



Transformational Leadership – Changing the Ice Hockey Culture in Vorarlberg, Austria

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Abstract

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Abstract <p>This diary-based thesis explores the professional development of an ice hockey coach employed by the Vorarlberg Pioneers in Austria, focusing on two primary themes: cultural transformation within the regional hockey community and personal growth in leadership and coaching skills. Observing the final phase of the hockey season from January 29th to March 31st, 2024, the study examines the author's role in driving collaboration among historically rival clubs to establish a centralized academy for developing young talent, while also enhancing personal coaching efficacy. The thesis draws on frameworks including Transformational Leadership, and strategic communication models to guide both the author's approach and reflection.</p> <p>The implementation of the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project involved a structured public relations campaign, targeting critical stakeholders and aligning with leadership theories that advocate shared vision and collaboration. Practical methods employed include data analysis, persuasive communication, and negotiation strategies, with notable reliance on Sinék's Golden Circle framework for gaining stakeholder support. Through this process, the author addressed cultural resistance within the hockey community, fostering a cooperative environment for talent development. Parallel to project management, the author worked on improving technical coaching abilities through video analysis and individualized training, further refining approaches based on elite sports theories.</p> <p>Results indicate the successful launch of the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy despite challenges, showcasing the author's growth in managing stakeholder relationships, adapting leadership techniques, and using strategic flexibility. Key insights gained include the power of persistence in changing organizational culture and the value of job analysis for identifying areas of improvement. In future applications, the skills and experiences from this project will contribute to the author's long-term professional impact within sports coaching and beyond.</p>
Keywords Transformational Leadership, Cultural Change, Self-Development, Diary Based Report

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1 Introduction

This paper explores the professional journey of the author, a dedicated Ice Hockey Coach employed by the Vorarlberg Pioneers, a prominent hockey club competing in the ICEHL. Situated in the westernmost province of Austria, this club serves as the focal point for the author's observations, which span the final phase of the Ice Hockey season, from January 29th to March 31st.

The primary goal of this diary-based thesis is twofold: to drive cultural change within Vorarlberg's ice hockey community and to facilitate the author's personal professional growth as a leader and coach. Both themes are deeply rooted in established theoretical frameworks that guide the author's reflection and actions.

Theme 1: Transforming Ice Hockey Culture in Vorarlberg

The first and foremost theme centers on transforming the ice hockey culture in Vorarlberg, leading to greater cooperation between historically rival clubs and establishing a development-focused framework for the region's young athletes. This aligns with the concept of Cultural Change, which is vital for reshaping beliefs, values, and behaviors across organizations (Kotter, 2012). The ultimate objective is to create a collaborative environment where all clubs contribute to a centralized hockey education system that nurtures the region's best talent. This vision is tied to the Transformational Leadership framework, particularly the principles outlined by Blane (2017), which emphasize creating a shared vision, inspiring stakeholders, and guiding cultural transformation.

Key to this process is Strategic Communication, which is essential for articulating the vision of a unified system, garnering support from stakeholders, and building consensus on a shared conceptual framework. The author has actively worked on cultivating relationships with the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association and other clubs in the region, positioning the association as a key partner in this transformational effort.

Theme 2: Professional Growth as a Leader and Coach

The second theme focuses on the author's professional development as a leader and coach, particularly in terms of building confidence, improving technical skills, and refining communication strategies. This theme reflects the author's desire to become a more effective coach and leader, which is central to both personal growth and the success of cultural change efforts.

Throughout this thesis, the author leverages insights from Transformational Leadership theory, as outlined by Blane (2017), to inspire and motivate not only players but also fellow coaches and key stakeholders. In addition, the author works on enhancing technical coaching skills, such as integrating professional-level coaching strategies into the Austrian U16 National Team and employing advanced tools like video analysis to improve player performance.

In this context, the author's dual role—working both as a coach for the professional men's team and as the Head of Coaching for VEU Feldkirch's junior club—provides valuable opportunities for skill development. This involves refining communication with players, tailoring coaching strategies, and improving execution through structured individual training sessions. The focus on self-improvement aligns with the broader framework of Deliberate Practice (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer, 1993), which emphasizes intentional and structured efforts to improve performance through feedback and repetition.

Challenges and Strategic Approach

Achieving the objectives tied to these two themes involves overcoming significant challenges, particularly regarding the entrenched rivalries between clubs and the need to foster sustainable collaborations. The author addresses these hurdles by adopting a strategic approach, positioning the regional ice hockey association as a central player in the development of the proposed academy. The ultimate goal is to establish this academy in Vorarlberg, with support from the regional government contingent upon achieving consensus among all clubs on a shared framework for the future of hockey development in the region.

Conclusion

Since May 23rd, 2023, the author has been cultivating a relationship with the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association, seeking to align the interests of various stakeholders in the region. This diary-based thesis will focus on the author's decision-making process, cultural transformation efforts, and personal growth as a leader and coach. Leveraging insights from Transformational Leadership and Deliberate Practice, the author aims to articulate and promote a compelling vision for a centralized hockey education system, tailored to the region's top players. Success in securing unanimous agreement on the proposed conceptual framework would not only mark a significant milestone for Vorarlberg but also serve as a blueprint for other regions in Austria grappling with similar challenges.

