupled with what was learned in relation to promoting a high performing culture amongst the HPU.

Cardno (2003) acknowledged the complexity of change in the organisational setting by identifying three domains of possible change and learning in response to action: organisational, interpersonal (collegial) and personal. Organisational change is the achievement of wholesale organisation wide change. Interpersonal change is where wholesale change is not achieved, but shared understanding between individuals and groups is achieved. Personal change is where, despite organisational or interpersonal change not being evident, individual participants develop “a deeper understanding of their own practice and of the beliefs and assumptions that frame their practice” (p. 2). These multiple perspectives highlight that in action related change research, while wholesale organisational change may not be evidenced, it is not a direct indication of the absence of change or learning amongst individuals and cohorts of the organisation.

This chapter evaluates both the chosen issue, philosophical alignment, and how this was understood, coupled with the chosen solution, a meaning centred intervention and its appropriateness for the context. While emergent themes confirmed much of the observational and participant data from the previous research cycles, the in-depth reflections offered evidence of learning amongst HPU leaders and wider participants. The resultant evaluation revealed the central factors contributing to significant philosophical shifts amongst HPU leaders, and highlighted that change in high performance sport is highly complex, multifactorial and non-linear. The chapter concludes with researcher reflections offering an evaluation of this final phase of the EAR.

Evaluating Cultural Change and Learning Within NZRL

Shortly after returning from the world cup, HPD and HC formally shared their perspective of the campaign, first with CEO and later with the NZRL board. Particular emphasis was placed on the emergent off-field player medication practices amidst a growing concern as to how to best manage and mitigate this issue if it reached the media. Over the Christmas period (2013), the news of players’ recreational behaviours at the world cup emerged in the media, in newspapers, websites and the televised news. On a weekly basis, new elements of the story, some true, some false, unfolded in the press.

In the new year, following collaboration with HPD regarding the best way to review the world cup and evaluate the research, it was decided to undertake the most thorough and comprehensive performance review to date. By engaging all key HPU stakeholders (all players, coaches and support personnel), the review served as a significant platform and data source from which to evaluate the impact of the research interventions. Management were required to complete a written performance review and SWOT analysis, consisting of a mixture of questionnaire style and longer answers questions. The players, some of whom had short in-person review meetings with HPD, were required to complete an anonymous survey on Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) consisting of a mixture of multiple choice and longer answer questions. The performance review intended to evaluate “all elements of the campaign...the

review explored the following: 'Leadership', 'Coaching', 'Resourcing and support', 'Planning, operations and logistics', 'Programme of activity', 'The performance culture', and 'Selection'" (New Zealand Rugby League, 2014a, p. 7). Players were instructed that as part of their contractual obligations to the NZRL, they would not receive their player payments until the performance review had been completed. It took a month to conduct, collate, analyse results and produce a report that was then disseminated to HC and other key stakeholders (CEO, the NZRL board and HPSNZ). Furthermore, as part of the evaluation phase, I also conducted unstructured interviews during the months of reviewing and planning that followed the world cup. These were primarily with the core group of participants (HPD, CEO and HC) however also included others on the management team. These research methods enabled in-depth data collection and the opportunity for the HPU leaders' to co-construct an understanding of the interventions, and their efficacy in facilitating philosophical alignment. Evaluations also explored any change (and learning) on the personal and interpersonal level that arose from the experience of the research.

Verifying the Issue and Solution

Evidence from the second intervention-action cycle (Chapter Six) indicated there continued to be a lack of philosophical alignment amongst the HPU, and therefore it was concluded that the desired high performing culture had not evolved. Under the proviso that change efforts designed upon faulty diagnoses are likely to be unsuccessful (Armenakis & Harris, 2009), the HPU leaders were asked whether they perceived the issue originally highlighted was and remains appropriate for attention. It was clear that participants were still confident that the issue prioritised was appropriate,

Well of course it is, because, did we win the world cup? No, were the boys ALL on the same page? No because of the way some of them behaved. So yeah I still think it's an issue for us that we need to continue to work on. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

HC was more pragmatic when making sense of the team's performance culture, but indicated cultural issues still required attention,

When you're playing Australia, you have to tick every box, cross every T, dot every I, and get a bit of luck too sometimes. So if you take that into account, and the way they came out to play, we compromised that opportunity to put in that performance, so there's no doubt that [sleeping medication] had been a factor, but there are a number of other factors too. (HC, Interview, February 2014)

For this research to be judged valid, it was important that the central participants, the HPU leaders, felt that positive change had occurred (McNiff, 2013). Despite an understandable level of disappointment at the team's on and off-field performance, there remained a positivity about the philosophies and beliefs underpinning *Te Iwi Kiwi*, and the HPU leaders maintained it was still the most appropriate solution to foster meaning and promote a high performing culture,

...Te Iwi Kiwi, as I said does encapsulate us as a group, it's something that belongs to us, it's something that, you know, it's obviously going to be in other groups, like New Zealand teams, like the [rugby club] which is obviously where we got it from, but to me, it's unique, it's not, you could almost transplant 'The Kiwi Way' and call it 'The [Club] Way', or 'The [Club] Way', and no-one would know the difference. It's a bit hard to call it Te Iwi [club] (laughter). So yeah, I still feel really strongly about Te Iwi Kiwi – that everyone in New Zealand knows what an Iwi is and a Kiwi, that's what we are, we're a big family of Kiwis, rugby league that stretches beyond the borders of New Zealand. I feel so strongly I want it printed on the Kiwis jersey under the badge for the Anzac.

(HPD, Interview, February 2014)

The HPU leaders' reflections and evaluations highlighted that the impact of the intervention was not a question of appropriate issue and solution, but a question of process,

As an idea I think the boys have grabbed it. Like the haka, that is part of why we went with Te Iwi Kiwi, because who we are, we're also about, something we really can, part of us, is the haka. So for them to have their own haka, I thought there was some buy-in to that...and apparently when they had their big meeting when we had the issue, it was all they talked about, their whare, and their contributions to building it and how their behaviour and actions contribute to shaping and building their house. But did we see wholesale change, probably not. I really like the concept of it, but where does it sit with us now, because we didn't have a long enough opportunity, or it wasn't planned enough to get it right, so it was half done. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

It was clear the PD visit intervention left a significant and profound effect upon HPD and HC, directing their attention and interest towards the need to pursue shared meanings of team membership and align beliefs to promote a high performing culture. HPD highlighted the contextual challenge of high performance sport where failure to deliver immediate results and instant success would influence the acceptance of cultural change initiatives by participants (Cruickshank et al., 2014). The HPU leaders reflected upon the way the intervention was implemented, nurtured and sustained, accompanied by other overlooked contextual factors, as the compounding reasons for the limited influence upon participants. The time available to implement, the context of the campaign team, authenticity, and the focus upon change content rather than the implementation process formed central themes.

Time

As HPU leaders reflected upon the solution, the lack of time was perceived as a major constraint upon the influence of the intervention,

We didn't have enough time to get the buy-in...it's difficult to embed something like that, it's almost a two-year project given the limited amount of time we spend with each other. In terms of the timing, if I had my way again, I would have insisted CA came across the whole world cup campaign...in that respect, it didn't grab the boys, you know, the way you would have liked to. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

Campaign Team

For manager-led change, the HPU leaders and management personnel raised the contextual challenges of the campaign team, one which meets one or two times a year for a competition, and the subsequent management practices required to lead such teams,

A world cup campaign presents numerous challenges; the balance of the end of the home-and-away season fatigue and the excitement of wearing the black and white jersey internationally, the impact of being away from home and family for an extended period, finding your place in the group dynamics, the expectation that goes with playing big stage games, and possibly competing for a spot in the side, limited personal space while rooming, eating and training with team mates, travel between short turn around games and little genuine time off, less familiar support staff, coaches and team mates, and heightened media attention. The upshot can be boredom or 'cabin fever' and the need to release the pressure valve. Achieving a culture of excellence 'on tour' is no mean feat. This kind of environment creates risk – the risk of poor decisions, the risk of greater susceptibility to peer influence, and the risk of taking your eye off the ball in terms of optimal performance preparation – sometimes without even realising that is what has happened. (S2, Performance Review Document, January 2014)

While the data promoted the idea that the high performance sport team exists as a set of loosely coupled relationships and interactions (Limerick, 1990), the campaign team was revealed to be hypersensitive to personnel changes and selection decisions,

Our campaigns are so short...one bad choice (First selection issue), derails the whole thing, eventually. In a club, things are more stable, consistent and you have time to right wrongs and for learning. Even though we played some good footy, it wasn't brilliant footy, I may add, it could have been better, but we got all the way through, and won, and got to the final, but one poor choice...Then you think, you try to build a team,

but between 2010 when we last won the Four Nations, we've lost half of our senior leaders, guys who've been there before, who could close out tough games, who've been around. We've lost (senior player) to rugby, (senior player) to family issues with their baby, (senior player) to form...then you look at the staff, [former] HPD left 6 months before the comp[etition], the S5, worked with the team for nine-years pulled out a week before the training camp for personal reasons, I was in a new role, C2 was brand new, S9 joined only six-months earlier, and then we've got you and S4 as veterans of three one week campaigns. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

The construct of a national sport team evidently exists as a temporary organisation, significantly under the influence of organisational impermanence (Bechky, 2006; Ferriani, Corrado, & Boschetti, 2005). In impermanent organisations, to enable collective action, members must draw on a wide body of diverse skill, knowledge and personal contexts in a limited timeframe to understand each other and formulate a collective plan (Weick, 2009). The management team were required to use their limited and fragmented shared past to make sense of the PD visit. Similarly, the players were required to do the same to interpret *Te Iwi Kiwi* and drive behaviour and team performance. The limited shared experience was overlooked when implementing *Te Iwi Kiwi* and subsequently directly influenced its impact.

Authenticity

When reflecting on the leadership of *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention once the team travelled to Europe, the HPU leaders highlighted an oversight of authenticity,

We had all these grand plans and to be honest, had CA been there, he would have driven a lot of that, but without him it really didn't happen...I think once you get on tour, everyone gets really busy in their own roles; you actually need a specific person to drive it. It wasn't something that I couldn't drive because I didn't know anything about it, and no one else really could in the team, so that sort of got lost a little bit... Even on reflection, I don't think HC had the knowledge to drive it, because I'm sure he would have if he did...CA he's got a genuineness about him, that we can't replicate, and if we tried, the players wouldn't believe it anyway, even if we had all the information. He was the only one that could really talk about it. So if CAs not there, the next person who would be, sort of designed to drive it, is someone like S2, but S2 couldn't drive it, a) because she doesn't understand it, and secondly, it's almost in direct competition to what she'd done. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

A belief amongst change recipients that formal leaders (vertical change agents) such as HPD and HC are committed to the success of a change effort is central in effective change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). CA's authenticity allowed HPD and HC to devolve responsibility for the intervention during the planning. This subsequently impacted the implementation and sustainability because they perceived they did not own it. The process frustrated the leadership and implementation of the intervention and contributed to the superficial perceptions and interpretations held by wider participants (Chapter Six). This highlights an inherent risk when outsourcing change projects to an independent third-party consultant or advisor. Suitable ownership was not cultivated amongst HPU leaders and therefore the sustainability of the intervention and any subsequent change was diminished upon CA's departure (Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004; Sturdy, 2011).

Content over Process

Attention to process significantly influenced the efficacy of the intervention and its impact upon sensemaking and meaning. The HPU leaders spoke in support of *Te Iwi Kiwi*, but acknowledged a weak design and implementation,

We talked about splitting the guys into teams or doing the analysis looking at the left and right side of the house, and always trying to relate it back to the house, but that never really got off the ground. Well it sort of did in the initial stages...but it was never

really driven like we planned...I think to me, and that's where we missed CA's guidance in that.
(HPD, Interview, December 2013)

While CA adopted a cultural process to building the content of the intervention, with little attention given to process by the HPU leaders prior to and once CA left the HPU at the beginning of the world cup, the intervention shifted toward a technocratic approaches to change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Despite being common within the organisational change literature (Robbins & Judge, 2014), the use of a technocratic approach had far reaching implications for change recipients,

We just got hey, this is this, this is what it means, we do our haka, and see you on your journey, well wishes and always think to refer back to this but - it was the next step - it broke down.
(S3, Interview, February 2014)

The experiences documented of implementing *Te Iwi Kiwi* challenged a dominant discourse in the literature that cites the planning and design aspects of change as the important part and the implementation as simple and uncomplicated (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). The breakdown in process reinforced that managing change is about managing people (Moran & Brightman, 2001), not systems and plans. Kumar and Singhal (2012) reported that leaders need to be attentive to the way a change intervention develops and becomes shared and sustained amongst recipients. Complementing this, Balogun and Johnson (2005) reported that that in facilitating and sustaining desired change, it is the alignment of the shared interpretation held by change recipients that is as important as the content of the interpretation itself.

The HPU leaders reflected that even a well-designed, logical and plausible intervention, supported by a variety of tools from the cultural toolbox, can be rendered ineffective without an understanding of not only the process but the flow of social interaction (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). C2 highlighted the fallacies of planning for a high performance sport team away from team,

It's funny, you have all these ideas, these plans, and you don't end up using half of them, coz most of them you come up with when you're not with the boys and you really need a feel for the boys, what they need, you know, tweak it, shape it, they might not need it, they might need more, you gotta be there, amongst it.
(C2, Interview, December 2014)

It is evident that a change agent's understanding of a change initiative evolves considerably through implementation. If people act their way into meaning, in the early stages of sensemaking actions *become* meaningful rather than *uncover* (and/or prescribe) the meaning from the start. As evidenced throughout the research, it was the various forms of conversations that triggered and sustained sensemaking and meaning construction. The emphasis on planning over process reduced change to a linear effort and desensitised the HPU leaders to the social reality of changing meanings amongst the players and management. For meaning to become meaningful, it needs to be made, not received, or found, and collective engagement is at the fulcrum of this. While leaders might facilitate a starting point, and they have a role to play in facilitating process, to allow plausibility meanings should emerge from the collective (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Weick, 1995).

Despite not having the intended outcome of cultivating meaning, aligning philosophies, and promoting a high performing culture at the 'organisational level' (Cardno, 2003), change and learning from the research experience was evident on personal and collegial levels (Cardno, 2003) amongst the HPU leaders.

Researcher Reflection on the Issue and Solution

The HPU leaders confirmed that both the issue identified from phase one and two (philosophical alignment), and the solution (cultivating a culture of meaning) was their desired

approach to promote a high performing culture amongst the HPU. The acknowledgement by the HPU leaders of the importance of process on the impact and influence of *Te Iwi Kiwi* gives further legitimacy to the use of sensemaking as an organisation theory that could reframe and enhance high performance sport management practice (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013). The cognition of sensemaking could help change management practices for coaches and performance leaders as it shifts management, leadership, and coaching from the behavioural and episodic to the socially constructed and continuous, from 'decision making' to making sense (Weick, 1995).

When considering the solution and the interventions, participant responses highlighted just how multifaceted and complex managed change is. The combination of the limited attention to process by the HPU leaders, the high risk and challenging nature of competing at a pinnacle event and the interventions limited influence upon the HPU, meant that it was hard to establish a relationship between the intervention and action, "*it's hard to measure*" (HC, Interview, February 2014). Subsequently, it became challenging to separate the learning from the intervention with that of the learning from the experience. As a pertinent reminder of the contested context of high performance sport, this acts as an example of the multiple causality and mutual shaping that underpins sensemaking, meaning and change, where it is often not possible to establish causal links between features of a culture but only to deduce there is a relationship (Lincoln et al., 2011). For this reason, an evaluation of the intervention amalgamated with an evaluation of the campaign and the experience. This learning highlighted the challenge of high performance sport management practice where a central work activity is evaluating, 'measuring' and determining the performance impacting influence of an initiative with a group of athletes (Sotiriadou, 2013).

Identifying Change and Learning

The performance review and evaluation interviews, supported by relevant data from phase three established whether there had been any change (and learning) from players and management regarding the team's performance culture at the organisational level. The evaluation also attempted to examine any personal or interpersonal change (and learning) amongst the HPU leaders regarding cultural change management.

Impact on Philosophical Alignment

Considering the two cycles of intervention and action, it is necessary to examine the impact of the first intervention (PD Visit) upon the HPU leaders followed by the second intervention (*Te Iwi Kiwi*) upon the players and the HPU management. As highlighted in Chapter Five, the first intervention (PD visit) had a clear observable impact upon the thinking and decision making of HPU leaders. The intervention and resultant action significantly influenced and aligned the HPU leader discourse of meaning, purpose and identity. Despite a considerable impact upon the HPU leaders' beliefs, the second intervention (Chapter Six) saw little change in shared beliefs and behaviours amongst the HPU.

From a technocratic paradigm, over the course of the world cup structural changes were observed, the players performed the new haka, they used the terminology of poua and tainui, and the meanings inherent in the intervention clearly resonated with some, as players commented, "...just different, this [haka] is ours now, yeah I love it" (P15, Interview, RLWC Week Three, November 2013) and "I love the whare, look at it, all the 'brothers', our family, this is what we fight for" (P14, Interview, RLWC Week Four, November 2013). However, the shared meanings underpinning the actions of a high performing culture were not observed as HC reflected, "Given the way some of them behaved, you could argue it [*Te Iwi Kiwi*] had no effect

on them, or they just didn't get the whare at all" (HC, Interview, February 2014). The lack of impact identified by management was reinforced by the performance review where no players mentioned *Te Iwi Kiwi* despite being asked direct questions about the team's culture. HPD commented, "Not many raised it. HC and S2 did. [HC] loves it, S2 loves it, I love it, and CEO love's it. Funny thing is, not one of the players talked about it though" (Interview, January 2014).

The dominant theme that emerged from the evaluation phase was a clear change at a personal level in HPU leader thinking. Through the research process, by collaborating with leaders to ask questions of the HPU's culture and behaviour, and subsequently attempting to change it, the HPU leaders were sensitised to issues of meaning. As they made sense of player's off-field behaviours, the campaign result and emotional disappointment, juxtaposed with the change initiative, some significant and meaningful reflections about matters of importance emerged,

*...with what we hoped to do with Te Iwi Kiwi, then the bottom falling out over all that off-field stuff, made me think more about my role. It made me question things that I had either not thought about or was aware of, or normally just accepted as fact. I just spoke to P4, you know, he doesn't see the Anzac test as unfinished business, he sees us as a new start. Because you know, everything in terms of how we operate, who we pick, who our staff are...I was talking to HC who's the same...we're both a bit more harder after the experience, and I just don't want to put up with that s**t anymore.*

(HPD, Interview, February 2014)

There was a lot to learn from the whole experience, and I think it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my past performance, and how I need to probably do things better. The whole process gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I was coaching...I think, it also gave an opportunity for all of us in terms of the organisation to reflect on how we can do things better.

(HC, Interview, February 2014)

The 'cultural issues' that arose during the world cup experience and the learnings from the review process acted as a catalyst for a change in discourse amongst HPD, HC and CEO, as CEO reflected upon HC's re-application for the head-coaching role,

What we could see, the whole experience really made him think about his desire for the role and it was really clear that he'd done a lot of reflection, but more importantly there was a real sense of steel about HC's presentation in terms of unfinished business but more importantly clarity of what he wanted to achieve and where it needs to go now.

(CEO, Interview, February 2014)

The interpersonal change identified amongst HPU leaders' beliefs and resultant actions focused upon four observable areas; (1) a need to re-build the culture, (2) underpinned by long-term collaborative learning and planning, (3) driven by strong leadership, with (4) an awareness and selection of the 'right people' for the culture.

Re-Building: Dismantle the 'Brotherhood'

In light of the experiences that unfolded from and during the two action-intervention cycles, a major observable change from the HPU leaders was an articulated need to "*rebuild that culture and get us back to playing for that Black jersey*" (HC, Interview, February 2014). A significant element was the critical evaluation of the beloved 'brotherhood',

It's important that whatever group we get in there, we start new, because I love the 'brotherhood' too, but to be honest, we've got a 'brotherhood' where we ain't winning footy games. So I think it's a good time to go, right, nah nah, that's not working...We've got the 'brotherhood' and we always thought that was good, but it was in name and talk only, not in behaviour, and action, so it might be time to dismantle the 'brotherhood', symbolically not physically, and start a fresh. I think it's become too much of a

distraction and too much of an excuse, it damages accountability...P4's (senior leader) is up for it too, you know, but there is going to be some pain from that.

(HPD, Interview, February 2014)

This discourse amongst the HPU leaders was significant given that HPD and HC are both former players, yet their responses highlighted the desire to challenge the deeply held belief that the 'brotherhood' was a positive influence upon performance. These actions highlighted a new awareness of a previous blind spot and taken for granted assumptions and beliefs. The energy and attention given by the HPU leaders to challenge the dominant 'brotherhood' narrative and invest in re-building the team's culture was evident in planning meetings with management, *"It's a bit of a watershed moment, I think from where we go, this being the first time that we're back together. There's a bit of work to be done in the rebuilding of our brand and our culture"* (HPD, Management Meeting, April 2014) and with broader stakeholders such as HPSNZ,

We've got this 'brotherhood', which is great, but it's a bit nice, there's no hard edge and it's a bit comfortable. It's not an environment of accountability; I don't see our players holding each other accountable to standards. We need to re-establish our team culture. What is it? What does it represent? Is it conducive to peak performance? Can we find a balance between the Kiwi 'brotherhood' and the harsh realities of accountability to excellence that is needed to compete with, and regularly beat, the Australians?

(HPD, HPSNZ Meeting, April 2014)

This change is particularly salient given that the psychology consultant had failed to prompt any significant change in discourse amongst the coaches and HPD, despite indicating, for over 18-months, the inherent performance risks associated with the 'brotherhood'. Prior to the world cup experience, no observable effort was made by the coaches to directly address the consultant's conclusions and question the influence of this dominant narrative in underperformance. The experience of the campaign, its challenges, 'mini-crises' and ultimately underperformance acted to trigger significant leader sensemaking and catalysed action by prompting realisation, clarity and comprehension of what was previously incomprehensible. The newfound awareness amongst the HPU leaders drew the link that in making sense and meaning from their experience, player ownership and accountability subsequently develops. Dismantling and rebuilding the 'brotherhood' became a significant discourse in addressing the lack of desired meanings.

In 2014, after the world cup, the first act of 're-building the culture' was the re-appointment of HC following a re-application and interview process. In a change from previous approaches, the contract was for two-years and renewal was subject to achieving a series of on-field and off-field performance outcomes and indicators including culture,

We've got an obligation to support HC in the right manner that is probably going to be a bit different to what we have done historically...But let's be really clear that the two-year term is also about seeing a lift, improvement in the overall team performance, but that will be measured on a whole bunch of things, including behaviour, beliefs and standards of the team.

(CEO, Interview, February 2013)

Following the discourse of 'dismantling and re-building the brotherhood', the second interpersonal change was the greater emphasis placed upon collective learning, long-term planning and collaborative leadership.

Collective Learning, Long-term Planning and Collaborative Leadership

By conducting not only a thorough review but also one that garnered contribution from all HPU members highlighted a deeper commitment to collective learning about performance, *"After what happened, what we've learnt over those seven weeks we gotta make sure in eight*

years' time, whoever's here, we haven't forgotten about it" (HPD, Interview, December 2013). The extensive performance review was a distinct departure from previous ones, in both scale and scope. The review was performance focused, rather than operational as it had been in the past, and framed participants' attention towards performance matters by challenging people to reflect and draw links between experience and performance. Questions elicited critical answers rather than token suggestions and findings were databased for future sharing within the HPU. In synergy with collective learning, an emphasis upon long-term planning emerged as another significant change,

There needs to be a high performance plan, which is shared and everyone knows, same as the other organisational plans. We can't live year to year, or we'll go round in circles. We need to take a proactive multiyear approach. A four year integrated campaign plan approach is critical if we are to win the world cup 2017. Our planning capability needs to improve and an understanding of what it will take to win is critical and we will need to include this within our operational planning. Moving forward there is a need for robust planning around future staff structures and the specific roles and requirements needed to further develop and grow the High Performance environment within the NZ Kiwis. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

The result was that from February through to April (2014), a visionary framework for an eight-year high performance strategic plan and a four-year campaign plan (in preparation for the 2017 world cup) was developed. Alongside a commitment to collective learning and planning was also a greater collaborative relationship between HC and HPD, and HC and the organisation,

But my very being here, and seeing a strategic plan, or any sort of plan like this is massive for us. I've been involved with the Kiwis for a long time, and I've never seen anything like this. Me and HPD [as Assistant Coach] just used to get tapped on the shoulder six weeks out, "Hey Anzac's coming up, you in?" and we'd come in, do the test or campaign and leave. (HC, HPSNZ Meeting, March 2014)

The third interpersonal change demonstrated by the HPU leaders was the need for strong leadership driven by meaning.

Leadership

A discourse of 'stronger' leadership emerged where, "our culture needs to drive our decisions" (HPD, Interview, February 2014) and "We need to put a marker down, draw a line in the sand. All our players are asking for it, and those that aren't, well they won't be there (HPD, HPSNZ Meeting, March 2014). The irrepressible commitment to standards and meaning-driven leadership was evident at three organisational levels: at senior executive level (CEO),

CEO: We brought in external solicitors to rework the contract and tidy it up in regards of professional standards and expectations. Initially we (signalling HPD) considered a fine process.

HPD: Yeah, we did but I felt given what we went through, there is not enough time in a six-week campaign for second chances, we establish a standard, and you're gone...

CEO: That has to be the consequence. We need to set the bar, we need strong leadership...

HC: So if we're at the world cup again, and that happens again, we send them home, [x number] players?

CEO: (pause)...well yeah, if we've got a standard.

HC: So six players broke our standards, two couldn't play through injury that leaves sixteen to take the field? So we default the semi-final?