2 Description of the initial situation

2.1 Analysis of your current work

To facilitate the progression of the project, the author must leverage his skills in constructing a comprehensive conceptual framework that vividly articulates the vision and underscores the collective benefits derived from collaboration among all clubs. Drawing upon his education at Haaga Heilia University at Vierumäki Campus, the author assesses his proficiency as a skilled performer in this undertaking. The advantage of being a native of Vorarlberg further enhances the author's ability to tap into established connections and past knowledge, facilitating the establishment of common ground with all stakeholders.

During the observational period, the author acknowledges the need for skill development, particularly in the areas of vision sharing through strategic communication and adeptly managing the diverse characters involved. Recognizing these as key components for effective leadership and achieving cultural change, the author aims to refine these skills over time. At the start of the observation period the Author assesses himself in this area as a novice, since often he seeks help from the Head Coach to help communicating in a more strategic way.

In tandem with the aforementioned objectives, the author identifies a specific area for skill enhancement related to his work with the professional team. In this aspect, the author categorizes himself as a novice, acknowledging room for improvement despite possessing a solid knowledge base. Notably, the author perceives challenges in coaching with confidence during video analysis sessions and small group skill practices. Consequently, the author attempts to bolster self-confidence during the reporting period by proactively preparing more video sessions for the professional players and engaging them in discussions on specific topics. It's noteworthy that the author has sought and obtained the Head Coach's approval for this initiative, signifying a collaborative approach toward skill development within the team.

2.2 Stakeholders

Numerous stakeholders play integral roles in the initiation of a collaborative Ice Hockey academy in Vorarlberg. The initial challenge for the author was to secure buy-in from the Vorarlberg Pioneers, the club to which the author is affiliated. Given the Pioneers' participation in the highest league compared to other regional clubs, there exists a heightened imperative for an enhanced player development system in Vorarlberg. The author successfully garnered the support of the General Manager of the Vorarlberg Pioneers, marking a crucial milestone.

In early discussions, the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association expressed interest in participating in such a project. However, they also highlighted longstanding rivalries that have persisted for decades, contributing to the denial of numerous similar initiatives in the past. Notably, the EC Bregenzwald, a club participating in Austria's second league, already collaborates with the Vorarlberg Pioneers, functioning as a farm team. The author anticipates and seeks the support of EC Bregenzwald in this effort. On the other hand, EHC Lustenau, affiliated with the third league club EC Dornbirn, presents a formidable challenge as they have the highest number of junior players in their program. Securing their participation is not only crucial but also the most challenging, especially considering their recent collaboration with a Swiss club.

EHC Lustenau and EC Dornbirn have initiated a joint program with a Swiss club, allowing players to compete in Switzerland at a lower level due to restrictions on non-domestic players at the elite level. While parents and players may express willingness to transition to a higher level when the opportunity arises, the author's goal is to foster collaboration with all clubs. The aim is to find common ground and facilitate cooperation without undermining the efforts of other clubs, thereby averting potential sabotage. The delicate task at hand is to navigate historical rivalries and establish a united front for the collective benefit of ice hockey development in Vorarlberg.

2.3 Interaction situations

Every morning, the coaching staff of the Vorarlberg Pioneers convenes in the office to outline the day's agenda. Typically, the head coach delegates tasks to the author, which often involve preparing video clips for individual coaching sessions tailored to specific players and devising individual or small group skill drills focused on particular topics. The author acknowledges instances where he has not actively contributed his own insights or proposed areas of work, particularly on days with lighter responsibilities.

Interactions with the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Federation primarily occur through phone calls or email correspondence. However, during the observation period, formal meetings with board members are scheduled. Additionally, the author has planned a formal meeting with authorities from other junior organizations in the province to present his proposal for a collaborative project aimed at nurturing young, talented athletes in Vorarlberg. Anticipating potential resistance from clubs in Dornbirn and Lustenau, the author recognizes the need to navigate these discussions strategically in order to steer them towards a favourable outcome.

3 Diary entries

3.1 Observation week 01

The objective for this week was to effectively communicate and gain support for the author's idea within the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association. To achieve this, the author sought inspiration from the "Principle of the Golden Circle," introduced by Simon Sinek in his book *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (Sinek, 2009). Thus, the author's focus for the week was twofold: first, to meticulously craft a presentation aligning with the principles of the Golden Circle, and second, to refine communication skills in accordance with this strategic approach. On the other hand, the author wanted to gain confidence by providing more value for the pro team players via individual skill and video sessions. Preparing clips and drills in advance would help build confidence in execution.

Monday 29.01.2024

Today, the author met with the board of the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association, having been invited after reaching out to a member of the association. The purpose of the meeting was for the board to hear the author's idea aimed at enhancing hockey in the province. The author presented the idea comprehensively, utilizing a printed handout version of his conceptual framework.

The strategy employed to engage the association involved a clear articulation of the "Why" behind the establishment of such an academy. Following the approach outlined in Sinek's book *Start with Why* (Sinek, 2009), the author initiated the presentation by emphasizing the need for collaboration in the province. Subsequently, the author detailed the value that an academy would bring to the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Federation, with the foremost value being the regaining of control over the clubs.

To provide context, it was highlighted that currently, the clubs in Vorarlberg operate independently, with no obligation to seek permission from the association. This autonomy stems from a breakdown the association experienced in recent years, rendering them unable to provide or deny financial support and leaving them without the capacity to offer anything to players in the province. The author underscored the necessity of reestablishing a collaborative structure for the benefit of the entire ice hockey community in Vorarlberg.

Tuesday, 30.01.2024

The author embarked on a train journey to Salzburg to participate in the annual Conference for the Heads of Juniors in Austria. This provided an invaluable platform for the author to present his idea to the Austrian Federation. The reception was overwhelmingly positive, with all attendees expressing enthusiasm for the concept. Furthermore, they pledged their unwavering support for the establishment of an academy in the province of Vorarlberg.

The significance of this endorsement is underscored by historical context: Until a decade ago, Junior National teams regularly featured multiple players from Vorarlberg. However, in recent years, athletes from the region have struggled to secure representation, if considered at all. This shift highlights the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation's recognition of the need for change within the province. They aspire for Vorarlberg's teams to compete in the Austrian Championships, thus signaling a departure from their current participation in Swiss second or third leagues. This alignment of goals reflects a shared vision for revitalizing ice hockey in Vorarlberg and fostering a more competitive landscape at the national level.

Thursday, 01.02.2024

On this day, the author had no junior responsibilities on his agenda, and set a goal to contribute to the improvement of the PK (Penalty Kill) Centers performance in faceoffs. The day's tasks included finalizing video clips for the PK pre-scout and assisting in the analysis of the opponents' power play (PP) in preparation for the upcoming game tomorrow. The cutting of video clips was executed efficiently and professionally. Having assumed this responsibility since the beginning of November, the author has developed into a skilled performer in this aspect. While editing the video for the pre-scout, the author focused on evaluating the habits of the opponents' power play Centers. Following the team skate, the author took the initiative to engage with the PK Centers, explaining the observations derived from the videos and working collaboratively on faceoffs. This task has become a recurring focus, with the Head Coach placing particular emphasis on its importance. The author's proactive involvement in refining this specific skill demonstrates an ongoing commitment to enhancing team performance.

Weekly Analysis: Week 1

In the first week of observation, the focus was on two primary objectives: effectively communicating a strategic initiative to the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association and enhancing professional development through contributions to the pro team. These goals align with broader leadership and

communication strategies drawn from Simon Sinek's Principle of the Golden Circle (Sinek, 2009) and Transformational Leadership theory (Blane, 2017), which were used to inspire action and guide decision-making.

Applying Sinek's Golden Circle: Strategic Communication

Simon Sinek's Golden Circle emphasizes the importance of starting with "Why" when communicating ideas, particularly in leadership settings. This concept is pivotal for framing the purpose behind a vision before delving into "How" (process) and "What" (outcome). The author applied this model while engaging with the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association, aiming to convince them of the importance of establishing a centralized hockey academy.

Application to Competence Development

The focus on explaining the "Why" behind the hockey academy represents a key aspect of strategic communication. Sinek's principle of starting with a compelling reason addresses the emotional and motivational aspects of decision-making. By emphasizing the need for collaboration to regain control over hockey development in the province, the author framed the situation in a way that appealed to the association's desire for long-term success. This approach not only demonstrated effective communication of the vision but also reinforced leadership qualities, as transformational leaders often create shared purpose and vision to influence change (Northouse, 2019).

Furthermore, by aligning the presentation with Sinek's framework, the author advanced their communication skills, particularly in adapting complex ideas into simpler, value-driven narratives. This method fosters a collaborative environment, which is crucial for the cultural change needed within Vorarlberg's hockey community, where historical rivalries hinder cooperation.

Leadership in Action: Cultural Change

Transformational leadership emphasizes fostering innovation, inspiring motivation, and creating a vision that drives cultural change within organizations (Blane, 2017). The author's efforts to integrate various hockey stakeholders into a cohesive framework for development resonates with this leadership style. The resistance faced due to clubs' independent operations presents a significant challenge—indicative of ingrained cultural dynamics within the province.

Application to Competence Development

By seeking the backing of the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation during the annual Conference for Junior Heads, the author strategically expanded their influence and sought allies to help facilitate the desired change. The positive response from the federation underscores the success of using transformational leadership principles to rally support. In this sense, the author demonstrated the ability to manage external relationships effectively while influencing key stakeholders—an essential aspect of leadership (Kotter, 2012).

Moreover, this experience reflects the author's growing competence in understanding organizational dynamics, particularly in leveraging external recognition (i.e., support from the Austrian Federation) to influence internal change (Yukl, 2013). Effective leaders often seek external validation or pressure to drive internal reforms, especially in environments resistant to change.

Technical and Tactical Development: Skill Improvement and Video Analysis

Aside from strategic leadership tasks, the author contributed to the pro team by focusing on penalty kill (PK) centers' performance in faceoffs. This work involved preparing video analysis and leading individual sessions with the players, reflecting the author's continuous professional growth in player development and technical aspects of coaching.

Application to Competence Development

The consistent application of video analysis to improve players' performance reflects the author's growing expertise in this area. According to Reid et al. (2004), video feedback is one of the most effective tools in skill acquisition in sports, as it provides athletes with real-time feedback and visual cues to enhance their understanding of specific tasks. The author's ability to edit and deliver video insights efficiently demonstrates advanced competency, both technically and communicatively.

Additionally, the author's initiative in working with PK centers to fine-tune their faceoff skills signifies a proactive approach to coaching, which is a key component of both individual player development and overall team success. The confidence gained from the repetition of these tasks reflects the principle of deliberate practice (Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer, 1993), wherein structured and intentional practice leads to expertise.