CEO: If that's what we need to do, then that's what we need to do. We need to stand for something but if we get to that point again, we've done something wrong earlier, we haven't done our jobs. Let's be clear, we're going to be really robust and it's going to be really clear about what our standards are. (HPU Leaders' Meeting, March 2014)

At NZRL (organisational) high performance level, where 'defining our culture' formed the first critical success factor for the post world cup plan (New Zealand Rugby League, 2014a) and entailed defining and being committed to a clear set of behaviours and standards that permeated all actions and all NZRL teams. And at a team leadership level (Kiwis),

Players raised concerns about their teammates and the culture of the team. Not just about the [off-field] issues but their day-to-day conduct too. We just have to set the bar, and we've just got to be harder.
(HC, HPSNZ Meeting, March 2014)

HPD and CEO raised the importance of re-evaluating the underlying values that drove performance in primarily the HPU but also the NZRL high performance programme,

How do we want to be seen? What do we stand for? It's about lifting our standards, because our values are going to drive it. So our values, through our actions and our professionalism, and this is a big word for us, and we've got to pull our socks up in this area.
(CEO, Interview, March 2014)

Emphasis was placed upon the need for 'performance focused' values, goals and outcomes. HPD subsequently not only constructed a set of overarching core performance values for the NZRL high performance programme, but also demonstrated a convincing commitment to these. The overarching performance programme values (excellence, commitment and leadership) were communicated with HPSNZ through a performance plan and in a planning meeting with the HPU management team,

We need to really make sure we're expressing [excellence, commitment and leadership] when we're in camp with the boys. [Players] will be judged on them, you'll be judged against them, and I'll be asking you over the next month, what those three things look like for you in practice. In the group in terms of the staff taking the leadership of what the Kiwis are about...I'm under no illusions and I feel we let a lot of people down last year...we need to make sure that we are on the front foot in terms of pushing ahead with what we perceive as our sort of high performance values so to speak.

(HPD, Management Meeting, April 2014)

A commitment to these values and meaning-driven leadership was observed in the tangible and embodied the HPU leader actions of amending contracts (player and management) to explicitly focus on professional standards, clear and accentuated communication of standards to management, and the HPU selection and recruitment.

The HPU leaders demonstrated a desire to persist with *Te Iwi Kiwi*, not only just the meanings implicit within the intervention but also using Māori narrative and concepts to drive it. This was reflected in discourse and leader behaviour, where HC viewed CA and his cultural involvement as a critical success factor in the team's future success and achievement of desired performance outcomes. Consequently, CA was recruited into a full-time position in the HPU and the previous consultant's contract terminated,

If we really believe in our whare and Te Iwi Kiwi and what we stand for as the Kiwis, we need him in there. Last year was only really a taste of it...he's a storyteller, he attracts people to him. I could sit and listen to him for ages. I told him about the pills problem, I actually gave him the full run down and the cultural and behavioural issues we had and questioned where that left our house. He responded, "In every Marae across the whenua [land], in a dark corner of the house, there is a post that is damaged, but that is still part of the house...that's part of your story, that's part of who you are, you don't move house just because of one damaged pole". I nearly fell off the chair; it was awesome. So at Anzac, I want him to give a really strong introduction along with HC who will have to establish a real good fresh start, but mainly to keep coming back to and talking about our house, talking about that damaged pole, and our story and moving forward.
(HPD, Interview, March 2014)

Coupled with the commitment to stronger meaning-driven leadership and *Te Iwi Kiwi* ideology, selection practices formed the final documented interpersonal change amongst the HPU leaders.

Selection: 'The Right Blokes on the Bus'

As part of rebuilding the culture, an understanding of the 'right people' for the HPU, in not only players but also management, and using this to drive selection choices became a central discourse amongst HPU leaders,

It comes back to getting the right blokes on the bus from the start, then you won't end up in the mess we did, or at least it makes things less likely to go down that road...our culture drives the type of player we select...Selecting on character not talent, this starts with selecting blokes who are there for the right reasons, guys whose behaviour and actions are what matters, not what is said...We need to reinforce standards consistently through selection, both proactively as to whether the player is a 'right' fit for our values, culture and will positively contribute to achieving performance goals, but also reactively as a consequence of failing to meet standards.

(HPD, Interview, February 2014)

HPU leader reflections highlighted the challenges of selecting players for an international, campaign sport team, where "You only find out about blokes when you spend time with them, but the best player for someone else, might not be the right player for you" (HPD, Interview, January 2014). Players and management made regular reference to the importance of the people in the HPU and knowing those people,

I learnt that the best players and the right players are not necessarily the same players...Our selection policy was one dimensional and needs to be developed...I suppose our campaigns are so short, and we get so little time with the players, and it's so crucial that you get the right blokes on the bus, we have to find a way to get to know the blokes, get to know them better than just a...coz one or two weeds can ruin the whole garden, very quickly. We also didn't fully understand the impact of changing staff in the middle of a big year; you just assume it will be sweet. So one of the major things I've learnt is that the success and failure of not only our project, but ultimately the team, begins and ends with the people involved. Makes you realise if you don't pick players who are prepared to put the team first, just how hard this job can be.

(HPD, Interview, January 2014)

To ensure that there were 'the right blokes on the bus', "a values driven selection approach of both staff and players" (NZRL High Performance Plan, March 2014) informed selection practices, however it was acknowledged that this required strong leadership,

In terms of wiping the slate clean, you know, again, I'll keep taking us back to what we're trying to create here with the group and the environment and the culture that we're trying to build. If that doesn't register or align with what they're [players] after, then again, the decision's going to be pretty easy for us, myself and the selectors...We need to pick guys who care enough about the Kiwis, and what it represents – and this may mean some tough decisions, and taking a step or two backwards before we can move forwards.

(HC, Interview, February 2014)

This significant change in selection philosophy was first observed in the high performance plans, and second through communicating the performance reviews, plans and the new culture-driven selection beliefs with the selectors,

I took them [selectors] through the RLWC13 review and they were amazed at some of the conclusions, they were amazed at some of the stories. They had no idea! I took them through the issue (sleeping medication) too. [Selector] was shocked. He said, went nuts! He said "they did it...don't ever pick them again, otherwise what does the jumper stand for anymore?"...I think after that conversation, it will be shown in the selection of the team, and I think those three things [performance values, excellence,

leadership and commitment] have to be at the forefront of the selectors' minds and they know that in terms of when we are picking our side. (HPD, Interview, March 2013)

Third, evidence of the change in selection philosophy was reflected in selectors' public comments in the media, where they indicated an explicit focus upon players who demonstrated the preferred personal attributes of commitment and character. Finally, the new selection philosophy was reflected the selection of the HPU for the forthcoming Anzac test. The squad of twenty players consisted of only five who featured in the world cup final (in spite of only four of the twenty-four from the world cup being unavailable), ten others and five debutants. The commitment to person and meaning driven selection extended beyond the 'new' playing group to management, with the non-renewing of four management contracts, the recruitment a new staff member and three previous staff to new roles.

Researcher Reflection On Change

As the evaluation phase progressed, a significant degree of optimism emerged amongst the HPU leaders. Despite an emotional and confronting experience that challenged many assumptions and beliefs, they demonstrated enthusiasm and eagerness to implement new learning in action, and to engage with the players again, rebuild the team's culture, and embed greater cultural meaning. Despite the encouraging change in discourse and identifiable actions that embodied it, some of the changes continued to focus upon surface architecture and reflect a systemic and hierarchical approach to change. An example of this was the importance placed upon policies, legal clauses, procedures and plans. With meaning construction being a subtle, enacted and interpersonal product of shared experience (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick, 1995; 2009), these documents and policies risked the same optimism that was experienced when planning *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention. Given the lack of campaigns during the evaluation phase, it was not possible to ascertain the extent to which the learning and change has led to a greater awareness of sensemaking and sensegiving, and therefore better symbolic management practice by the HPU leaders (Dunford & Jones, 2000). However, given the importance of constructing shared understanding and meanings for a shared experience (Weick, 1995; 2009), the world cup campaign provided the team with an opportunity. The campaign was a significant, emotionally charged and ideological shared experience and thus forms a cultural resource within the organisational memory (Bechky, 2006; Ferriani et al., 2005; Weick, 2009). With skilled leadership, the buy-in of the whole organisation and the full-time involvement of CA, this cultural resource could be leveraged to trigger sensemaking and construct deep, shared and most importantly sustained meaning amongst HPU members, as eloquently offered by CA, "*that's part of your story, that's part of who you are, you don't move house just because of one damaged pole*" (HPD, Interview, March 2014). The indifferent influence of the intervention following CA's departure at the beginning of the world cup, coupled with his fulltime engagement in response to learnings from the action research does raise the question as to whether CA in fact was the intervention rather than a medium for the intervention.

Learning About Change, Culture and Meaning Construction

The experience of the world cup campaign (and its mini crises) offered a landscape for learning,

It was certainly an interesting 12 months...I still don't reckon we'd have won, but what it did teach me, or gave me a bit of a hard lesson. I think [HC] learnt more last year than he did in the previous five years. You have to fail to succeed, but it kind of made me think too about our tour going [downhill], you know and to be honest I learnt so much from that, from that whole experience. (HPD, Interview, February 2014)

A number of themes emerged from the evaluation regarding individual and collective learning about change, sensemaking and culture. Most of these themes underpinned the

mentioned action and change and focused upon: the importance of people within the HPU, the need for strong, ideological leadership, addressed in daily practices that promote collaboration between stakeholders.

Importance of People

Unlike earlier technocratic foci, participants became attentive to the type of people selected and how that impacted not only the efficacy of the intervention but also the team's culture and eventual performance. The impact of people upon group dynamics in success and failure of both organisational change (Smith, 2003) and high performance sport groups is not new (Greenleaf et al., 2001). The data supported the socially constructed understanding of organisations, where though the duality between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984), that organisations and their meanings are produced, reproduced and changed (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Richard, 1996). Learning from this research also highlighted the lateral, informal processes of inter-recipient sensemaking that significantly contribute to outcomes of a change initiative (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). In the performance review, players and management repeatedly complemented the leadership of some players, but questioned the off-field leadership and behaviour of others, *"Players taking advantage of the jersey, we need players who are 100% committed and will give what's best for the team"* (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014). Player leaders reflected upon their lack of influence over others, *"When we approached our 'brothers' about off-field incidents...our voices became echoes...I felt sorry for my captain who tried to drill into the boys about their problems. To come out second best to what he had asked"* (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014). HC commented on how new players to the team influenced others, *"letting [new player] rail road [senior player] and new players' negative influence especially on QF weekend, we shouldn't have let it happen"* (HC, Performance Review Document, January 2014).

The HPU leaders' learning demonstrated a new awareness of the significant and subtle interpersonal dynamics that facilitate and inhibit meaning construction and ultimately effective change (Bate, 2000; Mantere et al., 2012). The acknowledgement of the importance of people indicated an awareness that meaning and culture is not easy to cultivate or change, if at all possible. The agency afforded to players in a high performance sport team by the context they existed within, positions them as influential actors and cultural architects (Cruickshank et al., 2014). If they align with the team's agenda they become social allies but if not, potentially destructive agents.

In making sense of the HPU leaders' learning, if the people within a cultural group are central to meaning construction and ultimately performance, the selection practices of performance leaders become of central importance in cultivating a high performing culture. These findings echo the quote by Richard Fairbank, who argued "at most companies, people spend 2% of their time recruiting and 75% managing their recruitment mistakes" (cited in Heskett, 2012, p. 81). This is compounded in the context of a national sport team who are not afforded long seasons and pre-seasons to undertake meaning and culture focused activities. Cruickshank et al. (2013a) reported a successful culture change effort where a major strategy of performance leaders was to carefully recruit players whose playing style and character symbolised the desired cultural meanings, and who upon arrival, became leaders and cultural drivers.

While significant time and effort was dedicated to constructing a cultural intervention, if the impact of any change intervention is constrained or enabled by the change recipients, this

research suggested that for high performance sport managers, the most crucial performance impacting activity is to identify, recruit and harness cultural allies and architects on both the playing team and management (Cruickshank et al., 2014), and then through strong leadership to promote standards-based meanings.

Ideological and Standards Driven Leadership

A strong focus through the performance review was a desire from participants for stronger leadership of standards and a focus on behaviour, as “*the NZ Kiwis high standards of behaviour were compromised by a few*” (S7, *Performance Review Document, January 2014*). As reported, compromising standards had far reaching implications. In the performance review, players rarely mentioned technical or tactical issues but focused largely upon teammates’ professional standards including discipline, attention, nutrition management, sleeping habits and recovery practices. The importance of strong leadership of standards and consequences was highlighted as a way of communicating meaning, “*Players deserved to be dropped during the tournament, we can’t say we respect the jumper then pick someone who doesn’t*”. Players also cited the lack of clarity in the selection policy impacted “*motivation, particular for those not selected*” and “*undermined the culture*” where there was “*no [selection] consequence for behaviour*” (Players, *Performance Review Document, January 2014*).

Players searched for a more explicit link between behaviour, commitment, and selection. Issues related to team selection have been shown to negatively influence the performance of elite sport teams (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Greenleaf et al., 2001) and induce performance impacting stress amongst athletes (Greenleaf et al., 2001). The reported ambiguity in selection supported earlier research that drew links between ambiguous selection criteria and processes, with negatives influences upon group dynamics, culture and performance (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003). The actions of not only leaders but teammates had a negative impact upon meaning by disaffirming participant’s perceived team identity (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) and the meanings attached to being a Kiwi. These feelings were summarised in S2’s reflections,

In a high performance culture it is critical that each person lives according to the agreed values and that the standards remain predictable and consistent. If you set a standard of ‘no excuses’ and yet you can see excuses offered everywhere and you don’t act, people have cause to think the benchmark is not really set, or is moveable. The standards don’t need to be impossibly high or even perfect; they need to be real, agreed and ruthlessly followed through for every person.

(S2, *Performance Review Document, January 2014*)

The emphasis given by participants to breaching of and adherence to standards highlighted that well-meaning symbolic narratives and cultural strategies will have little effect if leaders are not cognisant of what triggers sensemaking in their culture, and then aligning those triggers to sensegiving efforts (Kumar & Singhal, 2012). The importance of making leadership decisions consistent with the espoused meaning was evident throughout the evaluation phase, as HPU leaders reflected upon their leadership,

I should have taken more responsibility for standards...Well not that I didn’t have the guts but it was a tough decision. But there was a couple of things on that trip, where I should have acted more firmly and didn’t. I keep going back to that first decision (selection after cut-off date), that set the tone, first thing we did, in the eyes of our team, we actually compromised everything we spoke about, every bit of it....Even if we couldn’t see it immediately, it did manifest in a loss of trust, loss of belief at that level, which over time came to a head at the back end of the tournament.

(HPD, *Interview, January 2014*)

Previous studies of change management in high performance sport reported successful change to be significantly influenced by the unwavering and overt commitment of leaders and manager to vision-related decision making, often at the expense of socially desirable decisions (Cruickshank et al., 2014).

The decision to make the late selection change acted as a significant sensemaking moment creating mixed opinions amongst the HPU, with some arguing it had an impact on team culture and standards. When issues of identity and higher ideological aspirations, such as '*The Kiwi Way*' or *Te Iwi Kiwi*, were espoused, participants' attention was directed towards discrepancies or inauthentic cues, they evaluated actions in terms of consistency with the stated ideology, and criticism quickly developed when deviations appeared (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). As a consistent theme throughout the research phases, participants reflected upon action taking and the fundamental ideological contradictions that arose as a consequence, as a central site where meanings were destroyed (Phelan, 2005). Leaders need to be extremely consistent and credible for effective sensemaking and meaning construction (Phelan, 2005). Resulting from the experience, HPU leaders demonstrated a new self-awareness of both the effects of symbolic actions and messages, and the importance of consistent, repeated action in meaningful culture change (Kumar & Singhal, 2012). The HPU leaders' learnings about change were two-fold.

First, that selection and what performance leaders choose and choose not to address are powerful sensegiving mechanisms that convey meaning (Carey, 2013; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; Frontiera, 2010) to those with a direct stake in the team's culture and performance. Bunderson and Thompson's (2001) concept of 'containers of meaning' becomes particularly relevant when considering the ideological communicative capacity of the act of team and squad selection. The second learning was the need to be true to the ideologies implicit within both the culture and the change initiative, *Te Iwi Kiwi* (Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). The actions and management of selection and off-field behaviour by HPU leaders damaged the ideological currency held by the team's culture. A credible commitment to valued and principled meanings was damaged, and thus became inherently difficult to maintain in the presence of contradictory values (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003).

These articulated learnings by the HPU leaders were particular salient given that *Te Iwi Kiwi's* purpose was to address ideological issues and facilitate philosophical alignment to promote a high performing culture amongst the HPU. Given the multiple causality and mutual shaping that underpins meaning making (Bruner, 1990), it was not possible to determine whether selection actions by the HPU leaders directly caused the off-field behaviour issues, or whether players' existing agency and external meanings contributed to it. It is, however necessary to acknowledge the central role leadership does play in contributing to cultivating ideological currency and a culture of meaning.

Daily Practices and Sensegiving

Participants commented that culture change needed to be a daily practice and not just a 'one off' event, "*it wasn't continued, or continually spoken about or revisited all the time, so I think it just fell away*" (S3, Interview, January 2014). The idea of change being a daily practice was also reflected in S2's comments, "*Culture is 'live', not set in concrete and pre-determined. It has to be worked on all the time... events during the campaign provided a stark reminder that a sound, high performing culture is something that needs continuous work*" (S2, Performance Review Document, January 2014). Echoing earlier impressions from phase three, participants reflected that the subtle, daily practices and interactions that contributed to sensemaking were

overlooked, “I felt a lot of the problems were in house, n [sic] too late for discussion because it became a snow ball effect” (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014). The pervasive nature of “everyday culture” was reflected in S3’s description as “the invisible magic stuff that you think, uh, what are you talking about? And then...‘oh, it’s only when it’s not there that’s when you notice” (S3, Interview, January 2014). The lack of daily attention to the intervention’s meanings was cited as a major learning for the efficacy of the change initiative, “we probably needed to keep reiterating what it stood for...we would say, this is our house, that’s our house, yeah, but what does that mean though?” (S3, Interview, January 2014).

Learning reinforced Kezar’s (2013) conclusion that sensemaking is a process not a mechanism, and consequently sensemaking and sensegiving is present throughout a change initiative, and not just at stages or at the beginning of an intervention. While initial sensegiving and sensemaking facilitated superficial meaning amongst participants, the deeper meaning that frames and alters behaviour comes from persistent and evolving sensegiving approaches by leaders to connect participants and experience (Kezar, 2013). Despite good intentions by HPU leaders, the result of limited daily intervention focused sensegiving was a perception that *Te Iwi Kiwi* was a ‘one-off’ and potentially even a ‘quick fix’ event (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). The findings and resultant learning supported the existing discontent with traditional models of managed organisational change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). These perspectives privilege stability, leadership, routine and order (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), and view change as discontinuous episodes of step-wise action, existing as successive stages of independent punctuations in organisational life. While reported as largely failure ridden (Weick & Quinn, 1999), the assumption that considerable progress can be accomplished through quick fix, rapid and limited interventions is evidently plausible and highly tempting for leaders (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Participant learning highlights that sensemaking and change is less concerned with the grandiose vision and more concerned with local initiative and daily practices (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Smerek, 2010) as there “is nothing so impracticable as a packaged, prescriptive, linear change initiative” (Dawson, 2003, p. 175).

The findings reframe manager-led change on the high performance team sport from episodic, static and linear, to continuous, where constantly evolving human action means that “change is never off” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 382). Weick and Quinn (1999) described this philosophical shift to “focus on changing rather than change” (p. 382) where organisational change exists as an environment of inertia and flux. The findings supported earlier recommendations that change in high performance sport is a “boundless pursuit and not, as a number of organisational-based models suggest, a time locked checklist-oriented activity that works toward [sic] an ultimate conclusion” (Cruickshank et al., 2014, p. 117).

Importance of Collaboration

Participants reflected that for meaningful change, there was a need for collaboration at a number of levels. First, collaboration with the broader HPU regarding the intervention,

Being Māori I love my culture, but it did feel a little like it was, here have this and be a part of us...I felt like it lost its ownership, like this is ours. We were told we own this, we created it, whereas we kind of didn’t...I just didn’t feel part of it in the build-up so couldn’t really add anything or support it when we got with the boys.

(S3, Interview, January 2014)

As people had no experience of the intervention this failed to trigger sensemaking, meaning construction and sustain change (Weick, 1995) because “it wasn’t my baby” (S3, Interview, January 2014) and therefore became easy to reject or ignore. Second, to manage meaningful change, collaboration amongst the management team was required,

I think staff are very good at hiding it a lot of the times, because they're expected to be upbeat and positive. So that's a big learning, to me, staff welfare...we weren't that collaborative so we didn't know...If you've got staff who aren't happy, and there are obviously times where, you know, people weren't happy throughout the tour, it impacts on the culture.
(HPD, Interview, February 2014)

Given the lateral, interpersonal sensemaking processes that influence the outcomes of a change initiative (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), collaborative practices between participants become not only desirable but essential in triggering sensemaking and sustaining any subsequent change. Collaborative practices also contribute to meaningful experience by capitalising on psychological meaning making processes such as autonomy, self-efficacy and self-determination (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Collins and Cruickshank (2012) argued that, in managing high performance sport, collaborative and multi-directional approaches harness interpersonal relationships and cultivate and strengthen an intended vision and culture.

The evaluation revealed that despite the lack of collaborative intervention-focused practices, documented in phase three, there was an appetite for meaningful collaboration amongst the playing group, where *"Some players felt their thoughts weren't heard by mgmt. [sic]."* (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014) and *"I'd like to see [SLG] have more power on and off the field; to have more involvement from senior players in week planning"* (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014).

If culture change is an intersubjective and uncertain enterprise, where it is questionable if meanings can actually be shaped by hierarchical effort, and cultural infrastructure can frustrate efforts to engineer change, collaboration becomes a crucial discursive practice in facilitating sensemaking, meaning and change (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Scott et al., 2003). Meaning change requires legitimisation, and legitimisation requires local justification (Brooks & Bate, 1994). Collaboration acknowledges the "politics of acceptance" in change initiatives (Brooks & Bate, 1994, p. 188) and reduces the impact of not only hierarchical imposition of meaning but the construction of a plausible (false) narrative by change leaders. Collaborative approaches to change acknowledge the local culture, integrate local context (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) and facilitate not only shared interpretations of a shared experience (Weick, 1995), but ones that are local, influence action and sustain change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). For high performance sport managers, collaborative practices can cultivate and sustain group generated and governed beliefs and enact accountability, by promoting rather than enforcing the adoption of enduring performance-optimising behaviour (Cruickshank et al., 2013a). The persistence of the prevailing cultural infrastructure that impeded the intervention was reinforced by the lack of collaborative activities. Their presence would have acted to promote an awareness of performance impacting blind spots (Weick & Quinn, 1999) and the required acknowledgement that the existing cultural meanings were a barrier to goals and performance (Brooks & Bate, 1994).

Researcher Reflection on Learning

Reflecting upon the learning of the HPU leaders, while not articulated explicitly, it was clear that the perceived '*mini crisis*' regarding the off-field player behaviour at the end of the phase three had a profound impact on participants. Despite efforts to implement a change intervention, to construct new meanings amongst the participants a much more powerful event was required to trigger sensemaking. To destabilise an existing, deeply revered cultural infrastructure, paradigm failure is useful (Brooks & Bate, 1994). The world cup final result and the final team meeting served as a paradigm failure, as participants began to challenge the meanings implicit within the team, *"We are close and we call ourselves 'brothers' but our*

honesty in each other let us down, and we didn't do what should be done. 'Brothers' are honest, if we really are 'brothers', we should be honest" (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014). The sense of paradigm failure acted as a rich site for learning and subsequent change. It is widely reported that crisis facilitates change by triggering sensemaking (Ancona, 2012; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 2009; 2010). However, juxtaposing *Te Iwi Kiwi*, as a manager-led change effort, with the impact and change outcome of the *'mini crisis'*, highlighted the challenge inherent in accomplishing change in the absence of crisis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The lack of a pressing rationale for altering the status quo underpins the challenge of facilitating change in the absence of a crisis style situation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Indeed, crisis situations act as a threat to identity that become a powerful trigger for sensemaking and action (Kovoor-Misra, 2009). In perceived threat situations, as "individuals and teams lose important anchors about themselves" (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 563), they focus upon identity and perceptions of "who we are" (Kovoor-Misra, 2009, p. 494). The identity threat experienced by participants through the *'mini crisis'* events were likely to have been perceived as even greater given the public sphere in which the team operates and media reporting of the team's culture. As Weick et al. (2005) contended "who we think we are (identity) as organisational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes [sic] our identity" (p. 416). The strong sense of collective identity that buffered earlier sensemaking (Chapters Five and Six) was exposed (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). For participants the identity breach prompted 'discrepancy', a new heightened sense of awareness that stimulated a belief that change was needed, promoted change readiness (Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007) and an acceptance of the need for new meanings (Brooks & Bate, 1994). When considering the impact of the *'mini crisis'*, Weick's (2003, p. 67) quote is particularly salient:

Studies of organisational failure suggest that when people organise, they enact a platform that is more vulnerable than it looks, and is often audited more ruthlessly by unexpected events than anyone anticipated. The event can in some ways be considered as an abrupt and brutal audit: at a moments notice. (p. 67)

Thompson and Bunderson (2003) reported that for cultural members to question a breach of ideology, a more intense event is required than a transactional or relational breach. They concluded because members wait to evaluate whether it is a genuine ideological infraction, "the 'boiling point'- the point at which perceived breach will erupt into felt violation, will occur at higher temperatures' for ideology infused contracts" (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003, p. 2003). The events that unfolded over the final two weeks of phase three served as 'environment jolts' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013) reaching 'boiling point' after the world cup final. The poor result, ideological breach, identity threat and the public sphere gave an emotional intensity to the experience (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Taken for granted meanings and beliefs were overtly threatened, forcing participants to question the fundamental assumptions about what things meant and how they should act (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Players made emotive comments in their performance reviews, "*sharing the battlefield with players who disgraced the jersey" (Player, Performance Review Document, January 2014).* HC reflected on the perceived identity breach,

We're trying to protect something here which is important to a lot of people, and that's something which, again, when you talk about the disappointment and the hurt, in terms of the circumstances of the back end of the tournament last year...for me, one of the real painful aspects was there's a lot people who are invested in this jumper. Not the people, staff and players that were away at the tournament...the people back home, the people that have been watching and cheering for us for a long time, you know, one of

our values as a team is to have a country that's proud of us. So straight away, that was a kick in the guts. (HC, Interview, February 2014)

As a result of the ideological significance ascribed to the events, it served as a rich site for sensemaking amongst the HPU leaders and was a trigger for deep reflection and resultant change as they sought answers to make sense of experience. The powerful events surrounding the end of the campaign served to create the required equivocality about the team's culture (Weick et al., 2005) to stimulate significant sensemaking (Weick, 1995; 2009) that was perhaps not evident in the early phases of implementing *Te Iwi Kiwi* with the HPU.