Conclusion: Integration of Theory and Practice

In summary, the first week highlighted significant professional growth in both strategic communication and tactical development. Through the lens of Sinek's Golden Circle and Transformational Leadership, the author demonstrated growing competence in influencing key stakeholders and advocating for systemic change in the hockey landscape of Vorarlberg. Simultaneously, hands-on tasks like video analysis and skill development with pro players contributed to the author's technical expertise. The combination of leadership theory, strategic communication, and applied coaching techniques represents a holistic approach to the author's ongoing professional development.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the author should continue refining communication techniques, particularly in addressing resistance from stakeholders. Further integration of motivational strategies and conflict management skills could be beneficial in overcoming historical rivalries between clubs, essential for fostering a unified provincial development strategy. On the technical side, maintaining regular feedback loops with players and coaches will continue to improve individual and team performance, while also building the author's reputation as a key contributor to the team's success.

3.2 Observation week 02

This week, the author pursued two key development goals. The initial objective was to bolster confidence by seamlessly integrating the knowledge acquired from professional-level work into the coaching dynamics of the Austrian U16 National Team. The second development goal involved strategically conveying the alliance's message in Vorarlberg to key figures within the Austrian Hockey Federation. Employing a similar persuasive strategy, the author shifted the focus to emphasize the advantages of establishing such an academy for the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation.

Monday, 05.02.2024

During this IIHF break, the author traveled to Carinthia for his role as an assistant coach with the Austrian U16 National Team (Men). The primary objectives for the day were to embody a highly professional attitude and reconnect with the players. The initial meeting, led by the Head Coach, proved successful. Before and after the session, the author managed to engage in several individual conversations with players. On-ice and off-ice practices were productive, allowing the author to effectively convey the intended style of play, resulting in positive responses from the players.

By integrating coaching techniques typically used with professional players, the author applied the principles of progressive athlete development. According to Côté and Gilbert (2009), adapting professional-level techniques to younger athletes promotes skill acquisition and mental readiness, ensuring continuity in development as they advance in competitive sports.

Tuesday, 06.02.2024

The focus of the day was to inform Florian Mühlstein the Head Coach of the U16 Team and Head of Development for the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation, about the latest developments in Vorarlberg and seek his support. Following the practice day, an informal meeting was held in the Team Hotel. After presenting the concept of collaborative efforts in Vorarlberg, the author delved into discussions about licensing players and other organizational aspects. Mühlstein expressed agreement on visiting Vorarlberg to dedicate a day to mentoring coaches in the region and endorsing the project.

To successfully communicate the academy's vision, the author employed a persuasive strategy, emphasizing the "Why" behind the need for an academy in Vorarlberg, following principles similar to Sinek's *Start with Why* (2009). This approach, rooted in the "Golden Circle" communication model, was highly effective in gaining support, as it focused on articulating the underlying purpose before discussing specific steps (Sinek, 2009). By linking the academy's purpose to the federation's broader goals, the author demonstrated leadership skills consistent with Transformational Leadership theory (Blane, 2017).

Thursday, 08.02.2024

The day marked the first game against Norway. Leveraging insights gained from the pregame skate, the author provided valuable guidance to the team's centers. Drawing from experiences with the Pioneers Vorarlberg, the author worked with the young athletes on faceoffs, employing techniques akin to those used with professional players. Between the pregame skate and the game, the author scheduled a phone call with the Vorarlberg Hockey Association to share the exciting news about securing the Coaches Mentoring Program for the region. This strategic move further emphasizes the value the author can contribute to the region, particularly if entrusted with a leading role in the project.

Applying professional-level coaching methods in a youth context not only helped refine faceoff techniques but also reinforced the long-term benefits of deliberate practice in skill development. As

noted by Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993), structured and intentional practice, even in high-pressure game settings, significantly enhances an athlete's performance over time.

Weekly Analysis: Week 2

During the second week, the author focused on two main professional development objectives: integrating professional-level coaching techniques into youth sports and strategically persuading key stakeholders to support the proposed hockey academy in Vorarlberg. These tasks allowed for practical applications of leadership and communication theories, alongside significant self-reflection on coaching confidence and skill development.

Integrating Professional-Level Techniques into Youth Coaching

The author applied techniques typically used with professional players to the Austrian U16 National Team, promoting continuity in skill development from youth to professional levels. This approach aligns with Côté and Gilbert's (2009) principles of progressive athlete development, which suggest that using professional-level training for younger athletes enhances skill acquisition and prepares them mentally for competitive sports.

Application to Competence Development

One of the author's key realizations during this week was the confidence felt when working with younger athletes, as opposed to coaching professional players back home. Coaching younger athletes provided an opportunity to apply advanced techniques in a more receptive environment, which boosted the author's self-assurance. According to Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer's (1993) theory of deliberate practice, structured and intentional training helps build expertise. This was evident as players began to seek the author's advice more frequently after receiving individualized coaching. The feedback from the players was overwhelmingly positive, indicating that the tailored approach had a significant impact on their development.

This reflection demonstrates the author's growing competence in integrating complex professional-level techniques into a youth context while remaining attuned to the developmental stage of the athletes. The positive reinforcement from the players also underlines the importance of creating an environment where athletes feel supported and motivated to seek further guidance.

Strategic Communication and Gaining Support for the Hockey Academy

The second key objective was to gain the support of Florian Mühlstein, Head Coach of the U16 National Team and Head of Development for the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation, for the proposed hockey academy in Vorarlberg. The author successfully employed Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle" model of communication, focusing on the "Why" behind the academy's mission before discussing how it would be implemented. This persuasive strategy resonated with Mühlstein, who expressed his support and offered to mentor coaches in Vorarlberg.