The confusion or surprise exhibited by the HPU leaders in response to the events at the end of the campaign, was an example of a 'sensemaking gap', a new heightened awareness resulting from the contrasting of preconceived ideas and with that of experienced reality (Maitlis et al., 2013). The sensemaking gap triggered discomfort amongst players and the HPU leaders stimulating the questioning, doubting and updating required for sensemaking and change (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1988). The conditions at the end of the campaign and the months following drew similarity with those experienced by the HPU leaders during the PD visit intervention (albeit differing in context and intensity). This is in contrast with the sensemaking evident during the action steps of the intervention, where there was little sensemaking gap, thus, little enacted, felt emotion or doubting and updating of meaning (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Maitlis et al., 2013). Despite this, the learning resulting from the experience of the intervention through the flows of HPU (organisational) life facilitated new knowledge, understanding and meaning construction in the face of reflecting upon 'what went wrong'.

Evaluation of Phase Four (Evaluation of Intervention and Action)

To encourage the meta-learning philosophy noted throughout the project, the evaluation itself was critiqued, I articulated my own learning and summarised the outcomes relating to the research process, premise and content.

Research Reflection: Process, Premise and Content Learning

The evaluation phase prompted a number of methodological reflections and considerations about evaluating the intervention and action. Reflecting upon process, to ascertain learning from the perspective of the core group (HPD, HC and CEO) the formal evaluation cycle was of considerable value. The evaluation cycle as a distinct phase separated the emotions, feelings and beliefs documented in the flow of experience from the conscious reflection directed towards the intervention and learning. The evaluation phase allowed participants to articulate their own learning in a reflective fashion that was purposeful yet distinct and separate from the daily and weekly pressures that shaped the data in Chapter Six. Given that retrospection plays a significant part in sensemaking (Weick, 1995; 2009; Weick et al., 2005), the evaluation cycle facilitated the sensemaking of HPU leaders as they endeavoured to make sense of the experiences and outcomes of the previous six months. More overt collaboration with the HPU leaders at this stage through questioning and probing, enabled deeper and further retrospection, challenging, questioning and updating of sense made from experience (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 2010) as highlighted in some of the responses to my probing, "*that's a good question, I'll have to think about that*" (HC, Interview, December 2014) and "*it made me think about our conversation earlier*" (HPD, Interview, February 2014).

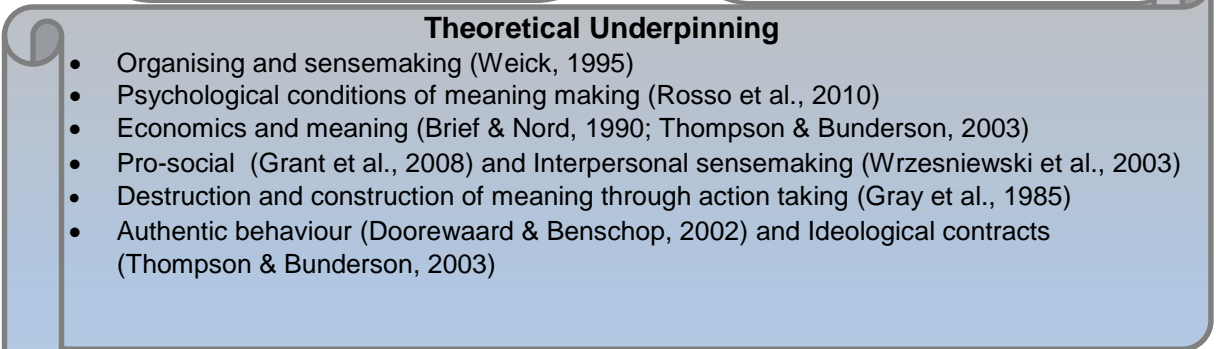
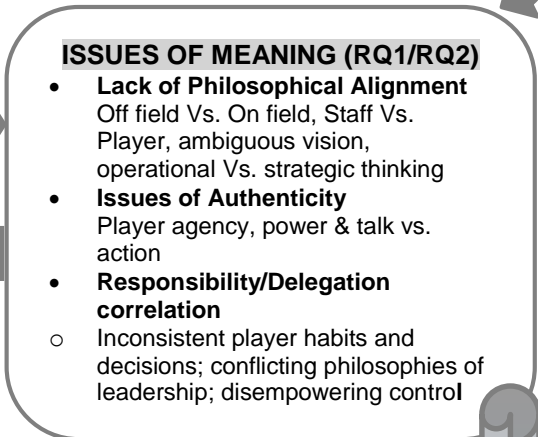
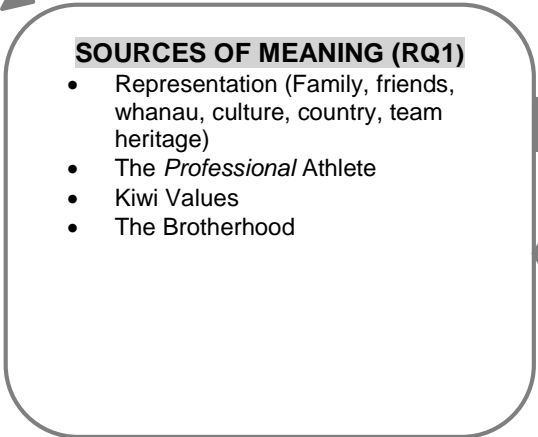
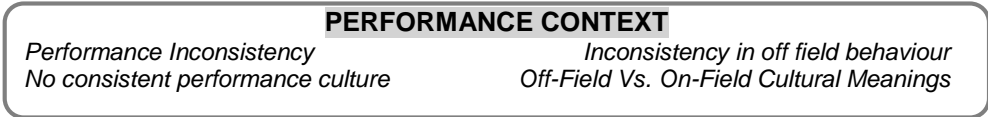
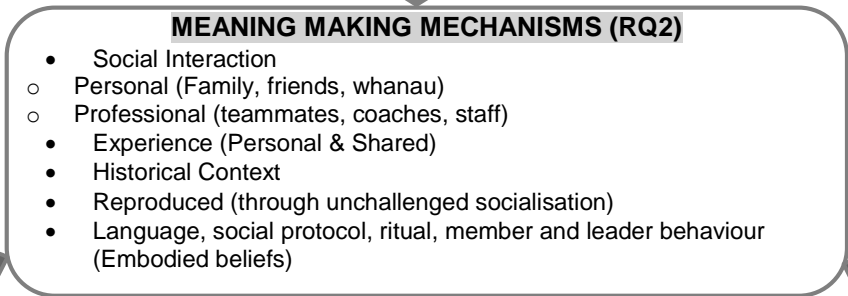
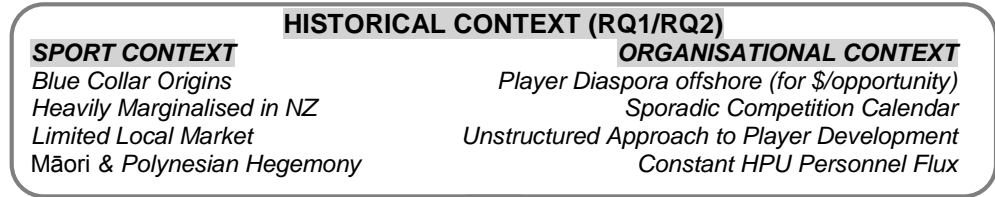
A second important process consideration was the sporadic nature of the annual calendar. This meant the evaluation period had no competitions or training camps with the HPU. Therefore, much of the documented change was verbalised learnings and plans. I was unable to make an inference to what extent the discourse changes would directly affect the local

level management and leadership of the HPU. The risk in making conclusions of tangible change and impact based upon the espoused learnings and intended actions of leaders made away from the daily context of the HPU echoes the contextual decoupling between planning and implementation reported in Chapters Five and Six. Once high performance sport managers are placed back in practice with their team or unit, complete with social, situational and contextual complexity, the espoused learnings may be rendered redundant or practically enacted in completely different ways to what was intended.

Reflecting upon premise learning and considering the unstated assumptions that governed the attitudes and behaviour of the participants, the evaluation phase did highlight the gravitas given to the off-field issues that blighted the final two weeks of the campaign. The significance and perceived sensitivity of these issues and their media profile framed thinking during much of the evaluation phase. As HPU leaders and some players rationalised their experience, they constructed a plausible retrospective narrative (Weick et al., 2005) that drew direct links between the 'cultural issues', including the late selection decision, and the culture, on-field performance and the impact of the intervention. In doing so, the narratives may have magnified or distorted the severity and impact of these issues. The significance attributed to these events may have desensitised participants to other subtle issues (many documented in Chapter Six), including the intervention, that were more genuinely performance impacting, and contributed to the disappointing final result. There is evidence that the significance given to the perceived '*mini crisis*' event may have overplayed the impact of the off-field behaviour upon performance, and underplayed the quality of the opposition and the impact and relevance of the intervention. However, given the complex nature of sport performance it is not possible to establish an explicit relationship between the intervention, off-field events and the team's performance in the final. While highlighting the suitability of a research paradigm that acknowledges multiple realities and complexity, the difficulties experienced in linking change interventions with outcomes acted a reminder of the methodological considerations needed when using action-research approaches to study performance sport.

Reflecting upon content learning, the HPU leaders identified that both the issue and the solution for promoting a high performing culture within the HPU were and continued to be valid and valuable ideas. However, the process of implementation was criticised coupled with oversights of some specific contextual constraints. At the conclusion of the data collection there was little compelling evidence of an organisational change (Cardno, 2003) in the performance culture of the HPU, with the intervention having limited traction or collective influence with the target group.

However, there was evidence that the research had some legacy in the form of personal and interpersonal change (Cardno, 2003) in the philosophies, beliefs and meanings of the core group of change agents, the HPU leaders. A change in leader discourse was documented as a result of the experience of phases one, two, three and four of the research. Participant learning and change was grounded in the acknowledgement of the performance impacting existing cultural infrastructure ('brotherhood'), an awareness of the need for strong, courageous leadership by way of symbolic decisions, and the need for collective and collaborative management practices that drive sustainable change. As part of the discourse change, a new awareness of the type of people selected was reflected in a commitment to new selection strategies designed to 'get the right blokes on the bus'. A schematic outline of the research outcomes, findings and theoretical synthesis for all four phases of the EAR model can be found in Figure 9.



**Phase 3
(Chapter 5)**

THE ISSUE FOR ACTION: *Philosophical Alignment*
(How the HPU can develop philosophical alignment across internal stakeholders as a means of promoting a high performing culture.

INTERVENTION 1
The Professional Development Visit (PD Visit)

LEARNING: Conditions for Leader Sensemaking and Change (RQ3 & 4)

- **INTERNAL:** Already looking, existing dissatisfaction, urgency, aspirations for a better future.
- **EXTERNAL:** A compelling image of a different future, legitimate source, perceived cultural similarities
- **A FELT EXPERIENCE**

Theoretical Underpinning

- Identity as central to meaning construction (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Weick et al., 2005)
- Image deterioration (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991)
- Sensebreaking, doubting and updating (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013)
- Pre-existing knowledge structures (Bartunek et al., 1999)
- Sensemaking and emotions (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Maitlis et al., 2013)

ACTION STEPS
Te Iwi Kiwi Planning

LEARNING: Leader sensemaking and Meaning Construction

PROCESS

- Cultural Narratives, Stories and Metaphors
- Identity and Identification
- Co-Construction

DESIRED MEANINGS

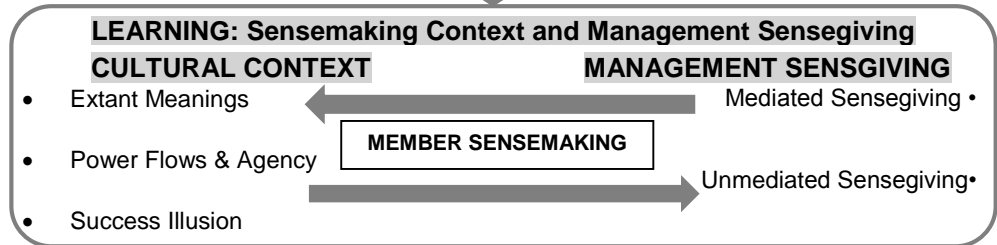
- Belonging
- Transcendence: Being part of something 'greater'
- Ownership, Buy-In and Responsibility

Theoretical Underpinning

- Narrative and metaphors in change and sensemaking (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2002; Humphreys et al., 2012; Thurlow & Mills, 2009)
- Management of Meaning; Ideological leadership (Limerick, 1990; Smircich & Morgan, 1982)
- Shared experience, interpretation and enacted meaning (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 1995)
- Plausibility over accuracy (Weick, 1995)

**Phase 3
(Chapter 6)**

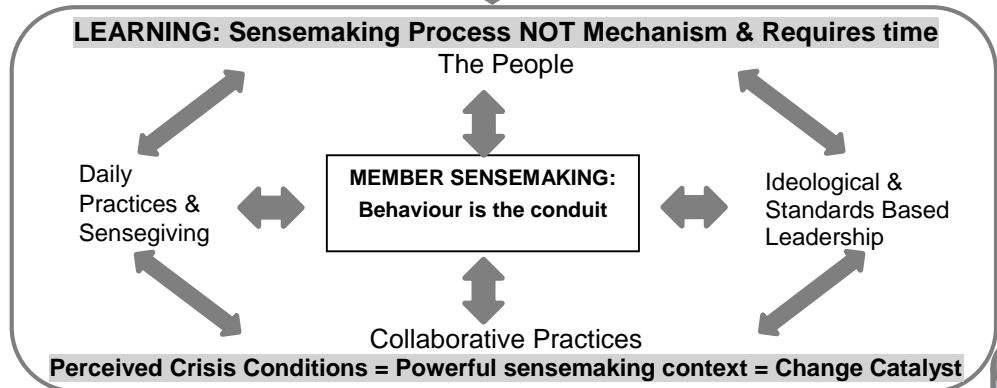
INTERVENTION 2 & ACTION STEPS
Te Iwi Kiwi Implementation



- Theoretical Underpinning**
- Cultural Infrastructure and inertia (Brooks & Bate, 1994)
 - Minimal Sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005)
 - Triggers of sensegiving and sensemaking (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007)
 - Power flows on HP sport teams (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2013a)
 - Plausible sensemaking and blind spots (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003)

**Phase 4
(Chapter 7)**

EVALUATION
Impact, Influence and Change



- Theoretical Underpinning**
- Organisational Impermanence (Weick, 2009)
 - Change as continuous non episodic (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Weick & Quinn, 1999)
 - Meaning construction as; process not content (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008); local and collaborative (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002)
 - Equivocality (Weick et al., 2005), doubting and updating (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick & Quinn, 1999)
 - Ideological contracts (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003)
 - Sensemaking and crisis (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 2010)

Figure 9. Summary of research outcomes for phase one, two, three and four

As there was no test campaigns during phase four, there was little opportunity for evidence of the HPU leaders enacting their articulated learning and change directly with the HPU. However, as an epilogue to this research, a week after data collection concluded, despite losing, the team's performance in the annual Anzac test versus Australia had captured the attention of the media, highlighting the character of the players on display:

Rated as no-hopers before the game, the Kiwis more than held their own and led 18-12 at half-time before being overhauled in the second half...the Kiwis can take great credit from a display that was full of character and commitment. (Australian Associated Press, 2014)

As discussed earlier, the selection for this game reflected a change in philosophy, where established, well-known players were overlooked in preference of players with the desired character and behaviours. This epilogue offers some practical evidence of change amongst the HPU leaders in the form of a commitment to selecting who they perceived as the 'right' (cultural) players rather than the most talented, and how such character driven selection can communicate meaning and subsequently capture the imagination of spectators.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Chapter Introduction

This research explored how a NSO acted as an agent of change to promote a high performing culture within their high performance unit. To explore culture and meaning change in high performance sport, it was identified that a research philosophy (constructivist-interpretive) and methodology (ethnographic action research) that allowed for the generation of both theoretically and practically meaningful knowledge was needed. Understanding change was predicated on the belief that to meaningfully investigate change it had to be in situ, embedded in the local, daily context of practice. The collaborative approach between researcher and practitioners (HPU leaders), to varying degrees throughout the research process, enabled the co-construction of rich practical theory, while simultaneously having an impact upon practice.

This chapter synthesises the findings and conclusions drawn from each phase of the EAR model and makes a case for how this learning might extend the current theory and practice of managing culture change in high performance sport. The first section draws together the research aims and central findings. This is followed by practical and methodological implications from the findings of this research. The chapter concludes by acknowledging research limitations and opportunities for future research.

Review of Research Aims and Main Findings

The central question guiding this research was: *How does the organisation act as an agent of change to effectively promote a high performing culture within the high performance unit?* To address this central question, five sub questions were posed; *What are the players' sources of meaning when playing for New Zealand? How were/are these meanings constructed? What actions can be taken to foster meaning and purpose? What are the implications of these actions? And What factors constrain or enable the ability of people to construct meaning?* The first two sub questions were primarily addressed in phases one and two of the EAR model (Chapter Four) and the remaining three through the phases three and four (Chapters Five, Six and Seven). A summary of the outcomes in relation to the research questions can be found in Figure 10, which highlights both the broad theoretical knowledge bases and the specific authors whose theoretical ideas have contributed to understanding the practical outcomes. In particular, theories of organisational change, meaning, sensemaking, sensegiving and high performance sport have all contributed in understanding how participants made meaning of their experiences through the research process.

Both the process and outcome established advancement in the contextual knowledge about how high performance sport managers, coaches, athletes and support personnel make sense of experience and construct meaning through manager-led change, and subsequently how a NSO can act as an agent of change in their high performance team. The PD visit intervention served as a form of creative tension or inspirational stretch that established a target or ideal culture (Senge, 1996), that was perceived would foster high levels of on-field performance. HPU leaders perceived the meanings and values in the target culture as crucial to on and off-field success. The target culture possessed a 'culture toolbox' of activities and events that were used to emphasise, legitimise and enact the desired meanings. *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention reconstructed this culture, but designed to suit a New Zealand (Kiwi) rugby league context. This design included a desired set of meanings that defined *Te Iwi Kiwi*, and to trigger meaning and change, were communicated through evocative cultural narrative and allegory, and supported by a 'culture toolbox'. In an attempt to avoid the perils of imposing hierarchical

meaning on others (Raelin, 2006) and proceed from the position that “meaning is rooted in the group and collective” (Bennis, 2009, p. 159), inherent meanings were drawn from the prevailing discourses existing within the HPU. The actions steps were planned to work in ideological terms, constructing concepts that were appealing as both sources of meaning and processes through which meaning and meaningful team membership could be constructed. As a result, *Te Iwi Kiwi* intervention, as a narrative of process, helped HPU leaders deal with equivocality (Weick, 1995), understand and rationalise what they thought, and define an identity as they prepared for the world cup. The intervention presented a well aligned, coherent, culturally relevant, and most importantly, plausible narrative that was perceived by HPU leaders as something the players could identify with.

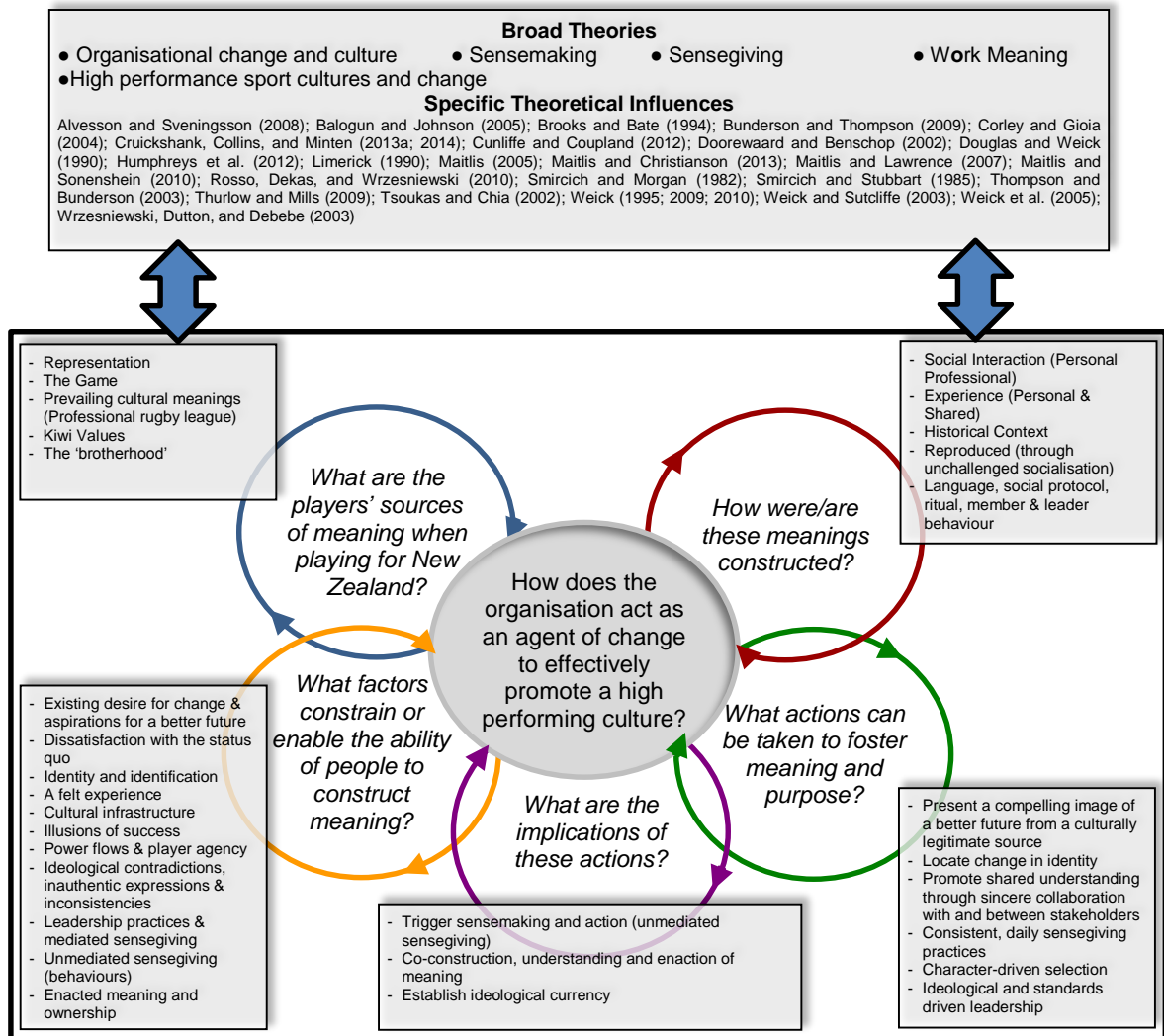


Figure 10. Summary of research outcomes in relation to research questions

The findings offered a practical example of many elements within Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) reciprocal sensemaking model, albeit not in the classical sense of a (perceived) successful change effort. Phases one, two and the first action loop of phase three (Chapters' Four and Five) explored the HPU leaders' own sensemaking as they sought answers to their questions of purpose, meaning and change and constructed a vision ('envisioning') for the organisation, *Te Iwi Kiwi*. This was followed by a period of sensegiving, or 'signalling' the new vision and the accompanying organisational reality to (and with) players and management. At the same time, players and management interpreted and 're-visited' the intended meaning of the intervention, while leaders and some players attempted to, 'energise', enact and realise *Te Iwi Kiwi* in practice (Chapter Six). The post-world cup evaluation phase (Chapter Seven)

acted to extend the 'envisioning' phase and close the feedback loop with management as they questioned what happened, and subsequently modified and 're-visioned' *Te Iwi Kiwi* for the future. However, unlike Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) model, for a number of reasons, participants failed to enact and realise the desired vision in practice. It is in the space between the two stories of sensemaking, that of the HPU leaders, and that of the wider participants, that the most salient findings and learning was located.

While managing change is a core high performance sport management task (Cruickshank et al., 2014), the findings indicated changing the deeply embedded meanings held by a high performance sport unit is highly complex, multifaceted and situational, and thus, difficult to trigger. In this, any attempt to define the social and ideological reality for others becomes a highly contested and negotiated practice. In synthesising the findings across the entire research, ten factors emerged that were deemed to contribute to the ability of the NSO to act as an agent of change in promoting a high performing culture. The research interrogated a highly complex and context specific discourse, thus these ten factors exist not as a comprehensive list, or 'recipe for success', but as the most salient (and pragmatic) factors that influenced change agency amongst the HPU leaders. They are also not intended to be a hierarchy of factors, but instead a series of intimately related considerations for leadership change agency. A schematic representation of these ten factors can be found in Figure 11.

As shown in Figure 11, 'identity' and identification forms the starting point for making sense of experience and change (Weick, 1995). Meaning was triggered when it connected with participants' identity and perceived sense of self (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Therefore, change is required to appeal first and foremost to a sense of identity, such as the leaders perceived cultural similarities between the team's culture and the PD visit team, or the haka leader's interpretations of *Te Iwi Kiwi*. For leaders, uncovering and articulating the core identities and meanings at play in the culture influences change agency because it creates an ideological connection for members. Narratives, stories, metaphors and allegories, located in culturally meaningful identities and knowledge can be used as sensegiving tools and organisational vocabularies to trigger, direct and frame sensemaking to promote a sense of belonging, sense of purpose and transcendence (Rosso et al., 2010). The narratives that powerfully captured HPU leaders' interest and subsequently formed the language for sensemaking, identity and the change intervention (Abolafia, 2010; Humphreys & Brown, 2002) were however, largely absent throughout the world cup.

The absence of these narratives with the wider HPU demonstrated that while identity forms a crucial start point for sensemaking and meaning, a sense of identity and identification could not be relied upon to carry an entire change effort. The participants sense of identity and their subsequent sensemaking of the change intervention was framed by the cultural context and prevailing cultural infrastructure. A central thesis is founded on the notion that a national sports team exists as a construct of loosely connected agents (Douglas & Weick, 1990), where in the absence of the tightly coupled relationships and interactions found in professional club contexts, meaning forms the only remaining anchor for collective action and performance (Limerick, 1990). With minimal shared experience in impermanent organisations like national sport teams, there is limited ability to create organisational memory and subsequent meaning (Bechky, 2006). Consequentially, in the search for stable meaning, participants drew on the diverse and prevailing social, cultural and professional discourses, and in turn protected and preserved these interpretations of their organisational reality. The multiple interpretations of learning by management personnel from the PD visit intervention highlighted the potential for different interpretations (meanings) even for the same experience because of the diverse

experiences and personal discourses available. The resultant loosely coupled unit of loosely coupled agents positions philosophical alignment as the perennial challenge to change agents in an organisational unit of largely diverse and disparate individuals. Therefore, the second and third factors influencing change agency were an 'awareness and understanding of the context for change and the existing cultural infrastructure'.

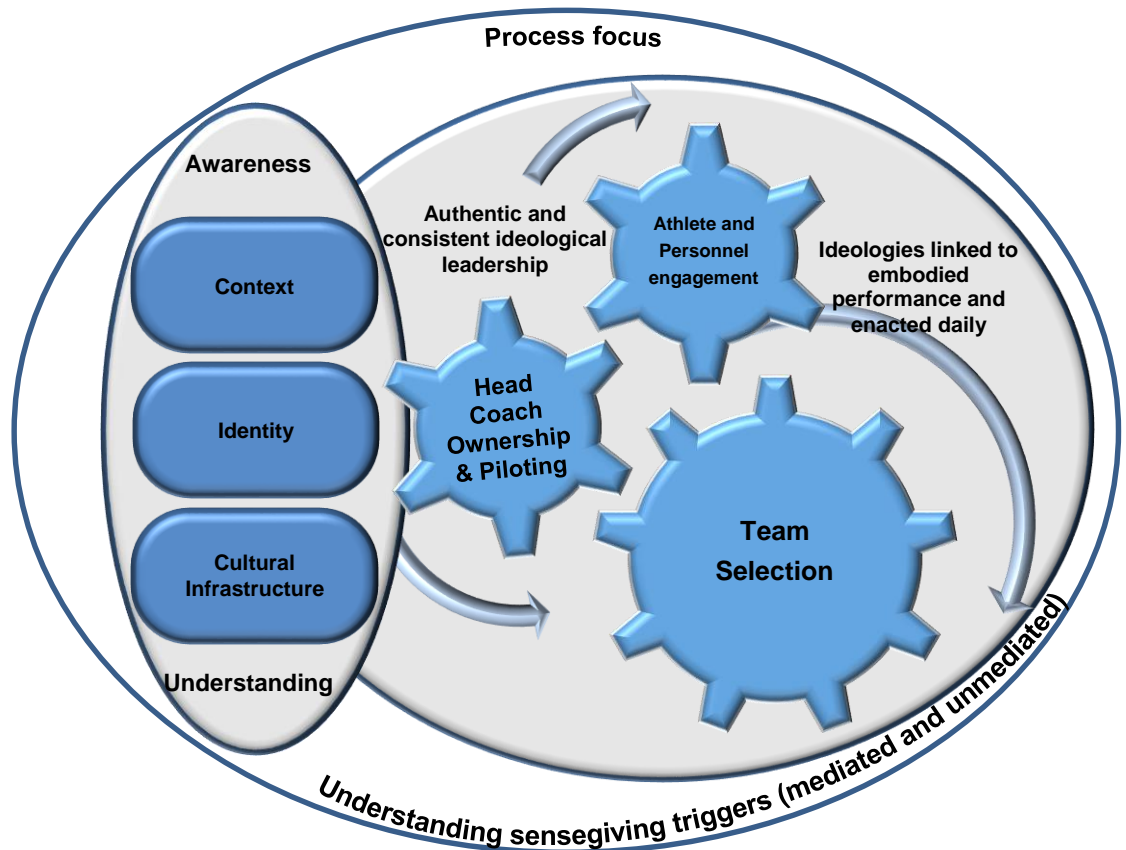


Figure 11. Ten factors contributing to the NSO's ability to act as an agent of change

The findings indicate that the internal and external prevailing meanings that form a cultural infrastructure and inertia inhibit even the most well-founded and well-intended change initiatives (Brooks & Bate, 1994; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). The existing meanings that provided the cultural infrastructure and change inertia, such as the 'brotherhood' and on-field 'success illusion' desensitised sensemaking. This allowed plausible (yet inaccurate) assumptions and beliefs to prevail, creating blind spots for leaders and participants, where significant events were overlooked. The result was a team of players (and some management) who did not perceive performance and team related matters in the same way. The plausible success narratives constructed by participants (including leaders) helped create the issues that later came to constrain not only the success of the intervention, but also collective action and performance.

Challenging identity generated considerable emotion, both positive and aspirational during the PD visit, and negative and threatening at the end of the world cup in the 'mini crisis'. These salient shared experiences collectively destabilised the existing cultural infrastructure, forcing participants to question and confront the ideological foundations of the HPU. This consequently triggered deep reflective sensemaking amongst participants. Through such identity challenges, participants questioned the previously taken for granted and constructed new shared understandings and action. The findings concurred with the dominant literature linking identity threats with revolutionary change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Maitlis &

Sonenshein, 2010). The powerful influence of internal anger and external embarrassment (from on-field result) through the *'mini crisis'* experience also supports earlier work that argued that ideological breaches require intense events to overcome prevailing cultural blind spots and rationalised realities to trigger new awareness and face questions of meaning and identity (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). While change does not need to be precipitated by crisis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), findings provide evidence for the argument that in the absence of crisis, changing the meanings that govern a national sport team culture is very challenging, if at all possible.

A fourth factor (see Figure 11) contributing to HPU leaders change agency focused on the attention given to a content, rather than a 'process' focus. Findings highlighted the inherent risk in leading national sport teams where performance leaders spend significant time away from the team constructing plans for success. A change intervention was developed in a context separate to where it would be implemented. This desensitised leaders to the importance of context (inhibiting factor one and two of Figure 11) and thus the influential dynamics of social intercourse. The consequence was the false security of a seemingly plausible intervention that reduced the complexities of change to a well packaged, but largely ineffective change strategy. Despite the effort and time given by participants to planning change, it was evident that leading and managing change is clearly not discrete or easy to package, but a dynamic, uncertain and ongoing accomplishment (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Weick et al., 2005).

A fifth factor (see Figure 11) that framed the ability of the NSO to act as an agent of change was 'understanding sensegiving triggers'. Resulting from a lack of process (and subsequent attention to context; factors two and four), merely altering the surface architecture or artefacts while proving interesting to participants, failed to trigger the intended meanings and meaningful connection. Superficial and thin mediated sensegiving was susceptible to dominance by prevailing meanings and cultural infrastructure, power flows and player agency. In the absence of collective sensemaking, unmediated sensegiving by participants (both HPU leaders and players) formed a far more powerful trigger of sensemaking than conscious mediated efforts to introduce new meanings and subsequently small events and issues came to have significant impacts.

A consistent theme permeating this research and a sixth factor (see Figure 11) contributing to NSO change agency was the degree of 'head coach ownership and piloting' of change. It was widely reported by participants that first and foremost, the change needed to be meaningfully driven or piloted by the head coach. HPU leaders reflected that they did not feel liked they 'owned' the change intervention and therefore this significantly influenced its implementation with the HPU. Mirroring organisational research (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Hope, 2010; Limerick, 1990; Smircich & Morgan, 1982) and the limited research in high performance sport (Carey, 2013), the behaviour of the positional leader, the head coach (and to a lesser extent his assistants and team manager) formed central sensemaking triggers for participants when making sense of not only the change intervention, but organisational life.

The seventh factor (see Figure 11) influencing change agency was a perceived lack of 'authentic and consistent ideological leadership'. Perceived inconsistencies (or oversights) of decisions failed to offer the required stability to trigger desired sensemaking amongst the loosely connected agents. It was evident that any event can facilitate sensemaking and meaning can be both fragile and enduring. The findings reported how in the absence of significant collective sensemaking, the subtle behaviours, decisions and actions of a variety of actors formed unmediated sensegiving triggers from which participants interpreted the meaning

of an experience and attributed value. Inauthentic and superficial expressions and actions from social actors ensured that new meanings were quickly diluted to anodyne meaninglessness, while prevailing meanings persisted, framing and inhibiting further sensemaking and sensegiving and lurking as blind spots that frustrated change efforts (Gray et al., 1985).

Considering that meaning is continually negotiated and reconstructed through enaction (Weick, 2010), the eighth factor (see Figure 11) framing the influence of change agents was the degree to which meanings and ideologies were 'linked to embodied performance and enacted daily'. The research highlighted that sensemaking and meaning construction is subtle and embedded in the everyday life, actions and practices of high performance athletes and management personnel, but punctuated by salient critical incidents, such as selection, off-field behaviour and on-field results. Subsequently, taking action proved far more powerful than dialogue in triggering sensemaking, and bringing meaning to life, highlighting the importance of meaning construction as an embodied experience (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

With shared experience and understanding as the building blocks for meaning (Weick, 2009), the ninth factor (see Figure 11) influencing change agency, was the degree of ongoing and sincere 'athlete and personnel engagement' incorporating collaboration between hierarchical leadership, management personnel and players. The findings revealed that meaning construction in the HPU was the product of experience underpinned by the complex relationship between personal, professional and historical contexts. Meaning construction from experience and what constituted a meaningful experience was a highly social activity and was either shared with or shaped by (significant) others. Meanings prevailed because they were unchallenged and reproduced through a variety of socialising mediums (language, story, social protocol, leadership behaviour and certain rituals) that enabled consistent shared experience. Concurring with Weick's (2009) central position that shared meaning is constructed and sustained from a shared understanding of the same experience, the rich experiences during and following the PD visit that triggered sensemaking and meaning for HPD (and to a lesser extent HC) were not mirrored for the wider participants. The co-construction of the intervention from ongoing collaborative experiences between HPU leaders and CA, triggered sensemaking and facilitated a plausible, culturally relevant and most importantly meaningful intervention for the HPU leaders. The wider participants, however, lacked the collaborative and shared experience with *Te Iwi Kiwi*, and subsequently, for these individuals, it became devoid of much of its intended meaning and any intended change was not sustained.

It could be argued however, that *Te Iwi Kiwi* and the wharenui was plausible to leaders because they had (with assistance) constructed it. The missing ownership by players and other management was reflective of a lack of shared experience and understanding of the intervention. Despite good intentions, and a conscious effort to ground change in the inherent meanings and identities in the team, HPU leaders (as change agents) largely authored the intervention themselves and imposed it upon participants. The initial template, one that the wider participants clearly identified as relevant and interesting, was not enough alone to trigger and sustain change, no matter how plausible it seemed to HPU leaders. Altering the surface architecture and artefacts without the rich narrative and dialogue that challenged, questioned and talked about meaning failed to trigger collective meaning. For example, players showed a greater understanding and interpretation of *Te Iwi Kiwi* in the collaborative sessions that asked questions of meaning, run by CA shortly before departing for the world cup, than in the entire remainder of the research process. Similar experiences were documented for HPD when developing *Te Iwi Kiwi* in preparation for the world cup. These findings demonstrated that sensemaking and meaning is not triggered simply by the transmission of information from

change agents to recipients. Indeed, in this case the impact and sustainability of the interventions highlighted that elite athletes and management personnel needed to be engaged in reconstructing any hierarchical impositions of meaning to suit their perspective at the local level (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Mantere et al., 2012; Weick et al., 2005). The findings promote the idea that hierarchical sensegiving practices are not a direct link to triggering sensemaking as highlighted by the risk associated with assuming what is plausible for one is plausible for another. While meaning may be the anchor for collective action (Limerick, 1990), it is shared understanding from shared experience that triggers this meaning and subsequently sustains change (Weick, 2009).

These findings supported and extended literature that positions not only organisational sensemaking as a political endeavour (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Eero, 2003; Hope, 2010; Long & Mills, 2010), but that the high performance sport environment is imbued with distributed power and personal agency (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014). The power structures in the HPU afforded significant agency to many players and contributed to the loose coupling between structure (leadership power) and agency (player and management personnel behaviour). These findings further reinforce the need to pursue meaning as the anchor for collective action, over traditional hierarchical forms of control. Considering power, agency and the impact of individuals and groups upon the HPU's culture, 'team selection' (see Figure 11) emerged the tenth and final factor affecting change agency amongst HPU leaders. Team selection offered a critical filter for meaning that both constrained and enabled its construction, by not only controlling the individuals that entered the culture but also acting as a significant 'container of meaning' for other team members. The research has made original contributions to high performance sport management theory, method and practice.

Implications for High Performance Sport Organisation Change Theory

The findings of my research have implications for theory which surround the application of organisational theory to examine the organisational dynamics of the high performance sport team, a domain that until recent research, was traditionally dominated by sport psychology. Furthermore, my research moves the existing organisational change literature beyond the collegiate (Schroeder, 2010a), professional team (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; Frontiera, 2010) and sport organisation (Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Wagstaff et al., 2012) settings to focus exclusively on the construct of the national sport team (within the broader NSO context). However, the theoretical contributions to scholarship exist beyond merely the application of existing theory to a new context. My research connected and reconceptualised previously separate bodies of work in organisational meaning-making, sensemaking, sensegiving and cultural perspectives of organisations and change to understand and explain how change does or does not occur in the high performance sport setting. Sensemaking and sensegiving formed a lens to understand attempted manager-led change at the local level, from the perspectives of both change agents and recipients. Much organisational change research and theoretical understandings of culture has persisted from traditional 'top-down' perspectives. This research investigated change holistically and from the 'bottom up', exploring manager intentions and participant interpretations, uncovering what meanings were actually being conveyed by managers to organisation members and why certain meanings were prevailing over others. In doing so the research has helped to address theoretical gaps identified in the literature by connecting leadership with people, and elaborating how meaning is constructed and the role key agents, stakeholders and prevailing contexts play in this process. Having used an innovative research methodology in a challenging research field, it is necessary to explore the implications for the EAR method in high performance sport research in the future.

Implications of the Ethnographic Action Research Method

Ethnographic action research (EAR) is a methodology that holds the intention of understanding a culture prior to, through and in change contexts (Bath, 2009; Tacchi et al., 2009). As an innovative and emergent methodology that integrates two separate research traditions, EAR offered a bespoke research approach providing both theoretical and practical benefits in a challenging research context. Subsequently, as highlighted in Chapter Two, the method addressed a number of methodological gaps in earlier high performance sport research. The length of the research and my cultural immersion allowed me to locate both the HPU and the management of high performance sport cultures within the broader organisational context (Douglas & Weick, 1990). In doing so, I was able to collaborate and assist in a change process, as well as better understand the lived experience of the participants, in particular the core group (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) in their leadership of this unit of the organisation. The long-term engagement as participant and researcher allowed me to be involved in and track manager-led change in real time. The process allowed multiple voices to emerge, not limiting the research findings to retrospective accounts (Cruickshank et al., 2013a) or singular (leader centric) perspectives (Frontiera, 2010). Subsequently, EAR allowed me as the researcher to draw an organic cultural picture by mapping the social network through the activities of participants (Tacchi et al., 2009). It should be acknowledged, however, that I could only draw conclusions from the use of this method in the HPU context. Nevertheless, by blending a number of methodological and philosophical perspectives to develop and road test a coherent framework for organisational analysis of behaviour and change is unique and holds significant potential as not only a research method but also praxis for change practitioners. Indeed, a number of pertinent learnings about this method emerged through the research process and offers implications and considerations for those interested in pursuing an EAR study of high performance sport.

First, given the high profile nature and potential sensitivity of data collection in this context, a number of variables are required to conduct an effective EAR project in high performance sport. The formal gatekeepers in the roles of high performance director and CEO facilitate access, and therefore, their engagement and continued support is a critical success factor without which a platform to enact a successful EAR process cannot be established. Following this, the commitment, openness, willingness, and support of the head coach, management personnel and players are crucial. The welcome I received from participants facilitated a willing research field and provided the opportunity to 'live' with the HPU and for participants to remain involved and engaged throughout the entire process. The honest and insightful contributions made by many of the management and players enabled the co-construction of an authentic cultural picture. In the context of an international sport team with periodic competitions, the length and 'living in' nature of the ethnography enabled me to observe and interact with the culture on multiple occasions and in different settings. Multiple data collection methods but most importantly, flexible methods were essential in building a 'thick' cultural picture of meanings and meaning construction. Whilst I did not adopt a philosophical position of pragmatism, given the uncontrollable and dynamic nature of the research field, pragmatic approaches to data collection were essential and to pursue the methods that yielded the richest data. Within a sport performance environment searching for tangible performance improvements, as discussed in Chapter Four, participant observation of behaviour (with participant voice as supporting, triangulated data) became a central data source for documenting the embodied or 'lived' meanings that influenced performance.

Second, the context of high performance sport is an unstable, messy and complex field for research. A high degree of personnel change was evident throughout. These changes were

not isolated to the NZRL HPU, but reflective of a cultural landscape of professional sport where club coaches, support staff and players are recruited, fired, traded or resign from their positions with regularity. While personnel transition is reflective of the nature of the high performance sport industry, for the researcher, a research field in a constant state of flux becomes a key consideration in undertaking collaborative change focused research. Weick's (2009) notion of organisational impermanence becomes particularly relevant when considering these contextual conditions. He argued that impermanence is inherent in postmodern organisations, where "situations are changing, experience is streaming and teams are transient" (p. vii). Subsequently, organisational permanence exists as a fabrication and social construction as people organise portions of text, narrative and experience to build recurrence and thus facilitate the façade of stability (Weick, 2009). The extent of change and flux experienced in the HPU reveals the degree of impermanence in high performance sport settings. At times, as the researcher, the constant change was a source of dissonance and frustration as I attempted to make sense of the meanings at play, interact with participants, collaborate with HPU leaders and construct the cultural picture. I subsequently was required to be flexible with respect to the nature of collaboration between HPU leaders and myself. In response to instability and situational challenges, I shifted between overt and explicit collaboration, and subtle, nuanced influencing, to promote co-construction between the core group and myself. The consistent instability also made it difficult to ascertain if change and learning was the product of any intervention or merely a natural occurrence of cycles of impermanence. Impermanence proved a challenge to understanding the construct of change in the classical sense, by linking intervention with action while also attributing such change to on-field performance improvements.

The inclusion of the psychology consultant contributed a further layer of complexity to the research process. While her involvement is likely to have increased dialogue and reflection about cultural matters amongst participants, it is not possible to infer the extent her presence and the initiatives such as *'The Kiwi Way'*, leadership group meetings and the player leadership group vote influenced the emergent meanings and participants responses to research change interventions.

Personnel changes aside, continual performance pressure upon coaches, players and support personnel and the subsequent environmental stressors, meant the research had to be very carefully monitored so not to be perceived as a distraction for players or a nuisance to HPU leaders and management personnel. As highlighted above, both collaboration with HPU leaders and the broader data collection required a flexible and pragmatic poise, accepting that planned research initiatives may not be actioned, time allocated for interviews removed and other initiatives (outside the research) prioritised by HPU leaders. However, an important consideration in the design was, as researcher to allow HPU leaders to prioritise change and lead intervention design. This did mean that while the research was still highly collaborative in co-constructing knowledge, interventions and actions, the core group had greater ownership of the intervention. The consequence was that the implementation in the field day-to-day was never rejected (even if extra or competing initiatives were added).

The instability in the research field did however make it difficult to separate the impact of the intervention from general daily activities. However, this research does therefore, offer an organic, 'real world', interpretation of the realities of high performance sport and change management. This contributes further to understanding the phenomenon of change as perceived by those who experience it rather than in controlled environments or from myopic, individual perspectives. While the challenges reported in conducting interpretive and

collaborative action-centred research in high performance sport do require acknowledgement. It is also necessary to maintain a pragmatic acceptance as 'par for the course' of research in this field. The emergence of impermanence reveals the research field as dynamic, complex and highly uncontrollable, thus not only reinforcing the suitability of the research philosophy but also offering a useful theoretical and methodological lens to inform EAR approaches in the future.

The final implication for the use of the EAR method focuses upon the concept of identity (re)negotiation. This was particularly pertinent given the multiple positions I was required to hold and present throughout the research. To drive the EAR research process I was required to concurrently occupy a position as a participant and researcher. As Mazer (2003) wrote, "I am simultaneously inside and outside the game, knowledgeable and naïve, powerful and vulnerable" (p. 227). While offering interplay between seeing through the eyes of a change participant and a dispassionate observer, in sustaining organisational membership and a research perspective, I encountered role conflict, found myself in behavioural claims, loyalty tugs and identification dilemmas (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The unfamiliarity with interpretative research left others to reconstruct my identity in the field. As Harrington (2003) wrote "when ethnographers approach a research site, they will be defined in terms of social identity categories salient to participants" (p. 607). Based on pre-existing social identity categories of doctoral students and academics, I was sometimes labelled the 'scientist' or 'geek' by management, while players used elements of my participant role on the management team to define me and my identity, making me wear GPS vests as part of a fine for a misdemeanour, or heckling me when the IT or video equipment failed in meetings. It is important to acknowledge that there will always be tension between finding and being given a place in the research field. The researcher cannot control his or her social placement and participants are known to use power and creativity to categorise researchers to make their presence more familiar and less threatening to group identity (Warren, 2001). Researchers are therefore required to be both flexible and accepting of the labels they acquire from their participants (Harrington, 2003; Warren, 2001), abandon one's ego and disconnect one's self-esteem, as they become opportunities and barriers to cultural access, acceptance and data generation when conducting this style of field work.

The maintenance of such role duality had profound implications. As I negotiated the research field, I was required to think with two selves, that of the participant and that of the collaborative researcher. Consequently, I came to look for potential data in every corner, questioning every interaction and to think deeply about its meaning. To collect authentic data, I was required to be everyone to everybody, consistently sensitive to data, finding time to record and document data, while simultaneously collaborating with HPU leaders and endeavouring to influence thinking and decision making by drawing on theoretical knowledge about change. Participatory style research, as Ball (1990) noted:

Requires a studied presentation of self (or selves) and the adaptation of the research self to the requirements of the field. It's much more like going on a blind date than going to work. First, second, and third impressions all count. (p. 158)

This constant process was manageable in the organisational setting or for short-term campaigns with the HPU, however negotiating, controlling and manipulating the multiple selves during the long-term immersion at the world cup was exhausting. Nonetheless, it was essential to maintain access throughout the research.

While appearing to some extent foreign to participants, EAR offers an opportunity to promote alternative forms of knowledge and practice beliefs in the high performance sport setting. Vermeulen and van Slobbe (2005) championed the need for the organisational

anthropologist in management studies, I make the same recommendation for management research in high performance sport. EAR offers a method that meets Denzin and Lincoln's (2011b) call for innovative qualitative scholarship in present day research settings. Through this research, high performance sport was revealed as a highly contested and complex social endeavour, whereby performance impacting behaviours and choices are framed by subtle, interpersonal cues. The interpretivist methodology used uncovered that 'high performance' may just as likely be found in the subtle day-to-day culturally located actions of participants as it is in their physiological tests scores, GPS measures or tackle counts. The hegemony of traditional scientific knowledge may offer a form of performance myopia, motivating practitioners to seek solutions in the wrong places. As a consequence, researchers using an EAR methodology and working with open-minded organisations and practitioners can seek out alternative forms of knowledge, help to create and determine improved practice and profoundly influence the management (and performance) of high performance sport.