Application to Competence Development

Strategic communication played a central role in convincing Mühlstein of the academy's value. By framing the academy as a solution aligned with the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation's long-term goals, the author demonstrated key aspects of Transformational Leadership. According to Blane (2017), transformational leaders are able to inspire others by communicating a compelling vision and motivating stakeholders to collaborate toward common objectives. The author's success in gaining Mühlstein's support highlights improved confidence and skill in stakeholder management, particularly in navigating potential obstacles through clear and purposeful communication.

The challenges involved in this process included overcoming initial hesitation from Mühlstein. However, the author's focus on building rapport and emphasizing shared goals helped secure his agreement. This success underscores the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, where understanding and addressing the concerns of stakeholders is crucial for effective persuasion.

Overall Reflection and Leadership Growth

This week provided significant professional growth for the author, particularly in terms of building confidence in coaching and mastering strategic communication. The positive feedback from both players and Mühlstein reinforced the effectiveness of the author's methods and solidified the author's role as a capable leader in both technical coaching and strategic leadership.

The successful integration of professional-level techniques into youth coaching demonstrated a growing ability to adapt complex methods to suit different development stages, while the use of Sinek's Golden Circle and Transformational Leadership frameworks showed improved skill in presenting compelling arguments to key decision-makers.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the author should continue refining both coaching techniques and communication strategies. Maintaining the momentum gained this week, the author should focus on transferring newfound confidence from youth coaching to working with professional players. Additionally, building on the support from Mühlstein, the next step will involve solidifying alliances with other stakeholders to ensure the realization of the hockey academy in Vorarlberg.

3.3 Observation week 03

The author's primary goal this week was personal development, particularly in assertively demanding what is genuinely desired and deserved. Drawing motivation from Blane's (2017) book, 7 Principles of Transformational Leadership, particularly the Purpose principle, the author aimed to ensure clear comprehension among all involved parties regarding the unique value he brings to the table. This strategic approach was designed to demonstrate why he is the right person to lead the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy.

Monday, 12.02.2024

Over the weekend, a crucial phone call from the Vorarlberg Hockey Association raised the possibility of someone else assuming the Head of Coaching position for the Academy, challenging the author's non-negotiable stance on the role. In response, the author diligently prepared for today's formal meeting, which involved all concerned parties, with the aim of persuading the decision-makers.

Leveraging the "Purpose Principle" as outlined by Blane (2017), the author passionately expressed not only his love, skills, and the value he brings to the project, but also articulated a clear purpose for occupying the Head of Coaching role. Through this strategic approach, the author successfully secured the Board's agreement, establishing him in the position.

Additionally, discussions took place regarding minor adjustments to the conceptual framework, which were deemed necessary to increase the likelihood of full support from other clubs. A meeting with all stakeholders was scheduled for Friday, 23rd February 2024, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the decision-making process in shaping the future of the Academy.

Wednesday, 14.02.2024

In the morning, the author was tasked with assisting the 4th line following yesterday's loss, focusing on rectifying errors made in the defensive zone. The objective was to reinforce key details overlooked during gameplay to ensure readiness for upcoming matches. Despite the setback, there was positive news as the Pioneers Vorarlberg secured a Pre-Playoff spot, marking a significant achievement for the season's initial goal. Coaches unanimously agreed to prioritize player development in the remaining three regular season games to prepare for the Pre-Playoff series.

The author conducted a detailed analysis of goals and scoring chances against, engaging the 4th line players in reviewing clips from previous games where they had executed better. This approach was intended to maintain morale and bolster confidence among the players.

The afternoon and evening were spent refining the conceptual framework for the Alliance of Vorarlberg Hockey Clubs to establish a joint academy. This effort presented challenges, as some of the author's initial ideas required adjustments. Recognizing the necessity for compromise, the author adapted his strategies to ensure the project's feasibility and success.

Thursday, 15.02.2024

The day began with the customary morning meeting. However, this time the author found himself without a designated task, which led to a sense of frustration after the previous day's events. Initially working on Junior Agendas, the author decided to push his boundaries. After a coffee break in the locker room and some conversations with players, it became clear that two young athletes were eager to work on refining their individual skills before team practice. Seizing the opportunity, the author planned and executed a brief session with the aspiring players, embracing the challenge.

Friday, 16.02.2024

Today marked a pivotal Game Day, with a home match against rivals from Innsbruck. Having failed to secure a victory against them so far this season, it seemed likely that Innsbruck would be the opponent in the upcoming Pre-Playoff Best of Three Series. Assigned the role of "Eye in the Sky," the author was tasked with identifying adjustments made by the opposition during the game and observing any overlooked aspects from the pre-scout. In an intense showdown, the team clinched a victory in overtime. The entire staff acknowledged the significance of this win as a major motivation boost heading into the postseason.

Week Analysis Week 3

In the third week of observation, the author focused on two primary development goals: asserting leadership to secure the Head of Coaching position for the proposed Vorarlberg Hockey Academy and refining technical coaching skills. Both objectives involved challenges that required the author to apply leadership strategies and enhance personal confidence, guided by Blane's (2017) *7 Principles of Transformational Leadership*, specifically the "Purpose Principle."

Asserting Leadership to Secure the Head of Coaching Role

The central challenge of the week revolved around the author's firm stance on the Head of Coaching role for the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy. A phone call from the Vorarlberg Hockey Association over the weekend suggested that another individual could assume the position, prompting the author to act assertively and secure the role.

Drawing on the Purpose Principle from Blane (2017), the author strategically articulated the value he brings to the project. This principle emphasizes that leaders must communicate a clear purpose to gain commitment from others, linking their personal vision to the larger organizational goals. By passionately presenting his skills and dedication, the author demonstrated not only his qualifications but also his deep commitment to the success of the academy. This approach aligns with Blane's (2017) suggestion that effective leaders inspire confidence in others by clearly defining why they are best suited for a role.

Application to Competence Development

The author's ability to secure the Board's agreement on his leadership position shows growth in asserting leadership presence. Overcoming challenges of self-doubt, the author successfully employed persuasive communication to position himself as a key player in the academy's future. This demonstrates improved self-confidence in navigating complex stakeholder dynamics, an essential skill in leadership. The decision to schedule a meeting with all stakeholders also reinforces the author's increasing competence in fostering collaboration.

Additionally, the author's willingness to adjust the conceptual framework for the academy indicates a recognition of the need for compromise and strategic flexibility—qualities that are crucial for long-term success in any leadership role. This aligns with Kotter's (2012) assertion that successful leaders adapt their strategies based on evolving circumstances and stakeholder needs.

Enhancing Technical Coaching and Development Skills

Another key focus of the week was the author's work with the Pioneers Vorarlberg, particularly in assisting the 4th line and helping players recover from defensive mistakes. By leveraging video analysis and reviewing clips from past games, the author took an individualized approach to coaching, which boosted player morale and confidence. The coaching methodology used reflects the importance of feedback-based learning in sports coaching, as supported by Côté and Gilbert (2009), who emphasize the value of individualized attention in improving player performance.

Application to Competence Development

The author's attention to detail in reviewing past performances and delivering tailored feedback demonstrates growing expertise in technical coaching. The ability to engage players in constructive analysis and support their development is indicative of the author's increasing comfort in managing player morale and mental readiness. Furthermore, prioritizing development over results in the final games of the regular season aligns with a long-term developmental mindset, which Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) identify as essential for fostering expertise in athletes.

On the personal development side, the author noted frustration when not initially assigned tasks during the team's morning meeting on Thursday. However, this moment of challenge was transformed into an opportunity for growth as the author took initiative by offering extra skills sessions to young athletes. This response highlights resilience and adaptability—key characteristics in both personal and professional development. By seeking out ways to add value despite the absence of formal responsibilities, the author demonstrated the self-motivation and proactivity that are central to continuous improvement as a coach and leader.

Leadership on Game Day

Friday's game against rivals from Innsbruck presented a high-pressure situation, with the author tasked as the "Eye in the Sky," responsible for identifying in-game adjustments and analyzing the opponent's strategy. This role further emphasized the author's ability to remain vigilant and adapt to the rapidly changing dynamics of a competitive environment.

Application to Competence Development

The game offered the author an opportunity to enhance situational awareness and develop critical thinking skills during high-stakes moments. Being able to recognize and communicate real-time adjustments is a key skill in high-level coaching and further underscores the author's growing confidence in leading tactical decisions. The overtime victory served as a tangible reinforcement of the team's success and the motivational boost provided by the entire coaching staff.

Conclusion: Leadership and Coaching Growth

Week 3 represented a pivotal moment in the author's professional development, particularly in terms of asserting leadership and refining coaching competencies. By successfully securing the Head of Coaching position through clear communication of purpose, the author demonstrated growing confidence and ability to navigate complex stakeholder interactions. At the same time, continuing technical development with the players—both in-game and during individual sessions—illustrates ongoing improvement in coaching techniques and player management.

The combination of leadership assertiveness, strategic flexibility, and proactive coaching positions the author as an increasingly capable leader within both the Vorarlberg hockey community and his team. Moving forward, building on this momentum by focusing on long-term player development and further refining communication strategies with stakeholders will be crucial.

Next Steps:

In the upcoming weeks, the author should continue refining persuasive communication techniques, especially as the upcoming meeting with stakeholders will require a united vision for the academy. Additionally, applying the confidence gained from coaching younger athletes to working with professional players could enhance performance across all levels of coaching responsibility.

3.4 Observation week 04

The week leading up to the significant meeting with stakeholders from all hockey clubs in Vorarlberg, scheduled for Friday, 23rd of March, was pivotal for the author. The primary goal for this week was to cultivate awareness, disseminate knowledge, and influence the attitudes of stakeholders towards the establishment of an alliance aimed at implementing an optimal system for the development of young players. To accomplish this, the author followed the guidelines outlined for

building a public relations campaign as detailed in *Sport Public Relations: Managing Organizational Communication* by Stoldt, G.C., Dittmore, S.W., and Branvold, S. (2006).

The strategic approach encompassed several key stages:

- **Research** – what is the nature of the problem or opportunity? What is the nature of the public related to the problem or opportunity?
- **Planning** – Goals and Objective of the campaign, and strategies used to achieve them.
- **Execution** – the event itself, aimed at engaging stakeholders and fostering dialogue.
- **Evaluating** – Evaluation of impact

By adhering to these structured steps, the author aimed to orchestrate a comprehensive and impactful campaign that would pave the way for constructive discussions and collaborative efforts among stakeholders, ultimately advancing the collective goal of enhancing youth development in Vorarlberg's hockey community.