Implications for Practice in High Performance Sport

Underpinned by Schon's (1995) view of theory as practice, drawing from the findings of this research, there are several salient implications for the practice of high performance sport management. The first is an acknowledgement of the role of the head coach as principal sensegiver and change agent within a national sport team. While the high performance director was a major collaborator in both pursuing and developing change interventions, it was the position of head coach that was the most significant (mediated or unmediated) trigger or inhibitor of sensemaking amongst the HPU. The head coach is required to be actively engaged using guided organisational sensemaking practices (Maitlis, 2005) to trigger the collective sensemaking and local interpretation of meaning required for change. An understanding of this dynamic has significant implications for management practices of high performance directors and managers. The contemporary position of high performance director (or manager) assumes organisational leadership and strategic responsibility for intentional change across a national sport performance programme (Sotiriadou, 2013). Despite being on the management team, it was not the espoused beliefs and behaviours of the high performance director but the head coach that, the players, those responsible for on-field performance were sensitive to. If high performance directors are to meet their job requirements and lead local and systemic change across performance programmes to cultivate high performing cultures (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Sotiriadou, 2013), they may be required to simultaneously acknowledge both their limited ability to directly impact performance and the central influence the head coach holds. Recruiting suitable head coaches and developing close, highly functioning, meaningful relationships that enable the high performance director's strategic vision to be enacted through the head coach by the on-field team becomes a paramount task for a high performance director. Furthermore, in situations of manager-led change, the head coach position is required to authentically own any change intervention. The importance of 'cultural understanding' and 'cultural thinking' reported informs the contemporary understanding of the skills, characteristics and role requirements for successful High Performance Directors and Managers. This research has considerable implications in foregrounding cultural, social and interpersonal skills and knowledge as of central importance for high performance directors and challenges the dominant narrative of high performance management as an extension of the sport science disciplines. It is hoped that the research may trigger a dialogue in the industry to revisit and question the job profile of high performance managers.

A second implication for practice is that as people are the vehicle for the sensemaking, sensegiving and meaning construction that drives collective action (Weick, 2009), who the members of a culture are becomes of paramount concern. For the high performance

management practitioner, while rather dogmatic, effective selection becomes not only a critical performance impacting leadership activity, but also crucial at times of change and ambiguity. As a national sport team exists as social system of loosely connected agents and distributed power (Cruickshank et al., 2013a; 2014), one of the few significantly influential actions performance leaders can take is the selection of the team. Who coaches (and selectors) allow into a culture not only contribute to the cultural fabric of a team, but also such decisions act as 'containers of meaning' for others when making meaning of team membership. If meanings are incredibly hard to change (if possible at all), head coaches and high performance directors are encouraged to very carefully consider the players they select, and why they are selecting them. Performance leaders must ask of those in contention for selection, 'what meanings do you bring with you?', and consequently avoid being seduced purely by athletic performance and consider the athlete as a social being within the performance culture, as participants reflected 'sometimes the best player and the right player are not the same player'.

A third implication for high performance sport management practice is the need to reframe change from the grand, episodic project that requires stability and a fixed destination, to a continuous, ongoing, daily approach to change that thrives in the unstable, unknowable contexts of high performance sport (Rentsch, 1990; Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Weick et al., 2005). Approaching change as a daily endeavour where change is never off (Weick & Quinn, 1999) acknowledges any actions can be open to interpretation, sensitising leaders to the subtle power of sensemaking and central importance of context, situation and process.

An appreciation and acknowledgement of sensemaking as a serious (performance impacting) sociocultural process offers great potential for the practice of high performance sport management and would help leaders to think culturally (Bate, 1994). A sensemaking perspective of management practice repels the traditionally held belief that decisions are the causal trigger for a particular course of action (Smerek, 2010). By replacing traditional rationalistic notions of manager (or coach) 'decision making' with the inherently pedagogical 'sensemaking', shifts leader thought processes from isolated events to a perspective of ongoing flows of experience (Weick, 1995) and promotes much needed adaptability. By acknowledging the role of sensemaking and the world as unknowable and unpredictable, re-positions cultural change as not an approach with a 'magic formula' but rooted in complexity. Such a paradigm shift would reduce the importance of managerial plans, surface architecture and rational artefacts (such as posters, phrases and meaningless practices) and emphasise the significance of organisational members in collective action (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008).

As a fourth implication for practice, management approaches need to consistently and explicitly frame sensegiving activities towards ideological constructs (meaning) that are manifested in tangible performance impacting behaviours and standards that can be enacted, practiced, felt and shared daily by players and staff. Subsequently high performance leaders are encouraged to think in ideological terms and consider the meaning implications of both their actions and that of players and management personnel, as perceived insignificant events can have profound cultural impacts, both positive and negative. Performance leaders are required to recognise critical (or teachable) moments and opportunities, where ideological leadership decisions could act as 'containers of meaning' (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003) and 'anchors' for collective action and performance (Limerick, 1990).

While change clearly needs to be head coach driven, what is deemed plausible by one will not necessarily be deemed plausible by another. It therefore becomes important for managers to not impose an ideological order, but to co-construct it with members. In moving

high performance sport management practice from a static concept to an ongoing, interpretive world view, where change becomes sustainable, foregrounds the co-creation of the meaning of a team's performance environment (Smerek, 2010). Thus, the final and perhaps most important implication for practice is that manager-led change needs to meaningfully engage and involve those in the culture identified for change. In acknowledging that shared meaning is grounded in shared understanding of the same experience (Weick, 1995), high performance leaders are required to facilitate and utilise shared experience and encourage sustained sincere and meaningful shared reflection for local re-interpretation (co-construction) of meaning amongst members. Performance leaders need to promote collective sensemaking by prioritising meaning and talking about it. One leadership approach that has a powerful 'sensitising effect' on the social landscape is summarised in the metaphor of "navigating by means of a compass rather than a map" (Weick, 2009, p. 264). As Weick argued, while maps may be the basis of performance, in an equivocal, unknowable world, the compass is the basis of learning and renewal that sustains and changes performance:

A compass makes it clearer that we are looking for a direction rather than a location. A compass is a more reliable instrument of navigation if locations on the map are changing. It is less crucial that people have a specific destination, and more crucial for purposes of sensemaking that they have the capability to act their way into an understanding of where they are, who they are, and what they are doing. (p. 265)

Furthermore, given the identified importance of acknowledging and accommodating context, the compass metaphor is particularly pertinent because the direction it points to is relative to one's position and therefore has to accommodate existing conditions and circumstances. By acknowledging "I don't know", performance sport leaders could relinquish power and authority and enable others to make sense of what they are facing, keeping leaders in touch with context (Weick, 2009, p. 263):

The effective leader is someone who searches for the better questions, accepts inexperience, stays in motion, channels decisions to those with the best knowledge of the matter at hand, crafts good stories, is obsessed with updating, encourages improvisation, and is deeply aware of personal ignorance. (Weick, 2009, p. 265)

If coaches (and performance directors) admit they 'don't know', they will invariably engage a group in meaningful sensemaking, and subsequently athletes and coaches are more likely to mobilise and sustain collective resources for meaningful mutual direction (Weick, 2009). Encompassed within this philosophical shift in leadership is the shift in discourse from 'decision making' to sensemaking discussed above. As Weick (1995) argued, decisions are personal, and have possessive qualities in which people take pride in and defend when challenged. Sense, or shared understanding, is collective, dynamic, promotes listening and is changeable. These approaches would cater and account for, rather than resist the prevailing culture infrastructures and distributed power of high performance sport environments.

Limitations

As a collaborative, action-orientated, longitudinal study of change in a high performance sport unit, this research appears to be the first study of its kind. While providing a number of bespoke implications for practice and theory, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this research.

The first limitation was the single participant group. The emergent theories and conclusions are therefore rooted to the specific context within which the research was undertaken. While this research sought not to produce generalised outcomes, but provide a valid account of people's narratives and experiences (Tolich & Davidson, 2011) and construct bespoke learning and practice approaches from them, the single participant group presented a

limitation to transferability. To mitigate this limitation, through the very process of theorising I explored the possibility of how the findings may be relevant to other sport organisations and contexts (Ferkins et al., 2010).

Focusing upon the EAR process, a second limitation was the length of the intervention and action cycle with the playing group itself. Partly due to the sporadic nature and length of time the HPU assembled as a collective, and also due to the scale, richness and amount of data generated, the intervention-action cycle conducted with the playing group was not only short, but a complete iterative cycle was not possible. As a result, while outcomes and learning from the second action cycle (Chapter Seven) were evaluated and further action planned, the planned action was not examined in the field with the playing group in a subsequent action cycle. Change can take time to destabilise the inherent meanings that form an organisation and overcome the cultural inertia to reconstruct new meanings (Weick & Quinn, 1999). For performance-based evidence of such change to emerge, this may take even longer. While change and learning was identified at personal and interpersonal levels amongst HPU leaders (and wider participants), the study length was not long enough to observe any HPU wide change. Therefore, the impact of the intervention or its future re-constructed forms may not have been revealed in the data during the time frame of this research project. While what was learned by participants about change and culture was indeed valuable, given the team's recent unprecedented success (winning a third consecutive games against Australia during the writing of this chapter, a first since 1953), it does raise the question about the research length and number of research cycles required to see on-field performance change in high performance sport research.

The third limitation, as highlighted in the implications of the EAR method, the research is reflective of a real world and applied context, documenting a high performance sport team as it prepared for a pinnacle event. This context made it challenging to separate the learning from the intervention with that of the learning from the experience. For this reason, an evaluation of the intervention amalgamated with an evaluation of the campaign and the experience. This is a pertinent reminder of the contested context of high performance sport and acts as an example of the multiple causality and mutual shaping that underpins sensemaking, meaning and change, where it is often not possible to establish causal links between features of a culture but only to deduce there is a relationship (Bruner, 1990; Lincoln et al., 2011). The dynamic, unstable research field meant that nature of collaboration with HPU leaders varied from phase to phase, from overt to subtle, and was dependent upon participant availability and environmental stressors. Despite this, the considerable contribution by participants generated significant depth and consistency of data to draw meaning from the learning that took place.

The fourth limitation was the extent of theoretical integration into the research process. While extensive theory was used in making sense of the data and generating theoretical outcomes, practitioners through the EAR process used little explicit theory. While integrating theory in action is viewed as feature of action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2013), it was my perception that participants were not influenced by and showed little interest in theory expressed in theoretical forms. Their interest was a more pragmatic focus upon tangible actions (and framed by social categories and stereotypes of academics and theories). Therefore, to maintain a commitment to integrating theory into practice required careful consideration of the scale of the theories and how they were introduced, termed and presented. This required a degree of narrating by me as the participant-researcher, limiting the direct application of theory to practice.

The final limitation focuses upon my roles as participant and researcher. My role on the management team added a layer of complexity when considering the power-constructs existing between the athlete and coach (or performance director), and my perceived proximity to those authority positions that select or 'drop' (non-select) players. Negotiating the power-dynamics of friendships and informant relationships can lead to confusion about the dual role occupied by the participant-researcher and prevent the flow of information (Greene, 2014). Despite never being explicitly highlighted by any participants, it was assumed inevitable that the extent of information disclosure from some players was framed by my perceived proximity to the coaches. The role duality also meant that the nature of my role as collaborator with HPU leaders fluxed throughout the research process. Through phases one and two and the first action phase, collaboration was more explicit and my influence stronger and more overt. However, in the second action cycle with the HPU at the world cup, the highly pressured, demanding and stressful context of competing in a pinnacle event meant that I was required to alter the nature of my influence and become more subtle and nuanced, using thought provoking questions and informal chats to influence and promote co-construction between researcher and participant.

Turning to my role as researcher and the primary data collection tool, it was unavoidable that my own socially constructed lens would be represented in the data and conclusions. As a cultural outsider (both ethnically, nationally and sporting) the findings and conclusions are subject to my interpretive lens. At the risk of reproducing my own socially constructed eurocentrism and to give voice to the experiences of the participants, I was required to commit to and engage in learning about rugby league, the team, its practices, beliefs, history and people, and maintain an openness to alternative and foreign worldviews. Despite being a cultural outsider, collaborative practices with HPU leaders and sustained interaction with wider participants facilitated the co-construction of data and limited the bias of my interpretive worldview. While my own social construction has inevitably shaped the particular lens I applied to interpreting the research field, through collaboration with HPU leaders, my foreign perspectives did facilitate an additional level of critique as I questioned that which would have seemed obvious, subconscious or 'natural' to the cultural insider.

Future Research

In exploring how a NSO could act as an agent of change to promote a high performing culture within their high performance unit, a number of further questions have emerged from the research.

Despite an espoused desire for change amongst the high performance director and head coach, it was a perceived '*mini crisis*' that formed the major catalyst for change. While contributing to the existing literature reporting change as precipitated by crisis (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010), further research is needed to elaborate upon the sensemaking and sensegiving that surrounds successful change in the absence of a crisis situation. Research is needed into the subtle leadership and managerial skills required to facilitate the sensemaking, self-awareness and motivation for change that resulted from the crisis experience.

This research promotes the idea that meaning change in the absence of crisis is an incredibly challenging undertaking for leaders. While recognising the significant time commitments required, longitudinal studies that track change initiatives over multiple years are needed. This call for long-term immersion further highlights the suitability of the participatory nature of action research and EAR methodologies. Insider research, whether ethnographic

(Couture et al., 2012) or action research (Coghlan, 2001) is encouraged to obtain the valuable, long-term research insights.

While this research concentrated on the change experience from the perspective of the culture as a whole, this research also promotes the head coach as the most crucial agent of change in a high performance sport unit. Given the reported influence of the head coach role in both mediated and unmediated sensegiving, to better understand change, further research is required into the contextual, situational and personal factors that trigger the sensemaking of head coaches as they negotiate the challenges of their role. Furthermore, given that within a sport organisation high performance directors hold organisational responsibility for performance, yet have little direct influence over the on-field performance of a HPU, it is also necessary that future research explore the nature and dynamics of the head coach-high performance director relationship.

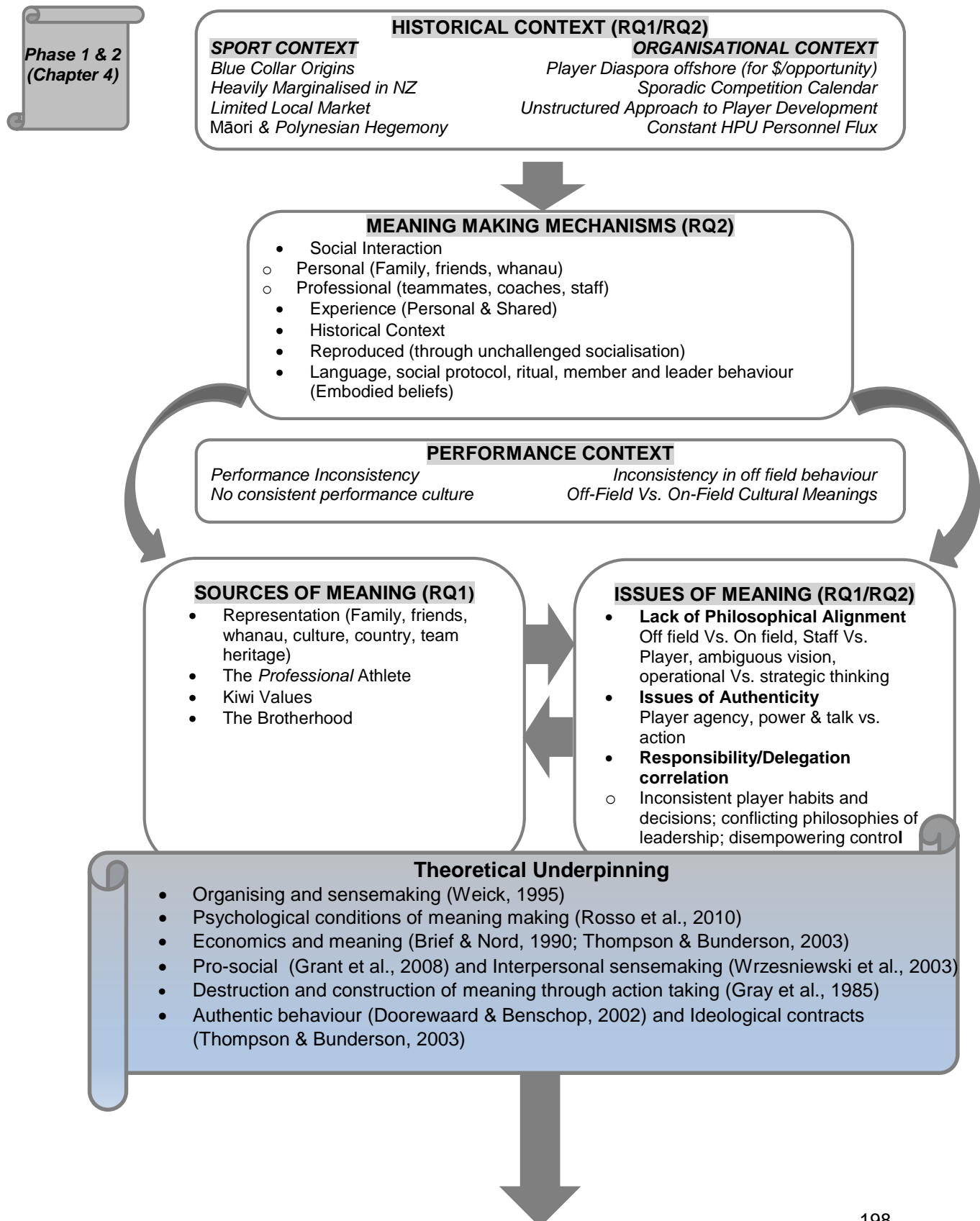
For effective meaning change, a central emergent theme was that participants need to be actively involved in meaning (re)construction and enactment. Inquiry is needed into the situations and management actions that encourage the sincere collaborative practices that trigger sensemaking and collective meaning. Given the reported unique flows and power constructs, research is needed into how head coaches and high performance directors cater for, acknowledge and positively leverage player power and agency to engage players (and management) in collaborative co-construction of performance impacting meaning. A further EAR project that explores the management actions and contexts that operationalise sincere collaboration has the potential to contribute to the importance of shared and collaborative meaning making found in this research.

With the 'right people' and subsequent selection of the 'right people' emerging as a critical factor contributing to meaningful change, the practice of high performance sport team selection is an area of research that warrants further investigation. First, an unanswered question raised by this research is just exactly what does the 'right player' look like, why and to whom. Future research needs to investigate the sensemaking processes undertaken by selectors to determine what they are looking for (and how), followed by the political dynamics of the selection process and final decision making.

While part of the research, but not a direct phenomenon of investigation, the role and impact of the management or cultural consultant would prove an insightful line of inquiry that would contribute to management practices in high performance sport. Consultants are a common (and expensive) feature in the high performance sport landscape (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Gould et al., 2002; Timson, 2006) and reflective of the growth of an outsourcing hype and consultancy as an industry in the corporate world (Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004; Sturdy, 2011). In this research two consultants were engaged to address cultural concepts and issues. However, despite legitimacy being given to these individuals on behalf of HPU leaders, it was not easy to evaluate the tangible impact they had on either the HPU culture or performance. I recommend future research extend this critique and caution to robustly investigate the performance determining impact of those entering high performance sport teams as consultants, coupled with the situations and contexts where the consultants are perceived as effective.

Overall, future research on this topic should continue to be practice centric and context specific, proceeding from constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, but most importantly investigating management practices as it happens. There is much to be learned by moving

away from retrospective accounts of change, to interrogating the discourse that emerges from participant's interactions in a particular context and moment. It can then be established how the actions related to manager-led change are contextually and situationally constructed. Figure 12 shows the ongoing development and synthesis of the research outcomes as the study passed through the EAR phases, along with relevant theoretical integration, key learnings and implications for practice and theory.



THE ISSUE FOR ACTION: *Philosophical Alignment*

(How the HPU can develop philosophical alignment across internal stakeholders as a means of promoting a high performing culture.)

INTERVENTION 1

The Professional Development Visit (PD Visit)

LEARNING: Conditions for Leader Sensemaking and Change (RQ3 & 4)

- **INTERNAL:** Already looking, existing dissatisfaction, urgency, aspirations for a better future.
- **EXTERNAL:** A compelling image of a different future, legitimate source, perceived cultural similarities
- **A FELT EXPERIENCE**

Theoretical Underpinning

- Identity as central to meaning construction (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Weick et al., 2005)
- Image deterioration (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991)
- Sensebreaking, doubting and updating (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013)
- Pre-existing knowledge structures (Bartunek et al., 1999)
- Sensemaking and emotions (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Maitlis et al., 2013)

ACTION STEPS
Te Iwi Kiwi Planning

LEARNING: Leader sensemaking and Meaning Construction

PROCESS

- Cultural Narratives, Stories and Metaphors
- Identity and Identification
- Co-Construction

DESIRED MEANINGS

- Belonging
- Transcendence: Being part of something 'greater'
- Ownership, Buy-In and Responsibility

Theoretical Underpinning

- Narrative and metaphors in change and sensemaking (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2002; Humphreys et al., 2012; Thurlow & Mills, 2009)
- Management of Meaning; Ideological leadership (Limerick, 1990; Smircich & Morgan, 1982)
- Shared experience, interpretation and enacted meaning (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 1995)
- Plausibility over accuracy (Weick, 1995)

**Phase 3
(Chapter 6)**

**INTERVENTION 2 & ACTION STEPS
Te Iwi Kiwi Implementation**

LEARNING: Sensemaking Context and Management Sensegiving

CULTURAL CONTEXT

MANAGEMENT SENSEGIVING

- Extant Meanings
 - Power Flows & Agency
 - Success Illusion
- Mediated Sensegiving •
- Unmediated Sensegiving •
- MEMBER SENSEMAKING**

Theoretical Underpinning

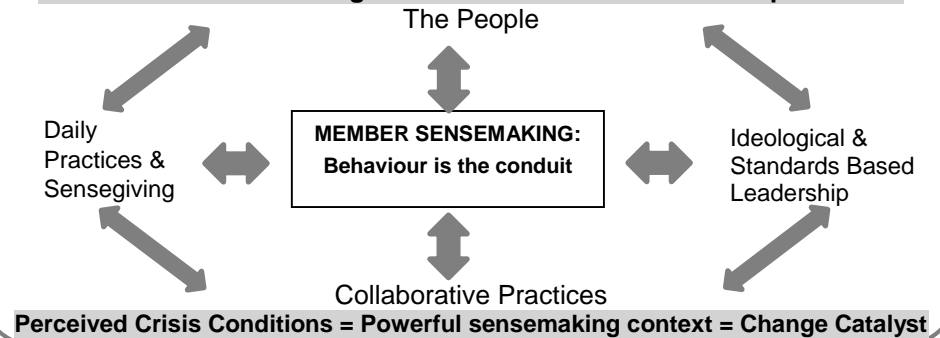
- Cultural Infrastructure and inertia (Brooks & Bate, 1994)
- Minimal Sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005)
- Triggers of sensegiving and sensemaking (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007)
- Power flows on HP sport teams (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2013a)
- Plausible sensemaking and blind spots (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2003)

**Phase 4
(Chapter 7)**

EVALUATION

Impact, Influence and Change

LEARNING: Sensemaking Process NOT Mechanism & Requires time



Theoretical Underpinning

- Organisational Impermanence (Weick, 2009)
- Change as continuous non episodic (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Weick & Quinn, 1999)
- Meaning construction as; process not content (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008); local and collaborative (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002)
- Equivocality (Weick et al., 2005), doubting and updating (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick & Quinn, 1999)
- Ideological contracts (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003)
- Sensemaking and crisis (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 2010)

SUMMARY

- Complex network of loosely connected agents of prevailing meanings, discourses and power = cultural infrastructure and inertia
- Meaning at the epicentre of change and is constructed from shared understanding of shared experience
- Identity and identification; identity challenges or threats = change catalysts.
- Meaning in a high performance sport team is an enacted practice; doing and experiencing
- Ten factors contributing to change agency: awareness and understanding of context, cultural infrastructure and identity, a process and content focus, understanding sensegiving triggers (mediated and unmediated) head coach ownership and piloting, authentic and consistent ideological leadership, ideologies linked to embodied performance and enacted daily, athlete and personnel engagement and team selection.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Management practices should:

- 'Think culturally', foregrounding issues of culture and social intercourse as of primary importance
- Be head coach owned and driven. Build strong, collaborative and meaningful relationships between Performance Directors and coaches.
- Carefully consider who is being selected and why; considering the whole player not just performer
- Reframe change as continuous, ongoing and unstable where change becomes a daily effort
- Consistently and explicitly frame sensegiving activities towards ideological constructs (meaning) that are manifested in tangible behaviour. Think in ideological terms (what does this mean for us) and recognise critical (or teachable) moments and opportunities
- Meaningfully engage and involve people. Lead by compass not map

Future Research

- Managed-change in the absence of crisis
- Head coach sensemaking in high performance contexts
- Dynamics and dyad of head coach/high performance director relationships
- Mediating sincere collaborative practices
- Making sense of team selection: The politics and dynamics of selection
- High performance sport (and culture) consultants; impact and efficacy

Driven by **practice orientated, context and situationally specific, constructivist driven research paradigms**

Figure 12. Summary of research outcomes for phase one through four and final research outcomes

Final Thoughts

This research identified a need to explore change and culture as core elements of high performance sport management practice. The theoretical framework for the research was developed by drawing together understandings of culture, meaning, sensemaking and change in the organisational behaviour and fledgling high performance sport literature. A central research question drove the research, asking how a national sport organisation could act as an agent of change to promote a high performing culture amongst their high performance unit.

The research revealed change in a high performance sport unit is a challenging endeavour framed by the highly complex, multifaceted and situational nature of international sport. Grounded in the longitudinal experiences of participants, it was concluded that national sport teams exist as a complex network of loosely connected agents, where despite meaning forming a significant anchor for collective action, prevailing discourses and flows of power also form a cultural infrastructure and inertia that frame change efforts. A second conclusion is that

meaning in a high performance sport team is constructed from experience, and cannot be defined or imposed on others as a sociological order. This conclusion positions the sensemaking of experience and constructing meaning as a process and not a mechanism. A third conclusion locates identity and identification at the centre of making sense of experience, where challenges or threats to identity act as powerful sensemaking triggers and change catalysts for players and management. A final conclusion is that meaning in a high performance sport team is an enacted practice and cannot be reduced to tangible architecture and artefacts. Meaning is constructed by doing and experiencing and therefore located in the subtle, and often overlooked aspects of everyday life for high performance athletes and management personnel. In particular, this conclusion reframes the construct of change in high performance sport from objective and rational to unstable, negotiated and ongoing.