Monday, 19.02.2024

With no scheduled practice for the Pro Team on this day, the author redirected focus towards meticulous preparation for the upcoming meeting. In a strategic blend of Simon Sinek's theory from *Start with Why* (Sinek, 2009) and the chosen approach for the campaign, the author delved into research. Leveraging data provided by the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation, which included rosters for the U18 and U16 National Teams dating back to 2013, the author embarked on a comprehensive analysis. The primary objective was to discern the representation of Vorarlberg players within these teams over time, track developmental trends, and ascertain the pathways undertaken by these players to reach national level. Such insights hold significant potential in reshaping perceptions among stakeholders, fostering an open-minded environment conducive to the exchange of ideas, and ultimately, achieving desired outcomes for youth development in hockey.

Thursday, 22.02.2024

Following the conclusion of the last regular season game yesterday, the Pro Team enjoyed a well-deserved day off. The author dedicated the initial hours of the morning to crafting the presentation for the crucial meeting scheduled for tomorrow. Deliberating on the planning phase, the author

strategically focused on the most effective approach to convey the message of provincial collaboration. Drawing upon the data gleaned from extensive research, the author aimed to elucidate the imperative behind such an alliance—emphasizing the "why" behind its necessity (Sinek, 2009).

In alignment with the persuasion principle outlined by Blane (2017), the author recognized the paramount importance of motivating stakeholders to perceive the Provincial Team as a boon rather than a threat to their respective organizations. The objective was to underscore the academy teams as not only the premier platform for nurturing talented players but also as a conduit for facilitating the return of promising young athletes to men's teams at all levels across the province. This holistic approach aimed to elevate the standard of hockey throughout Vorarlberg.

Friday, 23.03.2024

Today marked the highly anticipated meeting. Commencing the proceedings, the President of the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association provided an overview of the current state of affairs, highlighting the substantial room for improvement, particularly in comparison to other sports in the province. Subsequently, the author assumed control of the meeting, delivering a message guided by the predetermined objectives of the campaign, following Stoldt, Dittmore, and Branvold (2006) in structuring a comprehensive public relations campaign.

Despite feeling thoroughly prepared and confident in articulating the imperative for the project, the atmosphere in the room was notably subdued. Regrettably, the desired open environment conducive to idea exchange failed to materialize. Compounding the challenge, one of the most influential stakeholders among Vorarlberg's hockey teams was absent.

While there was no outright opposition to the idea, the prevailing sentiment seemed rooted in apprehension, with attendees more inclined to scrutinize potential pitfalls rather than explore avenues for realization. However, a consensus emerged to solicit feedback from each club regarding potential enhancements to the conceptual framework by the end of the following week.

Week Analysis Week 4

The fourth week of observation was centered around preparing for and executing a crucial meeting with stakeholders from all hockey clubs in Vorarlberg. The overarching goal was to cultivate awareness, build knowledge, and influence the attitudes of these stakeholders toward establishing an alliance that would create the optimal system for developing young hockey players in the region. To achieve this, the author utilized Stoldt, Dittmore, and Branvold's (2006) framework for building a

public relations campaign, alongside key principles from Transformational Leadership and Sinek's (2009) *Golden Circle*.

Application of Public Relations Theory

In structuring the campaign, the author adhered to the four key stages outlined in Stoldt et al. (2006): research, planning, execution, and evaluation. This systematic approach helped ensure that the campaign was well-prepared and that every stage—from understanding the stakeholder needs to measuring the impact of the meeting—was accounted for.

Research involved collecting and analyzing data provided by the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation. The author used this data to track the representation of Vorarlberg players on national teams, an essential element in addressing concerns and shaping perceptions among stakeholders. This stage was crucial in identifying both the problem and the potential opportunity, aligning well with Stoldt et al.'s first step of understanding the nature of the problem or opportunity.

Planning required the author to craft a clear message that would resonate with stakeholders. Here, the integration of Sinek's (2009) *Start with Why* theory was critical. By focusing on the "Why"—the underlying purpose behind the proposed alliance—the author aimed to frame the hockey academy as a necessary and beneficial step for all stakeholders involved. According to Sinek (2009), communicating the purpose first helps to foster a stronger emotional connection, which is essential when trying to inspire others to take action.

Execution took place during the meeting itself, where the author delivered a presentation designed to engage stakeholders in dialogue and promote collaboration. As Stoldt et al. (2006) emphasize, this stage is about engaging the public, in this case, the stakeholders, to create an open environment for exchange. However, despite careful planning and a compelling presentation, the atmosphere in the room was subdued. The author's presentation was well-received, but the openness for discussion and collaboration was limited. This outcome highlights the challenge of fully engaging stakeholders in environments where historical rivalries or concerns about losing autonomy may still exist.

Finally, evaluation was initiated when the author and the President of the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Association reflected on the meeting's outcomes. While the stakeholders did not outright reject the idea, there was a clear reluctance to immediately explore its realization. A follow-up evaluation involving feedback from each club was planned, which aligns with Stoldt et al.'s emphasis on understanding the campaign's impact and using it to adjust future strategies.

Application of Transformational Leadership

Throughout the preparation and execution of the campaign, the author drew heavily on Transformational Leadership principles, particularly in motivating stakeholders to perceive the alliance as a positive step for the region's hockey development. Blane (2017) emphasizes the importance of purpose and vision in transformational leadership, and the author applied this by focusing on the broader benefits of the hockey academy, rather than solely on its immediate challenges.

The author's role in positioning the academy as a solution aligned with the transformational leadership goal of fostering change through collaboration and shared vision. However, the subdued response from the stakeholders demonstrated the complexities of influencing cultural change in a historically competitive environment. This reflects Kotter's (2012) argument that transformational change often encounters resistance, particularly when stakeholders are not fully prepared to embrace a new direction.