Based on the broad conclusions above, ten factors emerged as contributing to the ability of the NSO to act as an agent of change in the HPU. These were; an awareness and understanding of identity, context and cultural infrastructure; a process focus; understanding sensegiving triggers; head coach ownership and piloting; authentic and consistent ideological leadership; ideologies linked to embodied performance and enacted daily; athlete and personnel engagement, and; team selection. These factors coupled with the conclusions presented above were deemed to contribute to the impact of the interventions and action reported in this research.

In conclusion, this research represents a story of people in a unique context of New Zealand sport, making meaning from managerial efforts to change their organisational unit to improve performance. While my primary interest was to improve the understanding and practice of those involved and engaged in the research, it is hoped that both practitioners and academics alike may find, in the stories, experiences and interpretations presented here, and through their own reconstructions, positive insights that will inform personal and contextual understandings of culture and change in high performance sport. It is hoped that to improve the management of high performance sport, research and practice will continue to work with culture from the perspective of meaning and sensemaking and avoid prescriptive, episodic change models. Perspectives that acknowledge the subtle but powerful social forces at play in high performance sport will ensure innovative and engaging approaches to practice, and enable (New Zealand) athletes, coaches, managers and support personnel to find meaning in their involvement in elite sport and subsequently win on the world stage.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Phase One and Two Executive Report 229
Appendix B: Phase One and Two Executive Report Presentation Notes 245
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Prompt Sheet (Phase One and Two)..... 248
Appendix D: AUTECH Approval..... 250
Appendix F: Historical Context of Research Site 252



MEANING IN THE KIWIS: CONCLUSIONS FROM A 10-MONTH EXPLORATORY PROJECT

John Alder | APRIL 2013



OVERVIEW, WHO & How



In November 2011 I was offered a 3-year PhD scholarship with the New Zealand Rugby League to carry out applied research in high performance sports management. The project brief was to support the high performance staff in gaining a full understanding of the current international best practices pertaining to National Team player management towards optimizing preparation and performance for world cup (championship) events. The PhD proposal was developed in collaboration among General Manager High Performance, Tony Kemp, PhD supervisors (Dr Lynn Kidman and Dr Tom Patrick) and myself, with an overarching aim of understanding how a high performance team at a National Sporting Organisation can better understand and enhance its high performance culture in order to improve on and off field performance.

THE EXPLORATORY STUDY

In order to achieve the above aim, before any change, it was necessary to gain an understanding of the high performance culture at the NZRL. Therefore an exploratory study was designed to investigate the personal and shared meanings that exist when athletes play rugby league for New Zealand, the mechanisms through which these meanings were made and the role the management and leadership of the high performance program played in their construction.

This is a report of the findings of the exploratory study. These findings, the meanings and mechanisms, will inform the direction for the follow on action research project exploring managed change towards improved cultural practice and performance.

This study has allowed the emergence of meaning themes and based on the findings and recommendations of this study, it is planned, that I, as the researcher, will collaborate with key leaders of the high performance team, namely Phil Holden (CEO) and Tony Iro (High Performance Manager), in order to identify specific issues, design interventions and action steps, and reflect upon outcomes aimed at enhancing the organisation's ability to effectively manage meaning in high performance among all internal and external stakeholders associated with the high performance program.

The study was conducted between May 2012 and March 2013. The project was driven by two key questions; *'What are the player's sources of meaning when playing for New Zealand?'* and *'How are these meanings constructed?'*

Rich in-depth data was gathered from the high performance unit¹ over a 10-month period. All members of the high performance unit¹ and NZRL development staff who have worked with the high performance unit were engaged in the study. This approach utilised interviews, observation, conversations, and analysed documents. The data was analyzed to produce key themes in answering the above research questions.

¹ The term 'High Performance Unit' defines the athletes, coaches, support staff and performance leaders of the national team programme.

KEY FINDINGS & THEMES



IN-BRIEF

- Personal & Shared Meanings: A number of sources exist that shape how meaningful players find their involvement with the Kiwis. These included: representation of family and culture, enjoyment and achievement, money and commercialisation and the Kiwi underdog.
- The Kiwi culture's strengths are also its weakness. Players found great meaning in their membership of the 'Kiwi' unique brotherhood and all that entailed, however much of the shared meaning is largely constructed along social-personal lines; and not consistently aligned to performance.
- The meanings are influenced or shaped through a range of experiences and people including the players upbringing, immediate family, culture and national culture, teammates, structures of hierarchy, status and leadership, and (a lack of) life experience coupled with some modern society values and beliefs.
- Three major themes emerged that act as a barrier to cultivating a performance culture; a lack of philosophical alignment, issues of authenticity and an absence of delegation and responsibility.

SOURCES OF PERSONAL & SHARED MEANING

It is well documented in research that people draw on a number of sources when they find their work meaningful. Firstly, these include the individual themselves, their values, beliefs and motivation. One of the most prevalent and patterned sources of meaning is the belief of **representation**. Primarily this centred on what players termed personal heritage and this centred on representing their family and wider family or friends. For some players, namely those of Maori heritage, they referred to representing their culture, a unique opportunity presented by playing for the Kiwis. The role of representing 'our country' was also cited regularly, and having a country proud of the team was a major source of meaning. The final major source of representation players cited was the

² To protect the identity of those in the research and to ensure anonymity, senior organisational staff/performance leaders will be referred to as [Executive Leaders], coaches as [Senior Leaders], high performance support staff as [Staff], senior players as [Senior Player] and other players as [Player].

history and heritage of the Kiwis themselves and the achievements and efforts of former players. However, it should be noted that players only cited the recent history of the Kiwis, namely history which has personal relevance, this focused mainly on the last 12 – 15 years, and not beyond.

The notion of the *career athlete* exists amongst players, and was identified by some members of staff as central to understanding the “modern” or “21st century player”. In this, money and rugby league as a job or career plays a central part. The players are aware of their market value and their performance or ability as a commodity. It is likely that this wider cultural belief system prevalent in professional sport will influence the meanings within the Kiwi culture, a representative team created in the light of former colonial beliefs and not in the image of commercialised professional sport. Arguably this is exemplified as contributing to an inward focus or at times selfish belief system articulated by the question ‘what’s in it for me?’ The meanings associated with playing for New Zealand are further shaped by the constraints of the wider game and the view that ‘it’s not your day, job’ and ‘high prestige, but low priority’. It is evident that these factors have contributed to beliefs whereby athletes find meaning in things which are of personal relevance to the individual. For example, the allocation of a Kiwi number by the NZRL is of particular significance here, whereby players cited the personal relevance as particularly meaningful. However, this raises the question of meaning of the symbolic gift of the koru which whilst holds cultural relevance to Maori, it lacks the same personal relevance held by the Kiwi number. Furthermore, it should be noted that this was a symbol allocated and ‘owned’ by a previous team culture, and whilst it held considerable meaning for that team, it is not necessarily evident that it holds the same meaning to the present culture, and certainly not a ‘performance’ based notion.

Players found great meaning in the elements and unique aspects of ‘*the great game* of rugby league’. This is consistent with the notion that the more emotional attachment and enjoyment one finds with the characteristics of a particular job, the more meaningful they will find it. Within this they cited the important role that enjoyment coupled with challenge and drive for achievement plays in their participation. Players found significant meaning in the challenge presented by test match football and the recognition of achievement that Kiwi selection provides. Interestingly, common in the meaningful work literature, is the notion of viewing a job as a calling. No players openly referred to their job as a calling. This may be a product of professional sport, and its financial trappings, but may confirm the prevailing belief that players view league as work, rather than pursuing a deep passion.



rugby league. Furthermore, regular comparisons were made between Australia and New Zealand, and union and league in New Zealand in which the latter are always the underdogs.

National culture heavily influences people's interpretation of what they find meaningful. This was reflected in the High Performance Unit through unique *Kiwi values*. Support, care, respect of hierarchy and status and humility were central to interpreting the experience of being a Kiwi rugby league player.

Not surprisingly, the meanings people attach to their work are influenced by those around them, co-workers, teams and leaders. This was strongly evident and deeply embedded in the notion of *Brotherhood*, something recognised a unique and special, a socio-cultural bond centred on family, openness, inclusivity and support that is clearly lived and embodied by all.

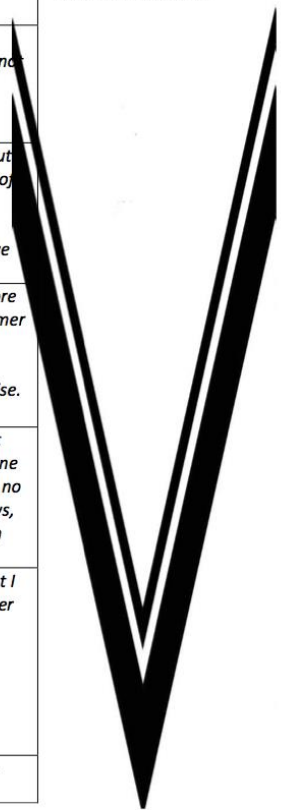
A regularly discussed notion and common shared belief is that the Kiwis are a *Tournament Team* and unable to win one off tests. This shaped externally by public and media belief, but also internally with players continuing to view themselves as underdogs to Australia, identifying State of Origin as giving more opportunity for Australians to play together, and the social nature of Kiwis requires time to build a consistent on-field team.

A final shared meaning amongst players and staff centres on the *NZRL and their commitment to change and improvement*. Players regularly commented on better times and improvement and found significant meaning in the commitment made by the NZRL in recent years to improve, grow and develop both the community and high performance game. It is clear that the change and improvement in the NZRL as an organisation has embedded the belief of change and improvement and raised player beliefs of the competency of the NZRL. Recently, that is demonstrated by the inclusion and involvement of Bluestone Edge, more training camps and regular leadership group meetings amongst other organisational changes.

It is clear from the data that for the players, these sources of meaning are embedded as meaningful amongst players and staff because they offer opportunity for transcendence, that is to represent others or history, and such altruism increases self esteem and self efficacy. In addition, the strong sense of belonging created through membership of the brotherhood, contributes heavily to the meaning players give to their involvement.

The table below offers some evidence regarding the sources of meaning players use when playing rugby league for New Zealand.

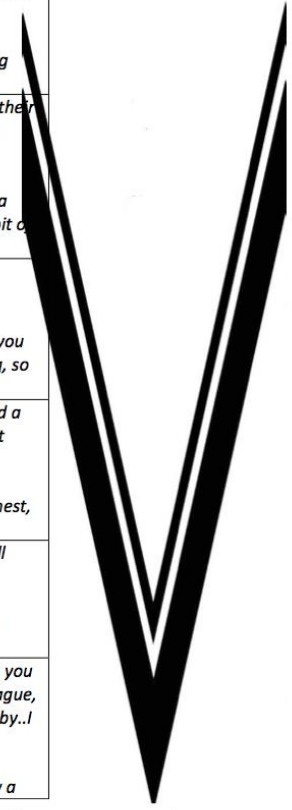




Theme	Sub Theme	Evidence
Representation	<i>Family (and Friends)</i>	<p><i>It did help the cause, you know, it supported mum and I was able to return the favour through playing for New Zealand. You know, just what she went through, and what she actually went through physically, verbally in relationship wise made me a stronger person, and every time I represented my country I represented what she did for me.</i></p> <p><i>I guess well, what the Kiwis represents to me is my heritage, all my friends growing up, the schools I went to, so I guess it represents all the people that are close to me and that I've ever known in my life, I feel that I'm representing all of them, all being Kiwis.</i></p>
	<i>Culture & Heritage</i>	<p><i>I think it just symbolises my culture and just getting it out there that I'm Maori and you know I'm proud to be Maori, and that's probably one thing that some Maoris take for granted, you know, saying that, you know, coming over here and saying that they're Aussies, and you know, not thinking about where they came from and their heritage.</i></p> <p><i>My culture plays a big part and the tradition that the Kiwis have is a big reason why I love playing for the Kiwis, and wish I was there forever.</i></p>
	<i>Nation</i>	<p><i>First is representing your country, and a yeah, it's a huge honour in itself you know whatever sport you play, and yeah, pretty passionate about that and proud to do it, for your family first and the people of New Zealand, and uh yeah, it's just a massive honour and one I'm pretty proud of doing.</i></p> <p><i>A Kiwi has a country that is proud, I think that is probably one of the main things that we want as Kiwis that we represent our country, and we want our country to be proud of us</i></p>
	<i>The NEW History & heritage of the Kiwis</i>	<p><i>I guess, going back to representing your country, but I guess once you're here, it's doing everyone else proud that I guess wore the jersey before you, yeah, just the history...then also, the senior boys that have played the Kiwis before that I have come to know and love, in particular <Former staff member>, I feel like I am representing those guys as well, so that's what heritage means to me</i></p> <p><i>Staff: I'm not sure. I think the modern day player doesn't look too far back. I think the most important one is that they see guys they recognise. I mean <former staff member> is a big part of the team, but if they can actually see what's been done there.</i></p>
The Career Athlete	<i>Footy as a Career</i>	<p><i>Staff: The modern player tick...um, I think the modern day player looks at it as a genuine career, so I don't think back when we were playing it wasn't sort of a, you didn't perceive it as something that you could set yourself up for life, coz there just wasn't the opportunities to do it...a one club man, and that's sort of out the window now, but in some respects the game's driven that too because it's such a business now so there's no loyalty shown both ways....there wasn't guys coming into the Kiwis because they were getting 25 000 dollars a test match, whereas these days, that will play a little bit of a part in some guys motivation for being in there, which for me, that does have a little bit of an effect on your team culture and its dynamics.</i></p>
	<i>Commodity and Athletic Commercialism</i>	<p><i>You can't say I dunno, you just do it for the love of the game in every sense, coz then you know, no one would be leaving clubs, you know what I mean, everyone would stay at the same club for their whole career, that's the reason why people are moving round, coz they are getting better offers. Not necessarily coz they wanna play for that team more than the team they're already at, it's because obviously, they're obviously benefiting more financially and for their family and I don't think that's such a bad thing</i></p> <p><i>Staff: The coaches will hate it (NRL 9s), it's just another opportunity for them to get injured, but the money will be that good the players will want to play – Players loveee money! Well, most people love money. But they are worst than most, they love it, it's all about who's getting what and how are they getting it.</i></p>
	<i>What's in it for</i>	<p><i>Well for a start, players haven't got a sense of history, they don't care, simple, they don't care about all that, and in a sense why should they. So its good coz their focus is inward, quite selfishly, on their performance – but I suppose that inward selfish focus can spill out off the field.</i></p>

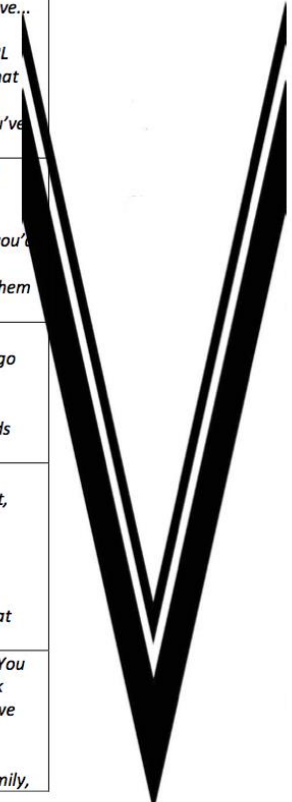


	<i>me?</i>	<i>Staff: Oh if you go from that old school type, like the [senior player], and I think [senior player] is a kind of newbie, but he's in that old school type, with that little bit like, "what's in it for me" type, that's kind of what I get from them...I know has a passion for it, but it depends on what carrot, and again, it's about what am I gonna get? I think...I don't think selfish, but kind of self...where they do kind of....well, selfish then, they self reflect more about this is what I'm doing, rather than looking big picture and going look</i>
	<i>Not your day job</i>	<i>People come to Kiwis after a 26 week season, it's the part time thing on top of the regular thing they do...the challenges, the main one, the short international calendar for sure is one, but the main one is that it's not everybody's primary gig, so the main one is it's a high prestige, low, really really low, priority time wise...The Kiwis are prestigious but the clubs are players' career bread and butter.</i> <i>Staff: There's still a little bit of, especially in season where clubs take a lot the priority, the players don't have any less feeling for representing the jumper, it's just that they do owe a lot to their clubs in terms of their loyalties there.</i>
	<i>Personal & Cultural Relevance</i>	<i>So everyone's got dog tags now that are still living, just to make them connected to New Zealand Rugby League, and what they've done for their country by having a number that's unique to them. It's a huge honour coz not that many people get to play for New Zealand. So having our number, our own number and our name makes it real significant and special.</i> <i>There's the dog tags, which is probably more of a modern sort of symbol of our brotherhood, so the boys have all, and you know, I think it's a perfect idea, coz the boys love wearing dog tags anyway, so I guess its personalising it, it's making it relevant to the group, so you've got a bit of tradition there, you've a bit of present time symbol</i>
The Game	<i>Enjoyment</i>	<i>You've got to have fun with what you're doing, coz it's too hard otherwise, there's too much challenges, you know it's the top end of performance, so if you're not enjoying it, it'll make it too hard.</i> <i>If you're not enjoying your footy, you're not playing good footy at all, so, me enjoying my footy is probably one reason why I made it so far, you know, I like beating players one on one, and tackling players, and you know, I'd rather be doing this than digging holes all day, or steel fixing, so it's a dream job I reckon</i>
	<i>Challenge & Achievement</i>	<i>The game's definitely another level up, and yeah it's another challenge and yeah, I guess personally, I really enjoy that....It's a lot shorter and a lot more intense, and it's another level up from the <club competition>, so guys start to take that other step and prepare themselves for that bigger challenge.</i> <i>You want to better yourself, I guess if you just stayed at the same level, the whole way through your career would be pretty boring to be honest, well it wouldn't be as enjoyable</i>
The Underdog	<i>NZ Vs Aussie</i>	<i>If the benchmark is the Aussies, are we doing everything we can to beat them...We could come up with a thousand excuses...it's too hot, well bad luck...the excuses we come up with, the Aussies have to put up with exactly the same thing.</i> <i>Walking through the streets of Whangarei; [staff] spoke to two young Maori boys – said "are you coming to the trials tomorrow?" the boys replied, "uh maybe". [Executive Leader] said, "you ought to, you could be walking the streets of Sydney, not Whangarei"</i>
	<i>League Vs Union</i>	<i>He was a rugby man, and when I told him I'm thinking about playing league instead of rugby, he was like oh, he said, oh I dunno about that, you know, he wasn't like forcing me or anything, he just had his doubts and he was like are you sure...when I said I was going to leave to play league, the principal came to talk to me and he was like, are you sure you want to do this – you should stay another year and carry on with your rugby..I don't know what it's all about, they're totally different games eh, but there's definitely a rivalry there</i> <i>Staff: They've got such a strong culture (All Blacks) probably because there's such high prestige of the game. Whereas our cultures probably a</i>



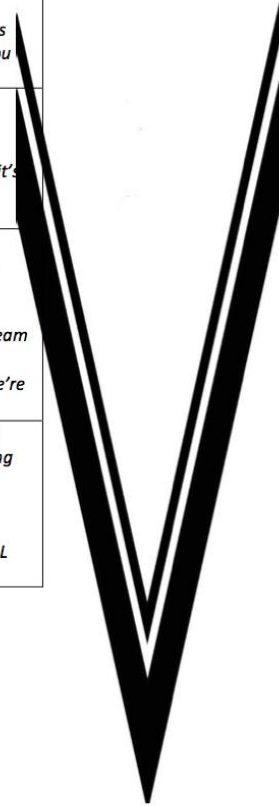


		<p><i>little bit different because I think it's been grown on being the underdog, doing the best you can with what you've got.</i></p> <p><i>He was just more of a father figure, I didn't grow up with a father, and he was there for me so, supportive, taking me to training, and do everything a normal father would do, you know, he loved me more than...as much as his own sons, so that was probably something that I really admired and wanted for myself so you know, he gave that to me and he made me probably the person that I am today to.</i></p> <p><i>You know with both of them (club coaches), they really care. They genuinely care about you. Back to <first coach>, he's a family man himself, and he's got two kids that struggle a bit and you know what he goes through for his kids, he really cares about people and that's good to have...</i></p> <p><i>My Dad and that, they sort of liked their soccer sides but yeah, my mum, growing up used to drive me everywhere and when I played at <NRL club> I was only 16 and didn't have a licence and my mum used to drive me to training and wait for me so, you know, nearly every day, so that was pretty special, what she did do, the sacrifices she did make for me to be a better person and start playing NRL. And you know, my Dads always been there for me, you know, always gives me advice and that. I get a lot of advice from my wife now but (laughs), they know, if you've played a shit game; you hear it as soon as you get in the car! ></i></p>
Kiwi Values	Support & care from others	
	Respect, Hierarchy & Status	<p><i>It was also noted that players should keep their heads down while they are young and need to earn their stripes; someone else will tell them when they are legends! It's really, it's really a high respect culture in that respect... they won't buck the system against their elders</i></p> <p><i>A respect thing, I would never, you would always acknowledge your elders, and you'd always stand up for an elder person to sit down and you'd think twice about, "oh shit, they're older than me", I have to respect them...They nod and shake their head, but see, that's a respect thing, they're not supposed to talk to their elders, talk back to their elders, even if their elders are asking a question, the elders are usually telling them something, and they're supposed say "yes, I'll do that, I'll do it", so it's the same thing.</i></p>
	Humility	<p><i>The thing is, everyone operates differently, with the cultures that we have in this team, so, we're very humble people, so for the players to interrupt another player, that makes us a bit uncomfortable...We're naturally humble people anyway...we are humble people and we don't go around shouting about when we're winning so...Its putting yourself out there and we don't do that.</i></p> <p><i>The way the Kiwi culture is, to not show off what you got, and especially with the island boys, you must be very respectful, so most island kids aren't boastful</i></p>
The Brotherhood	Unique Selling Point	<p><i>I guess its special in the sense that we all come from different backgrounds, and a lot of the guys are in Aussie now, and they probably appreciate it more, coming into a Kiwi environment that they're not used to with their clubs over here... Kiwis camp is awesome, it's the best, the best feeling, [staff] will tell you, it's different to the [pro club], [pro club] is a great feeling, but the Kiwi camp is different, it's a special feeling.</i></p> <p><i>In terms of what you actually, the stuff that you've got, for me, and I was saying to [Executive Leader] before, its, you could not buy it – you know the brotherhood, the connection that you've got, and the pride – you could not manufacture it, and teams spend years trying to do that and don't have what you've got</i></p>
	Openness, Inclusivity & Comfort	<p><i>I probably speak for everyone, in that; every time we come into camp it's like a reunion, all the brothers coming in to see each other again. You play each other during the year, and then end up going to battle with each other against the other teams. It's something special, and I think other teams don't have a grasp of that, the other teams like Australia and the UK probably come in and shake hands, where with the Kiwis we embrace each other, catch up and just really enjoy each other's company</i></p> <p><i>I think it comes back to those special people as well, you know, everyone that comes in, when you come into camp, you're family, you're family,</i></p>





	<p><i>there's no discomfort anywhere you know, its, yeah its very comfortable, everybody knows each other, you can just kick back, relax, be yourself, I guess everyone's just on the same mindset, you know we're here to work as well but we're also here to enjoy each other's company and chill and I guess that's just the familiarity that's a big factor in it.</i></p>
Mutual Bond & Support	<p><i>I guess one of the main thing that stands out is how close everyone is I guess, you know, at the <club> there's a few who think they're a bit better than people...coming into camps and that, I'd do anything for the boys if they asked, so you know, without hesitation, so you know, I just love being a Kiwi and love being part of the camp.</i></p> <p><i>Yeah I think, I believe it's just a natural bond, it's a natural way of being, because and that's a big factor, because of the way that our cultures been over, I dunno, hundreds of years, we've always been these tight knit communities, everybody does their role, within that community, you work together day in day out, and it's you know, supposed to be a place of peace and safety, and community and love really.</i></p>
Brotherhood as Family	<p><i>You know, it's not about Maori, Pakeha, Samoan it's about just being one in the Kiwi family</i></p> <p><i>I guess, the difference with the Kiwis is, you know, there doesn't seem to be any segregation, everybody understands each other, no cliques, we're family, we do get annoyed with each other at times, and that's what family does, it's not perfect and we're not all smooth sailing, but it's just what we know, it's just what we're comfortable with, what we're familiar with, I think it's pretty much the same as what all of us have grown up with, with our own families. ></i></p>
The Tournament Team	<p><i>We really haven't competed well in a one off test, we haven't won a one off test, we go alright in a tournament as you guys know, if our preparations right, you look at the world cup, the 4 nations, the tri nations, the longer those tournaments go the better we get but when we come up against the one of tests, we struggle.</i></p> <p><i>I think this test is really important, like we were saying before about, I think there is a still a mindset in our players that we are tournament team</i></p> <p><i>Despite very good recent performances early in the year, public perception that the ANZAC game or others of a one-off nature aren't ones we're likely to win. That obviously makes it tougher to get people along.</i></p>
The NZRL & journey to Improvement	<p><i>I've seen a lot of changes through NZRL since, which has just made me more and more proud to be a part of it, and to be representing it...I'm really impressed with <Senior Executive>, and just his ability to put structures and systems in place and yeah I can honestly say that everything that he's put in place like every time I see his presentations, it makes me wanna be much better and fulfil my role in that whole programme I see that it is getting better every year...this time round has been the best so far – love being a part of this group</i></p> <p><i>Just wanted to start boys by saying, just in regards to <Senior Executive>'s presentation last night, I think he's shown how the rest of the NZRL family has made progress, and I think the balls in our court with the next move going up those stairs.</i></p>



BARRIERS TO EMBEDDING MEANING

Whilst many of these sources of meaning cannot be influenced, it is hoped that the conclusions and data shed some light or confirm existing beliefs about what athletes find meaningful when playing rugby league for New Zealand. Furthermore, players and staff recognised a number of positive actions have been taken by the NZRL to incorporate these meanings into the culture; for example, the PAMs brunch, flying parents to debut games and the commitment, support and care shown by staff and the NZRL in camp. Whilst much of the NZRL High Performance culture is described by people broadly as a 'work in progress', and demonstrates some excellent facets of a sound performance culture, at a performance leadership and administrative level, a number of controllable themes did emerge which have a significant affect in shaping the teams shared and personal meanings. Whilst many of these themes are largely not destructive, if the NZRL are to achieve a desired, sustainable and successful performance environment, they require consideration.

Firstly, there is evident a **lack of philosophical alignment** between the organisational performance leadership and the external staff. This is echoed in the data with little relationship between the 'brotherhood' and performance focus or outcome. Whilst the group have moved forward considerably in the attempt to establish direction with the Kiwi way and the allocation of performance focus, it is apparent that this belief system is not reflected in the performance management. This featured in ambiguity of planning, outcome and process in management, the lack of an articulated high performance vision and operational or logistical management rather than strategic. A clear sense of purpose is a major mechanism through which people find meaning in what they do above and beyond economic terms, and this can be found in articulated missions and visions and through leadership.

Secondly, a prevailing and reoccurring theme throughout the project was centred on **issues of authenticity**. This suggests that a change in articulated beliefs or values is not yet embodied or lived, visually or viscerally. This was evident in a series of unfulfilled promises, senior players leveraging power, discrepancies between talk and action amongst players and staff, and finally, issues of transparency in micromanaging situations, athletes and staff.

Finally, whilst not overt or harmful to performance, the prevailing culture is one lacking in **delegation, ownership and thus self responsibility**, amongst players and in some instances amongst staff. The inclusion of Bluestone Edge Ltd has allowed a number of positive steps to be taken towards facilitating a shift in responsibility, including the articulation of





the 'Kiwi way', player ownership of leadership voting, greater involvement of the leadership group, the formation of an emerging leadership group (also voted by players) to invest in leadership education and development and greater voice being given to the whole playing group. Whilst these changes have been observed in the short term, time is needed to establish whether prevailing belief systems have changed.

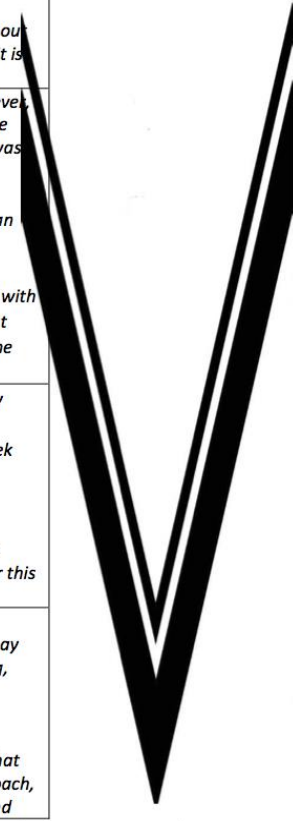
Evident over the course of this project were some issues within the High Performance unit that influence beliefs around player responsibility. First, it was widely discussed by staff that the players exist in a world where they are spoilt and spoon fed, first and foremost in their clubs and secondly, by NZRL's organisation of the high performance campaigns, in an attempt to improve player experience. This highly controlled environment was recognised as a contributor to player's lack of self responsibility. Secondly, the review processes in place in the High Performance unit, whilst having clearly contributed to improved operations and logistics, do not review performance or establish performance accountability, from staff or players. There are no individual performance or development plans in place for staff or players (selected and aspiring). Thirdly, it was evident that there are still some inconsistencies in player's habits and decision making when it comes to professional expectations, namely, risk of partying and alcohol, habits with the media and adherence to sport science protocols. Fourthly, at present it is clear that whilst there is a shifting leadership landscape, there are competing frameworks of leadership between desired and existing, and between players, senior leaders and staff. Centred largely on a desired shift of ownership and responsibility away from hierarchical lines, yet those hierarchical lines are still quite deeply embedded from executive level. It is important that if true ownership and responsibility is desired, the leadership shift towards a shared leadership needs to be embraced and embodied by all in the High Performance Unit. Finally, it was clear that communication breakdowns exist between the NZRL and squad players, but particularly non-selected players. It is apparent that little feedback or communication is given to wider squad players who are not selected as to how they can improve their performance in order to be selected. Most worryingly, this led to one player describing the experience as 'being forgotten or not cared about'. Whilst most NZ eligible players qualify for a number of nations, improving performance in this area is of primary concern in order to stop athletes playing for the Pacific Islands or worse, Australia.

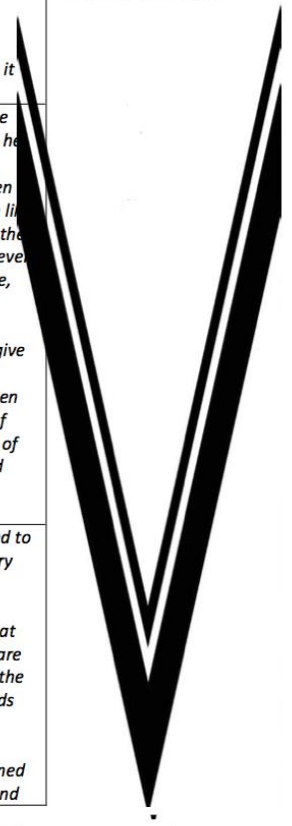
The table below offers some evidence regarding the barriers to embedding meaning in the High Performance Unit.

BARRIERS TO EMBEDDING MEANING

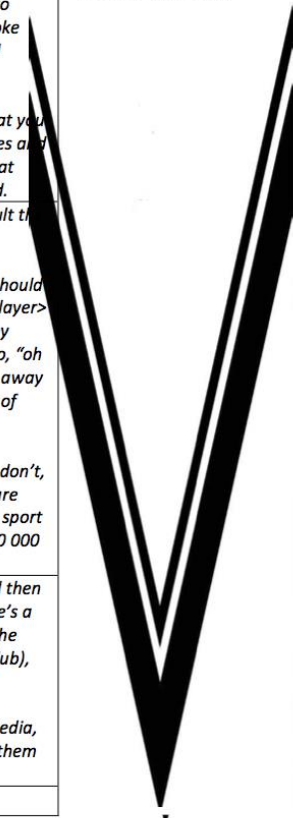


Theme	Sub Theme	Evidence
Lack of Philosophical Alignment	<i>Brotherhood & Performance</i>	<p><i>What I did notice alongside that, was there's so much, I've actually use the word love between them, there's so much connectivity and love and respect and enjoyment of each other, its primary and performance is secondary. So they are more engaged in being together.</i></p> <p><i>The last group was saying that there wasn't yet enough real belief in the fact that you're winners. You're passionate and they talked about brotherhood, absolutely, which was said here, but you know it's a brotherhood, it's a strong cohesion, but it's almost offfield more than it is onfield. Like do you stick together enough onfield, are you there for each other enough onfield?</i></p>
	<i>What Vision?</i>	<p><i>During the meeting, the focus was upon securing money; the money was to be used on running more camps, and recruiting staff. However, neither the [Executive Leader] or [senior leader], could articulate the links between how their planned spending of money would enhance performance; I questioned how this application funding fitted with HP vision/philosophy/aim (knowing that one wasn't established). I was told, we don't need to know that now, let's get the money first, and we'll sort that out later.</i></p> <p><i>Presentation: If you don't have a vision, all roads lead to nowhere – unclear what our vision is. This slide recognises that we don't have an agreed/shared vision for HP amongst staff (and players, however, <Senior Executives> felt that the staff and the players probably need separate ones); concern is that 13 months post the presentation of this document by [Executive Leader]; we still do not have HP vision. Concerning here, is that post presentation it was targeted as a short term target for the HP staff – to produce a vision. I communicated with everyone via email (See below), below is the only response I have had: John, This is a very good starting point. I agree it is very important that we have a High Performance Vision and what you have put as a start will certainly get some discussion going. I will also give it some thought and be happy to discuss with everyone further. Regards <Senior Executive> (May 2012)</i></p>
	<i>Operational NOT strategic Thinking</i>	<p><i>Staff Feedback: Very organised tour from logistical viewpoint, Usual planning and organisation was again first class, Overall planning by <Staff/Senior Leader>, Detailed planning and preparation, Pre-planning of Test week is good and always helpful to what I hope to be a seamless campaign, Very well organised – great coming into camp and everything that can be pre-arranged is, Pre-planning of Test week was great and having great relationships with suppliers etc is hugely helpful as well, Thought overall organisation was very good, Well organised and plenty of activities to keep everybody busy.</i></p> <p><i>Planning & Review meetings – focused heavily on the logistical, operational aspects rather than strategic. Not once did we address the question, what is the purpose of this camp? What is its aim? Do we achieve the purpose – how well? What is our vision for the future for this camp? Questions and analysis largely focused upon evaluating our time management, use of space, and 'slickness' of operations.</i></p>
	<i>Ambiguity</i>	<p><i>Upon unpacking their practices, systems and approaches, they appear to be minimalistic and in the infancy of their change and development in high performance; none of the practices, policies and protocols are documented or easily accessible; and as a result it may be difficult to gain any consensus on mutual direction... High Performance planning processes are largely unclear: performance planning, recruitment, job descriptions, KPIs, succession planning (staff and players), not explicit or clear. Staff Feedback: No contract or job description, KPI's, remuneration, No coaches strategy/style of play/player regarding selections,</i></p> <p><i>We need to get clear about that, that when you walk in the door, straight away, everybody knows what's the plan, everybody knows what to do, and you're not catching up...So even if you're the physio, you need to understand what the coaching philosophy is, if you're the coach, you need to understand what the medical philosophy and principals that come from there, not in great detail but you need to understand</i></p>





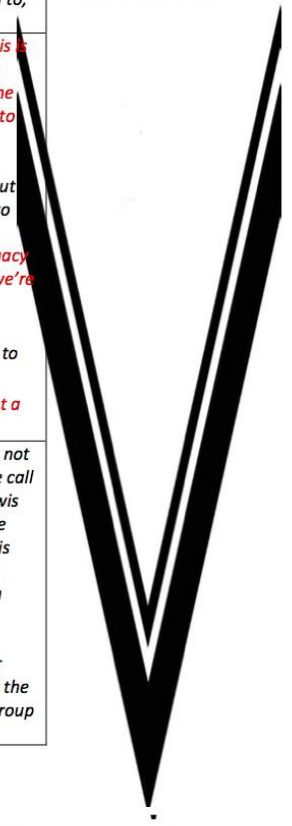
<p>Issues of Authenticity</p>	<p>Empty Promises</p>	<p><i>what the Kiwi way is.</i></p> <p><i>One of the things that New Zealand Rugby League has become in New Zealand and it's become more and more regarded for it all the time, is the culture, is what we say is what we do. If we decide we need to do something and we can afford to do it, we just get on and get it done...</i></p> <p><i>Just to fill you in on what we're doing in and around it, we're gonna go to the Gold Coast first, we'll probably secure those bookings on Monday after I've spoken to [Senior Leader] on the weekend, then we'll fly in – Never Happened</i></p> <p><i>We were supposed to have that pregame in the Cook Islands, so that was a bit of a bummer not having that game. Would have led into it quite nicely – Never Happened.</i></p>
	<p>Senior Players, Power & Hierarchy</p>	<p><i>I think we make too many excuses for players, and even [Executive Leader] goes, "oh its family", but I'm like, nah! There's a point, and he ([Executive Leader]) even knew, coz that's when he was saying, "oh I think he's trying to get out of it", but what annoyed me the most is he and if you want to play for your country, and he lived only two hours drive, which wasn't too much, and he knew about it since the November, December before, so and then he couldn't even, for that, give that much for the jersey, so it just made me soo angry, and then when he's still in the leadership group, I was like why would you do that, coz all of the boys were like, "where's [senior player], coz again like you say, the whole, you set the rules, you have values and then one of them is outside it, and the boys all talk, and they all see, but then the coaching staff still go, here you are, here's your leaders, you know, that's when you start the old "how come he gets that, and he didn't even come?", so how can we, and [Executive Leader] kind of mentioned about those boys that didn't come, they had an opportunity, I was like, there's one right there, he said he was going to come back and he didn't, that's even worse!</i></p> <p><i>I think they love playing for their country, no doubt, with that jumper, or they'd die in that jumper, but it's that, "what else do I have to give up to play? Cant I just play and still do all this other stuff", you know, it's like, I've got my family, so if you want me, I'm gonna have my family there, I'll play and I'll play really good, but it's kind of like a bit of bartering, especially with [senior player], and you know that when they've got that jumper on, they'll play 100%, but you know, he tries to call the shots I think, and he does, he's like, my first impression of him on tour, is like he's the top dog, in prison, you know how in a prison, you've got the top dog...Well [Senior Leader] played with some of the boys and I think that's that tie with [senior player], coz him and [senior player] are very tight, because they played together first, and then he was the assistant coach, so they spend a lot of time catching up and talking and laughing and I suppose too from a player perspective, you think what is he the leader just because him and the [Senior Leader] area really tight.</i></p>
	<p>Talking & Walking</p>	<p><i>Probably someone who doesn't just talk the talk, but does it by actions, on and off the field, you want a leader who, if you're not allowed to go out, you know, the leader doesn't go out to, so if you're on the field and the leader tells you, "you can't miss tackles" and he gets every tackle, it's probably something that I see in a leader.</i></p> <p><i>Staff Feedback: [Senior Player] did a lot of talking but didn't really deliver when we needed him, The failure to meet media expectations at Thursday's press conference resulted in negative coverage, A huge awareness around the respect for coaching staff meaning when you are told not to drink from the Coach then you don't do it, I could only honestly say 4 of 8 from our leaders delivered in this respect, question the integrity of the player leadership group, [Senior Player] and [Senior Player] need to buy in and feel part of it, and every single player needs to be accountable – no exceptions.</i></p> <p><i>Behaviours going on and happening and players not being pulled up by anyone, nothing serious, but behaviours that wouldn't be condoned as professional or performance focused...because [senior leader] has been there for a while, there is a friendship existing between him and</i></p>



	Transparency	<p><i>quite a lot of the players, and I suppose that's expected, but I wondered whether it's just become a bit comfortable and a bit nice.</i></p> <p><i>There seems to be a developing culture of transparency and investment in the future and the people who will get you there, which must be encouraged.</i></p> <p><i>I think you all know the outcome...that you don't want [Senior Player] in the captaincy role for much longer, but if you allow the players to drive that through, so it just becomes really obvious, that's a much lower risk perspective...Interesting that nobody mentioned openly to anyone [the reasons behind the sacking of Captain], unsure if he [Senior Leader] discussed this with the captain that the straw that broke the camel's back was that [Senior Player] wasn't voted for the SLG by the group – instead the communicated reason was coaching and management decision.</i></p> <p><i>The thing with [Senior Player] is you're going to have to keep him sweet to keep him, you know, to actually get him to...Well, I think that you can get probably the most out of him by letting him feel that there's a shared responsibility for the leadership, if he's looking for excuses and he's trying to, he's already trying to take himself out of the line of accountability, but I think you also need to stroke his ego coz he's that sort of athlete; so you know, if you were to say out loud, look you're the spiritual, we want your spiritual leadership so to speak on field.</i></p>
Issues of Delegation & Responsibility	Spoilt & Too Easy	<p><i>From my perspective, the management seemed more focused on ensuring the boys were treated better than the Aussies, and as a result the boys became a bit spoilt, and this was reflected in their behaviour over time.</i></p> <p><i>You get [player], who is even more older school, but he is soo respectful, he tells me off for doing stuff for the boys, he say's hey, they should be doing their own that, they should be doing their own this, you know, or oh you fuss too much over them...It was <returning senior player> who said, and he kind of highlighted to me, "let them do it themselves", and I understand that whole, do everything for them so all they have to worry about is the football, but I think, and it's not so much us, because at that level it's nice to do those niceties where they go, "oh woh, this is cool", coz you know they go wow, and I don't think they get it at NRL, but it's the basic stuff that I think the NRL clubs take away from them...They're like sheep. But you see all of them are like "ohh, oh we're moving", they have no idea where they're going...A lot of their life they're up, now we shower now...shower...we meet at this time, here's the drinks, shakes here, it is, it's all done for them</i></p> <p><i>Most of them are spoon fed information...in life I suppose, if you were an NRL professional now, you're not having to wait in lines, you don't, there's that many staff running round after you trying to get you better, you just basically turn up, for a lot of them, the good players are students of the game and they work to improve themselves, but most of them just turn up. Every clubs has got a sport scientist or 2, a sport psychologist, in my day I'd never even heard of a sport psychologist, let alone seen one, they're spending money on analysis, GPS's, \$50 000 wrestling mats, they're overloaded.</i></p>
	Inconsistent Habits & Decisions	<p><i>Debut, but he's been on tour...Been on tour (laughing), nearly been sent home from a tour (Staff laugh)...He's a follower, Drinking, and then lying, "nah nah, I didn't drink! (Covering his mouth up –alcohol breath), I swear it! You can't smell that on me can ya!?" That's why he's a follower, he looks for the loose guys to lead him astray. He paired up with <non selected player> last year, who's just the same. Yeah he looks for the looseness. Staff: So there's no strong senior influence on him? Senior Leader: Well he still gets in trouble down there (at club), you know, he's one of those guys like [senior leader] said, he doesn't mind lying...for an out.</i></p> <p><i>The team collectively do still not give a warm appearance to the media, he felt that whilst many of the boys were excellent were the media, and couldn't do enough to help, some were quiet and others quick prickly with the media, but I always find myself making excuses for them and their lack of good habits – but sometimes it just not good enough.</i></p>
	Flawed	<p><i>Agree that complacency can creep in – for players and staff. We as staff should be looking at ways to continuously improve on each</i></p>



<p>Reviews & Performance Accountability</p>	<p>performance like the players. I would love that kind of feedback from the staff. Maybe we should all have performance reviews with [Executive Leader] and [Executive Leader] to stay on top of our game. The paper SWOTs are good but nothing really beats a discussion either individually or as a group.</p> <p>That's part of the challenge here is you want those accountabilities without making it colder or more clinical or more harder or losing any of the richness...the other stuff, they do, their risk spot is the lack of accountability, they actually have to agree to that. – So they've agreed to, for example, a player vote on the leadership.</p>
<p>Shifting but Competing Frameworks of Leadership</p>	<p><i>I think just going on from a management side of things, is that we're shifting away from the hammer, like this is what we want fellas, this is what you'll do, you know, so on so forth, so you'd have seen a shift in the Anzac test, and its moving more towards you guys now, so the conjoint between us and the team is you guys, but they're still some non-negotiables, you know, around respect, obviously, you've got the main one which is alcohol, the second one is women, you know, we've got guys with families in here and bits and pieces, we don't want to be putting ourselves in that situation, we've got to put that out to get you guys to deliver that.</i></p> <p>Staff Feedback: Leadership group grew in stature seem to relieve responsibility off [Senior Player], increased involvement of the SLG, input and direction from [staff], Leadership from [Senior Player] (brilliant all week) plus other SLG members, attitude of all the boys (ripped into things, big step up from April)</p> <p><i>So our job [staff] is to influence that group as much as possible in a positive way in thinking about what do they want, what will their legacy be, what is their contribution...So we'll set some expectations around the Kiwi way and what's expected from you guys as well as what we're willing to deliver...You're all part of the squad, and that's why you're a part of it, you either buy in, or you're not in. OK?</i></p> <p>Staff: "The greater the ownership and navigation of the vision that players and high performance staff have, the more likely they will be to drive results and stay true to the NZRL 'DNA'."</p> <p><i>In 2012, [Executive Leader] and [Executive Leader] launched the first HP strategic plan. This strategic plan was written in secret, away at a hotel in Australia by [Executive Leader]/[Executive Leader] with no consultancy with other stakeholder staff.</i></p>
<p>Communication Breakdown</p>	<p>That's the one thing we've been poor at in the past, is connecting not only with the those selected, but probably more importantly those not selected. I think because everyone's so busy, we're always focused on the test match, the team and that's that... I don't even know if we call those who don't get selected before selections announced to chat to them about it, especially those players like [player] who are real Kiwis and haven't been in the frame for the past couple of years...After hearing from [player] on how gutted and upset he was to not make the Kiwi ANZAC Test squad in 2011 maybe we can look at how we communicate with the players that don't make it for selection – even if it is just to our key players? [Player] had a similar story where it hit him really hard and he started taking diet pills etc to try and enhance his performance yet it had the reverse effect. His family stepped in to intervene but regarding our duty of care of our players maybe we can offer more support to those who don't get selected.</p> <p>Improve engagement between management team and players, one of things that we've learnt from the past, is that when we select our squad for the Anzac test of maybe 19, or the end of season test campaign of 23, we communicate really well with them, but what about the 10 or the 15 that hasn't been included in there, well you're still part of the brotherhood, we've still got to communicate with the wider group as well.</p>



MOVING FORWARD & RECOMMENDATIONS

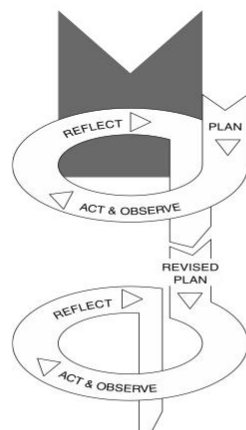


This summary offers numerous themes of personal and shared meaning coupled with three wider themes that act as barriers to embedding a performance culture (1. A lack of philosophical alignment in high performance; 2. Lack of authenticity amongst players and staff; and 3. Issues of delegation and responsibility) for consideration as starting points for the managed change project detailed in the PhD proposal. Broadly, the aim of this project is to enhance and embed a high performance culture and leadership at the NZRL. The design allows freedom for the CEO and High Performance Manager at the NZRL to, based upon these observations, select or prioritise areas for planned changes. It is not my intention to conduct any of the planned changes, but to record and evaluate them. The research will simply act as an evaluation tool, monitoring the planning process, the change itself and the outcome, before informing learning for the next series of planned changes.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND PHASES

In order to monitor the impact of the planned actions within the managed change initiative, along with the learning, I recommend we follow an 'action-research process'. 'Action research' involves researching a situation with the intention of taking action that will make a difference – that is, will bring about change or improvement. This learning focused, pragmatic approach is a perfect research process for the dynamic, outcome focused field of performance management.

The diagram below depicts the spiraling relationship between identifying issues, planning, acting, observing and reflecting that are central to this particular type of learning.



This would use similar data collection tools to the first project to follow impact of the planned change within the action research process.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

The project will run from June 2013 to April 2015, allowing multiple cycles of planned action, reflection and monitoring over two full playing seasons and all the major high performance competitions.



OVERVIEW

- PhD Purpose: Understanding how a high performance team at a National Sporting Organisation can better understand and enhance its high performance culture in order to improve on and off field performance.
- Focus upon meaning making and management amongst internal and external stakeholders associated with the high performance programme.

EXPLORATORY PROJECT: WHY, WHO & HOW

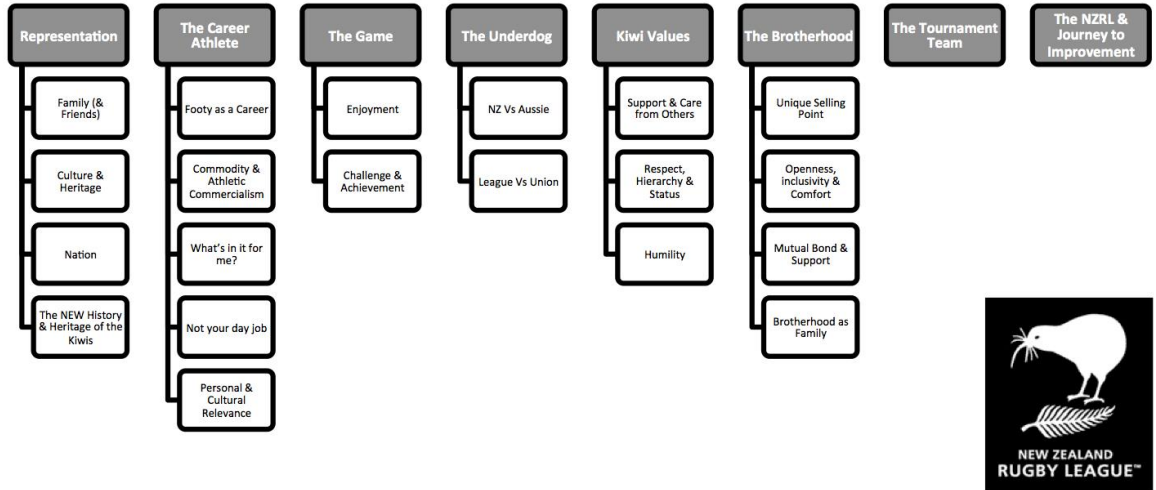
- Personal and shared meanings, the meaning making mechanisms and the role the management and leadership of the high performance program
- Two key questions; '*What are the player's sources of meaning when playing for New Zealand?*' and '*How are these meanings constructed?*'
- 10-months
- All members of the high performance unit¹
- Interviews, observations, conversations and documents

¹ The term 'High Performance Unit' defines the athletes, coaches, support staff and performance leaders of the national team programmes





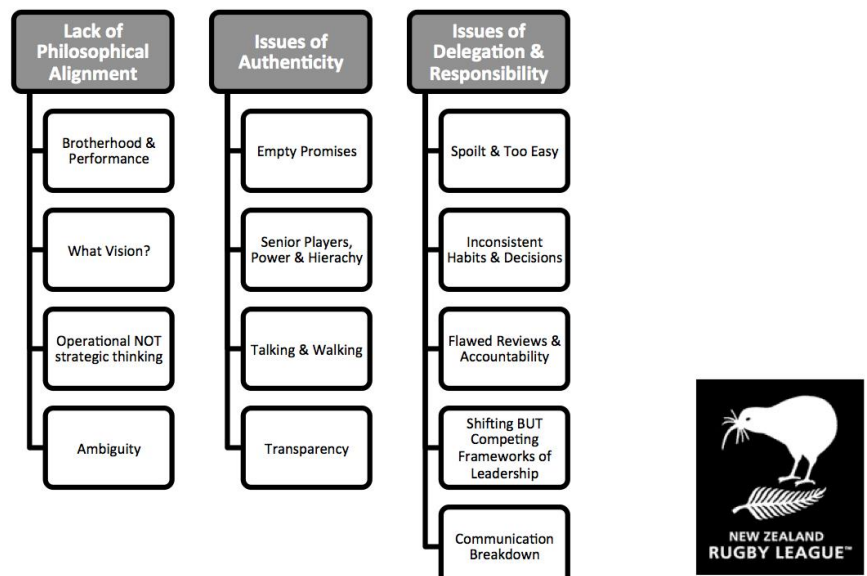
KEY FINDINGS & THEMES: PERSONAL & SHARED MEANING



Meaning In The Kiwis: Conclusions From A 10-Month Exploratory Project

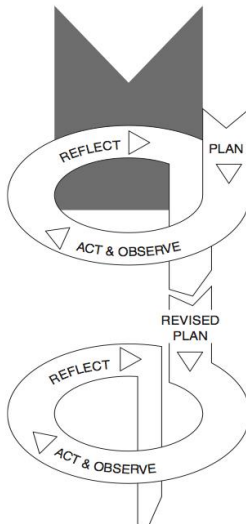


KEY FINDINGS & THEMES: BARRIERS TO MEANING



Meaning In The Kiwis: Conclusions From A 10-Month Exploratory Project

MOVING FORWARD & RECOMMENDATIONS

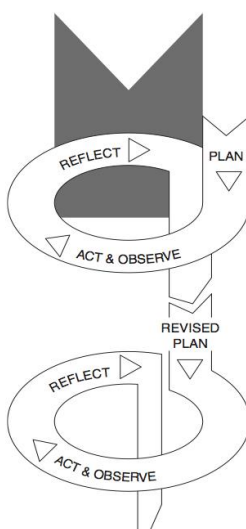


- Action Research:
 - A learning focused, pragmatic approach: perfect research process for the dynamic, outcome focused field of performance management
 - Spiraling relationship between identifying issues, planning, acting, observing and reflecting
- My role as researcher
- The next step
 - Selection, prioritising & planning action



Meaning In The Kiwis: Conclusions From A 10-Month Exploratory Project

MOVING FORWARD & RECOMMENDATIONS



- Question: Based on new knowledge, how can we do things better?
 - Considering sources of personal & shared meaning
 - Considering existing barriers to embedding meaning

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

- June 2013 to April 2015 (22 months)
- Multiple cycles of planned action, reflection and monitoring
- Two full playing seasons and all the major high performance competitions.



Meaning In The Kiwis: Conclusions From A 10-Month Exploratory Project

- d. *Tell me about the koru, dog tags and your Kiwi Number*
8. *In addition to those things, what else about the kiwi culture means something to you?*
 - a. *Tell me about the staff in what way do they add to the kiwi culture?*
 - b. *What roles do the staff play – [Staff]/ [Staff]?*
 - c. *What are [Staff]'s Kava sessions like?*
9. *What's the leadership like within the kiwi culture?*
 - a. *What do you look for in a leader? Who do you look up to in the team, players and staff? Why?*
 - b. *We've introduced [sport psychologist] this year to help the team. Was there anything wrong?*
 - c. *Have you seen any changes in the team?*
10. *NZRL talk a lot about heritage and history, what role does the history and heritage for you when playing for the kiwis?*
11. *What could the NZRL do to enhance your desire to part of the kiwis? What's your impression of the selection process?*
12. *What makes you feel like a kiwi or a New Zealander?*
 - a. *Are they different?*
13. *What are the best things about being a professional footballer?*
 - a. *Thinking about the modern footballer, what motivates them?*
 - b. *If you didn't play rugby league for a job what else would you do?*
 - c. *What do you think about players who change their national allegiance? Why do you think they do that?*
 - d. *What are the threats to Kiwi badge? And to the Kiwi boys based overseas?*
14. *If you had to sum up what – what would you say, and why?*
15. *MEANING; tease it out, come back to it; 1st question should focus on meaning*

Appendix D: AUTEK Approval



MEMORANDUM

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK)

To: Lynn Kidman
From: Rosemary Godbold, Executive Secretary, AUTEK
Date: 18 June 2012
Subject: Ethics Application Number **12/116 Personal meaning in international sport: An exploration of social construction.**

Dear Lynn,

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK) at their meeting on 14 May 2012 and I have approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEK's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEK's meeting on 9 July 2012. Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 18 June 2015.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEK:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 18 June 2015;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 18 June 2015 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEK is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEK approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEK grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all written and verbal correspondence with us. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6902. Alternatively you may contact your AUTEK Faculty Representative (a list with contact details may be found in the Ethics Knowledge Base at <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>).

On behalf of AUTEK and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: John Alder john.alder@aut.ac.nz

26 July 2013

Lynn Kidman
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Lynn

Re: Ethics Application **13/163 Towards a performance culture: Managing cultural change in the high performance programme of a national sport organisation.**

Thank you for re-submitting your application for ethical review. I am pleased to confirm that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) has approved your ethics application for three years until 22 July 2016.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 22 July 2016;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 22 July 2016 or on completion of the project;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. If your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within their.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: john.alder@aut.ac.nz; John Cronin

Appendix E: Historical Context of Research Site

(For a comprehensive and critical analysis of rugby league's socio-historical positioning in New Zealand see Mark Falcous' (2007) paper).

Rugby league in New Zealand. Rugby league in New Zealand arrived as the rival, breakaway form of rugby from northern England, the 'Northern Union'. The sport established itself in the Antipodes underpinned by rugby league's 'blue collar' background and accompanying values of hostility to class privilege and communal bond to the game (of rugby league) by those involved (Falcous, 2007). At the turn of last century, New Zealanders played a pivotal role in the emergence and survival of the 'Northern Union' in the Antipodes. Events such as the (in)famous professional tour of the 'All Gold's' led by Wellingtonian Albert Baskerville in 1907, and the tours of the New Zealand Māori teams to Sydney shortly after, not only established rugby league in New Zealand but consolidated the game in northern England, arguably facilitating its survival and prosperity in Australia (Coffey & Wood, 2008). In 1910, the New Zealand Rugby Football League (NZRFL, present day NZRL) was formed as the game's national governing organisation with responsibility for administration, governance and operations of the game in New Zealand.

Rugby league in New Zealand was never to become dominant in the way it did in New South Wales, Queensland or northern England (Coffey & Wood, 2008). Rugby league in New Zealand today is defined by a relatively small, yet fanatical following who possess a strong sense of allegiance to the game at all levels, and the rugby league's development is the product of the game's distinctive socio-historical origins and antagonistic development (Falcous, 2007). To understand the culture of rugby league in New Zealand, it is necessary to deconstruct the hegemonic sport cultures or "sport space" (Markovits, 1990, p. 242), of New Zealand and in particular the historical role of rugby (union) in the construction of a national identity and resulting culture (Falcous, 2007).

National identity, or as Hall (1996) refers to, the meanings of a nation, "are contained in the stories told about it, memories which connect its present with its past and images which are constructed of it" (p. 613). As a former settler colony of the British Empire, certain "selected sports were promoted and given patronage as critical symbols of a hegemonic national consciousness, entrenching the privileged status of the white European settler – Pākehā – urban, educated, male, middle class" (Falcous, 2007, p. 425), serving as a physical medium for the expression of certain values, defining social communities and the subsequent promulgation of national narratives (Hall, 1997). It is well recognised that New Zealand rugby union predated and in part facilitated the emergence of the New Zealand nation itself as the country searched for its post-colonial, urban, industrial identity over its empire frontier origins (Falcous, 2007). While diversifying from the rugby union's upper class origins, rugby union served to become a New Zealand symbol of mateship, communal inclusiveness and assimilation "distinct in the apparent utopic colonial outpost" (Falcous, 2007, p. 427). International success, particularly against England, as the former colonial ruler, cemented rugby's place as the prominent manifestation of New Zealand nationhood. Alongside rugby, other colonial sports such as cricket, sailing and rowing occupied and continue to occupy privileged positions within New Zealand sport space and national identity (Collins & Jackson, 2007).

The emergence of 'professional' code of rugby challenged the early construction of the New Zealand sport space, threatening the privileged position of rugby (and its amateur ethos promulgated and policed by the NZRFU) and consequently the New Zealand national identity. The reaction to this challenge was one of repression and marginalisation leading to the rugby

league being established and developed at the periphery, marginal to the core narratives of New Zealand the nation. Privileging certain sports over others reveals the place of social recognition and subsequently entrenches the hierarchy of sports within the national imagination (Falcous, 2007). Rugby league's development has been characterised by continual struggles for legitimacy and subsequent marginalisation and stigmatisation by not only rugby governing bodies but also rugby's position in national discourse (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007; Greenwood, 2007). Examples include early bullying and aggression tactics towards rugby league players, whereby playing rugby league was criminalised in the eyes of the NZRFU and subsequently those who have played the 'professional' code could no longer play the nation's game (rugby union), enter rugby (union) grounds, join clubs or be officials (Falcous, 2007).

Conservative, 'paternalistic colonial' establishment stigmatisation continued to marginalise rugby league, manifesting in struggles over the use of municipal grounds and facilities, media resistance and the education sector, controlled exclusively by the middle classes, whereby rugby league was either banned or simply not available in schools or universities (Falcous, 2007). Amidst fears of working class belligerence, rugby league players were depicted as turncoats and mercenaries acting in direct oppositions to ideals of the national narrative by a sceptical and hostile, anti-league press (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007). Fear of rugby league was clearly captured as popular All Blacks referred to league as "sleazy" and that playing rugby league for a New Zealander was regarded as "tantamount to selling one's soul" (Laidlaw, 1973, pp. 69 - 70). Out of such persecution, the rugby league's national development was fragmented, becoming established in urban hotbeds such as Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and on the coal mining West Coast, yet struggled in the rural provinces (Coffey & Wood, 2008).

Over the last 107 years in New Zealand, rugby league has established structures, support and following, and experienced some significant on-field success. However, the entrenched position of rugby union with established patronage and subsequent strong organisation, finances and media support ensured the game remained marginalised and has never gained the dominance experienced in Australia and northern England.

Greenwood (2007) noted that given the powerful position of rugby union, the emergence and development of rugby league in New Zealand was not bound by the explicit class divides existent in the UK and Australia, but as a player-led initiative where there was choice. The result was a perception of league players as rebellious and anti-establishment, illustrated by examples of rugby league players competing in rugby union under false names to outsmart NZRFU rules (Falcous, 2007; Greenwood, 2007). Such cultural values reinforcing the central role of players and their agency continue to pervade through to today (Wright, 2013). Of the early playing base, there is evidence that support for rugby league was predictably strongest amongst the working class, however the game received considerable support amongst other marginalised groups, primarily the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori, and more recently, the indigenous immigrants from the Pacific islands, or Pasifika (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007; Greenwood, 2007).

Ethno-cultural intersections. While rugby and its place in the early New Zealand national imagination served as a site highlighting and facilitating illusions of cultural assimilation, egalitarianism and ethnic harmony, it also privileged and reproduced dominant colonial or Pākehā, middle class discourses and silenced a divisive history of colonial plunder to inculcate a national unity and identity (Falcous, 2007). Despite functionalist narratives, undercurrents of colonialist racialised discourse underpinning the marginalisation of Māori in early dominant

rugby narratives implies there was resistance from and to Māori with regards to the amateur ideal promulgated by the NZRFU and rugby union (Falcous, 2007). Since the early days of rugby league in New Zealand, Māori have played and currently play a prominent role providing a large numbers of players (both domestically and internationally) and administrators in clubs (Coffey & Wood, 2008). Rugby league served as a medium to promote Māoridom, Māori success, and celebrate separatism and liberation from colonial hegemonies and stereotypes (Falcous, 2007). With the strength of Māori rugby league, a separate governing body (New Zealand Māori Rugby League) was established coupled with a representative team, New Zealand Māori, who in the 1930's experienced greater success than the New Zealand national team and at the height of separatism competed alongside the Kiwis at the 2000 Rugby League World Cup (Coffey & Wood, 2008). The role of Māori has been such, that Falcous (2007) highlighted from a playing perspective, rugby league in New Zealand has to some degree become a Māori, and more recently, Pasifika domain.

As a result of growing global capitalism and industrial growth, the decades following the second world war saw large numbers of immigrants from the Pacific islands (predominantly from, although not exclusively Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands) arrive in New Zealand in search of work and opportunity (Grainger, 2006). Access to industry and low cost housing, large communities settled in the growing urban suburbs of South and West Auckland, both of which were firmly established hotbeds of rugby league (Coffey & Wood, 2008). The recession of the 1970s led to Pasifika occupying a contested position in New Zealand society, whereby they were scapegoated for welfare abuse and rising unemployment, and increasingly came to be viewed as 'over stayers', immigrants taking jobs from 'real' New Zealanders, culminating in the infamous police dawn raids for illegal immigrants in Auckland through to the early 1980s that resulted in prosecution and deportation for whole families (Grainger, 2006). Despite such marginalisation, many stayed and called New Zealand home, and the collision sports of rugby union and rugby league offered salient mediums for Pasifika aspiration, advancement and recognition (Horton, 2012) where large families became the backbone of Pasifika involvement in rugby league (Coffey & Wood, 2008).

Māori and Pasifika are widely represented within the New Zealand game and these participation trends are intensified at the elite level, as Falcous (2007) highlighted, the New Zealand Kiwis ANZAC test team in 2004 drew entirely on players with Māori or Pacific heritage. As a product of its socio-historical evolution, it is unquestionable that the contested, stigmatised and marginalised position of rugby league in New Zealand and its ethno-cultural 'Polynesian' flavour, has shaped not only the cultural nuances and dimensions of rugby league in New Zealand, but also the underpinning cultural values, beliefs and meanings of those involved in the present day game in the professional era.

Professionalism, commodification, performance and the Anderson report. Despite already being a 'professional' sport, rugby league received considerable commercial growth from the mid-70s. While this was largely confined to northern England, New South Wales and Queensland (Australia), the 1980's saw commercialism and television broadcasts of the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) Winfield Cup (a precursor to the modern National Rugby League, NRL) generate significant interest in New Zealand, raising the profile of the sport (Mirams, 2001). The lack of a sustainable professional game in New Zealand and the sport's marginalised existence resulted in New Zealand 'high performance' players' diaspora as they sought professional opportunities in Australia and the United Kingdom. However, as Mirams (2001) argued, despite frequently featuring expat New Zealanders, increased New Zealand interest was with the Australian game, and had little connection with New Zealand

domestic rugby league, which was largely 'scorned' by audiences consistently immersed in domestic and international rugby union. Playing professionally in the United Kingdom and Australia not only offered New Zealand players a strong financial rationale but also to play where the game occupied a significant socio-cultural position, holding social currency and meaning (Falcous, 2007; Rowe, 1997).

Reproducing its cultural roots as an anti-establishment, player driven initiative (Falcous, 2007), this era saw the emergence of player versus country conflict as they exercised their agency in pursuing opportunities offshore and the NZRL attempted to maintain authority over the legitimacy of rugby league in New Zealand and the national team (Wright, 2013). Court cases, restrictions, selection and transfer policies all created conflict between 'high performance' players and the NZRL, until in 1990, a landmark court case saw the NZRL remove transfer regulations, facilitating mass diaspora of New Zealand talent to Australia, which continues today (Wright, 2013). In 1995, New Zealand's first privately owned professional rugby league team, the New Zealand Warriors (formerly Auckland Warriors) played their first season the NSWRL (traditionally Sydney, Australia based) competition. Despite developing a cult following as the only identifiable New Zealand team (other than the national team, the 'Kiwis') and offering a professional base for some New Zealand players, the team merely served as an extension of the market for rugby league in the Australia (Falcous, 2007). This growing rugby league market in Australia, reflected in consumer numbers, with the three game annual State of Origin series between Queensland and New South Wales attracting the largest free-to-air television audience in country, made "the 'business' of rugby league, especially its media portfolio a clear takeover target" (Rowe, 1997, p. 221).

That takeover came during the infamous 'Super League War' of the mid-90s, and in 1998 culminated in media corporations assuming central ownership of the global professional game (Denham, 2000; Falcous, 1998; Rowe, 1997). Historically, rugby league was a limited or non-profit making activity controlled by local businessmen, however, the arrival of pay-tv reframed the economic importance of television to the conduct and culture of rugby league (Denham, 2000; Rowe, 1997). Reconstructing the sport's history of conflict and 'breakaway organisations, 'News Corporation' executives and rugby league officials established a new, rival competition in a deal involving millions of dollars and pounds that gave the Rupert Murdoch owned 'News Corporation' sole television rights and elite players were lured away from clubs in the existing competition by much larger salaries to compete in a pay-per-view spectacle (McGaughey & Liesch, 2002; Rowe, 1997). With no rival league in the UK, 'Super League' was embedded firmly in European rugby league, however, the endeavour proved Australia could not sustain two professional competitions with twenty-two teams. Following a series of high profile court cases the 'war' concluded with the offer a settlement and an amalgamation of the two leagues jointly owned by Murdoch's media corporation, 'News Limited' and the Australian Rugby League.

The super league war and the formation of the new fourteen team National Rugby League (NRL) rationalised and modernised the game along strictly commercial lines (Andrews & Ritzer, 2007; McGaughey & Liesch, 2002). This modernisation led to a radical re-organisation of the professional game, with wholesale changes in the marketing of the sport, ownership of clubs and the rationalisation and franchising of the professional game (Denham, 2000), whereby extant clubs were merged or closed due to a lack of profitability (Phillips & Hutchins, 2003). Trade routes were clearly opened, with salary caps and player earning potential dramatically increased. As commodification and commercialisation firmly embedded itself in the cultural fabric of rugby league, the cultural meanings and values attached to the

game were threatened and in many instances changed or reconstructed to suit a commercial narrative (Denham, 2000; Falcous, 1998). Traditional clubs and communities were replaced by corporations as rugby league transitioned into a postmodern industry and culture (Denham, 2000). Denham argued since this period of commodification, “the sport as a whole as well as individual clubs, has come to be treated increasingly as a business and thus is increasingly placed more firmly in the nexus of market operations” (p. 279).

McGaughey and Liesch (2002) cited clear evidence in the declining value of historic bonds of loyalty and unity in the game amongst governing bodies and clubs, coupled with changes in contractual relationships between players and their clubs where players became reframed as human resources. Corporations and institutions that transcend locality in establishing a new global world order are antithetical to sport’s symbiotic relationship with local and national constructions of identity and meaning (Rowe, 2003). Denham (2000) argued the reduction of rugby league to a product whereby supporters become customers purchasing a product, shapes the intimate connections between participants, teams, fans and local or regional sentiments, leading to weakening or ‘brittle’ connections between stakeholders and teams. It is argued the new economical politics of rugby league led to a partial disconnection of people from stable social structures entailing a reduced importance of historicity and as a consequence a new ‘depthlessness’ of meaning (Denham, 2000).

However, amongst this era of commercialisation, the rugby league field has become one sociocultural site for the contemporary achievement and advancement of New Zealand, predominantly Māori and Pasifika players (Horton, 2012; Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005). Recent figures show that 35% in the senior NRL competition hold New Zealand eligibility and the figure rises to 40% in the U20s version (NZRL, 2012). Professional rugby league (and union) has become a cultural hub of mainly Pasifika and Māori talent, where these players are widely recognised as outstanding athletic products, who are prime commodities and in high demand for purchase on the global sport labour market to sell rugby league (Grainger, 2006; 2009; Horton, 2012). Professional rugby league offers a potentially lucrative career option, and with contracts for the very best players growing to over one million dollars per season is in stark contrast to the reality of traditional Pasifika and Māori labour pathways into unskilled work (Horton, 2012). As Horton (2012) argued with only family and church more important than rugby to the majority of Pasifika young men, professional rugby is a “highly attractive, socially and culturally appropriate ‘masculine’ career pathway” (p. 2400), and one that would allow a player to fulfil cultural obligations and expectations to not only financially support his family and kinship network, but bring them success by ways upward social mobility.

High market demand for ‘New Zealand’ players coupled with lucrative rewards has significantly influenced New Zealand player migration patterns. A trend of mass player exodus exists across the performance spectrum, from professional player transfers to clubs in the UK or Australia (Evans & Stead, 2012), to youth players (and their families), often as young as 14 who are actively recruited from New Zealand by agents and professional clubs to take up rudimentary professional contracts in Australia (The Anderson Report, 2009). For those not recruited, in many instances, players’ families relocate to pursue opportunities to gain a club contract. For many boys living in New Zealand (or Australia), this process often begins with gaining a football-based scholarship to a school or a centre of excellence in the Australian state system, then advancing to a franchise academy and gaining a professional contract (Horton, 2012). As Falcous (2007) wrote, “at the turn of the third millennium the New Zealand game acts a primarily as a ‘peripheral’ feeder of playing talent to the ‘core’ economies of the game in Australia and England” (p. 435).

The associated migration of players and their families presents a number of challenges to the NZRL with respect to leading and managing high performance (The Anderson Report, 2009). As Light and Kirk (2001) found cultural newcomers who participate in the culturally dominant sport (i.e., rugby league in eastern Australia) are awarded with more opportunities for socialisation and gain access to valuable social capital and power, shaping perception of self and meaning construction. Players' experiences of socialisation into non-New Zealand societies are also highly likely to mediate identity (Higham & Hinch, 2009; Maguire & Falcous, 2011) and shape the cultural values, beliefs and meanings athletes possess (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Light & Kirk, 2001), and in particular when playing for the national team (Tuck, 2003; 2011).

The complex situation creates a challenging landscape within which to cultivate a high performing culture amongst the New Zealand national team, with respect to accessing and engaging with talent, tracking players, establishing player commitment, retention and eligibility (Kemp, 2012; The Anderson Report, 2009; Wright, 2013). While participation in rugby league in Australia is a means which facilitates socialisation and integration for relocating New Zealanders, NSOs such as the NZRL, do not accept plural identities and dual nationals are required to choose one nationality over another (Poli, 2007). Higham and Hinch (2009) recognised "globalisation and contemporary mobility have brought enormous change to the values and reference points that once framed people's lives...It has also challenged many aspects of personal and collective identity" (p. 11) giving rise to the contested space of the dual sporting nationality (Tuck, 2011; Wright, 2013). Compounding this issue is the RLIF's regulation that players may switch international allegiance once per world cup cycle which has rapidly changed the landscape (and meaning) of international rugby league, and consequently highlighted publicly the complicated questions of heritage, birthplace, residency and citizenship (Grainger, 2006; 2009; Lakisa et al., 2014; Wright, 2013). As Grainger (2006) noted, for Polynesian players, the key here is the "resultant familial networks that bind, emotively and economically, the 'migrant' to 'homeland,' and the complicated questions of ethnicity, citizenship, and national belonging that result" (p. 47). Highly public eligibility struggles between New Zealand born players and the governing bodies of Australia and New Zealand has challenged traditional notions of New Zealand nationality and the position of the Kiwi rugby league team (Wright, 2013).

While the global game transitioned swiftly into postmodern commercialism, the governance of the domestic game in New Zealand failed to transition as quickly. In 2009, amidst growing concerns at government level over the health of rugby league in New Zealand, the sport's governance, management and administration practices, Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC, presently known as Sport New Zealand) commissioned an independent review of the NZRL. The highly critical report confirmed concerns for the game's future, highlighting a lack of a shared vision for rugby league, strategic ignorance across the game, bankruptcy worries, financial ignorance, sponsorship exodus, no grassroots sustainability and provincial decline (The Anderson Report, 2009). An acceptance of talent diaspora at the NZRL has led to a laissez-faire approach to the leadership of high performance whereby "high performance is outsourced to Australia, that's NZRL's current policy" (The Anderson Report, 2009, p. 45). The resulting uncontrolled, unmonitored 'outsourcing' of the high performance development of New Zealand players to Australia was demonstrated by the lack of a clear strategy for high performance.

Despite a widely revered talent base (Coffey & Wood, 2008; Falcous, 2007; The Anderson Report, 2009), the inconsistent approach to managing high performance rugby league in New Zealand has manifested in the results of the team in recent decades:

The 2008 Kiwis team which won the World Cup comprised eight Warriors, with the remaining players from offshore (i.e., non-New Zealand residents). New Zealand's international performance has to date not been demonstrably consistent or sustainable. However, the Kiwis outstanding performance at the 2008 World Cup, the Women winning the world cup three times, and the Kiwis performance in the 2005 Tri Nations final against Australia (where they won 24 - 0), demonstrates that New Zealand has extra ordinary talent. It also shows that the New Zealand flagship high performance team the Kiwis has the ability to be the best internationally - the challenge is to be the best "consistently". This has the potential to be achieved if supported by a high performance strategy which addresses the talent recruitment and retention issues. (The Anderson Report, 2009, p. 48)

The 'Anderson Report' (2009) prompted a period of significant organisational change, renewal and financial stability. This period began with the recruitment of a corporate CEO to lead change and move the sport away from "league's old-school, colourful, grassroots administrators and towards big business and governance" ("Ground zero for under-fire rugby league," 2008) and address the critical shortfalls highlighted. The NZRL developed their first high performance strategy for the period 2009 – 2013 and the Kiwis also won the 2010 Four Nations tournament. However, despite significant organisational change and a dedicated strategy for high performance, as highlighted in recent test matches, the HPU had yet to achieve the degree of consistency in on-field performance that is reflective of a high performing culture.