Stakeholder Persuasion and the Golden Circle

The use of Sinek's (2009) *Golden Circle* was another key component of the author's strategy. By focusing on "Why" the academy was necessary, the author aimed to create an emotional and motivational appeal that would resonate with stakeholders. However, the challenge of changing ingrained attitudes was apparent, as some stakeholders remained more focused on potential risks than the shared benefits.

The author's approach demonstrates the importance of aligning individual stakeholder goals with the collective vision. As Yukl (2013) notes, leaders must tailor their persuasive strategies to the specific concerns and motivations of their audience. While the data-driven presentation provided a strong foundation, it is clear that more work needs to be done to address lingering doubts and build stronger emotional connections with stakeholders.

Technical Coaching and Player Development

In addition to stakeholder management, the author also focused on maintaining optimal game readiness for reserve players. The decision to incorporate game-like drills and blend conditioning with skill work was well-received by the players, highlighting the author's growing confidence in designing engaging training sessions. This approach aligns with Côté and Gilbert (2009), who emphasize the importance of adapting training methods to maintain player motivation and foster continuous development.

The reserve players' positive feedback, coupled with the coach's endorsement, reflects the author's growing competence in adapting coaching methods to suit the specific needs of the players. The dynamic nature of the drills also reflects Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer's (1993) theory of deliberate practice, which emphasizes the need for structured, goal-oriented practice to improve performance over time.

Conclusion: Leadership and Strategic Communication Growth

Week 4 represented a significant learning experience for the author, particularly in terms of stakeholder management and strategic communication. While the meeting did not immediately achieve the desired outcome of open collaboration, it provided valuable insights into the challenges of influencing long-standing cultural dynamics within the hockey community. The author's ability to integrate Sinek's Golden Circle and Transformational Leadership principles into the presentation showed an improved understanding of how to inspire and persuade stakeholders, though further refinement of these strategies will be necessary to overcome resistance.

On the coaching side, the author continued to demonstrate growth in technical coaching skills, designing effective and engaging drills that addressed both conditioning and skill development. The positive response from players and coaches further reinforced the author's confidence in their ability to lead player development.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the author should focus on refining stakeholder engagement strategies, particularly by addressing the specific concerns and motivations of each stakeholder. Additionally, continued work on maintaining player development through innovative training methods will be crucial as the postseason approaches.

3.5 Observation Week 05

The Vorarlberg Alliance for Ice Hockey Development campaign temporarily halted this week as the initiator opted to pause and await feedback from other clubs. Coincidentally, this break aligned perfectly with the team's initiation into the Pre-Playoffs, commencing with a triumphant win on Sunday. With the season set to continue throughout the week, the workload intensified, primarily consisting of video analysis and cutting. The primary focus during this period was directed towards aiding the team in securing victories. The author's objective was to meticulously scrutinize the opponent's

gameplay, identifying nuanced details that could potentially tip the scales in our favor over the course of the series.

Monday, 26.02.2024

Following yesterday's triumphant victory in the first Pre-Playoff Game, clinching a 6:3 win and delighting fans with an unexpected performance, today's focus shifted to game analysis and strategic planning. The task at hand encompassed a meticulous review of our performance, identifying areas for improvement, and anticipating potential adjustments from our opponents to ensure readiness for immediate response.

Specifically tasked with scrutinizing the opponent's power play, the author delved into past clips of their power play maneuvers, aiming to anticipate and counter any strategies they might employ. Drawing on accumulated experience throughout the season, the author approached this task with a sense of confidence, having honed these analytical skills through consistent practice and engagement. As Reid et al. (2004) note, video analysis is a powerful tool for improving decision-making and tactical understanding in sports.

Tuesday, 27.02.2024

The author's objective for the day was to anticipate and counter any tactical adjustments the opponent might employ, ensuring our team's readiness to respond effectively. During the morning meeting, the coaching staff meticulously reviewed all available data, fine-tuned the game plan, and discussed potential adjustments anticipated from the opposing team.

Following the pregame skate, a brief video session was conducted to reinforce key points. Select clips showcasing successful strategies from Game 1 were highlighted to boost confidence among the players. Additionally, two clips illustrating areas for defensive improvement were shown, aimed at ensuring the team felt well-prepared and poised for Game 2. To prevent overwhelming the players, the coaching staff strategically retained most of the information, focusing on delivering targeted insights for optimal performance.

Wednesday, 28.02.2024

Following the victory in Game 2, Wednesday was initially planned as a well-deserved day off for the team. However, unexpected developments arose as news circulated from other clubs. Rumors, initiated by a junior coach from the Lustenau Ice Hockey Club, falsely suggested that Feldkirch aimed to undermine their junior program with a competing initiative. Not only was this claim untrue, but it also swayed some stakeholders in the region to adopt a negative stance toward our project.

In response, the President of the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Federation and the author convened an urgent meeting to address these misconceptions and provide clarity. Every club president was invited to participate, ensuring that all parties had the opportunity to engage and contribute positively. Handling such misunderstandings aligns with Kotter's (2012) framework on managing change and addressing resistance. Open communication is critical in situations like this to prevent misinformation from escalating and ensure stakeholder alignment. The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 12th of March, marking a pivotal moment for the realization of the alliance among all clubs in the province. The author recognizes the significance of this gathering as the final opportunity to unite the clubs and advance the shared vision for ice hockey development in Vorarlberg.

Weekly Analysis Week 5

In Week 5, the primary focus shifted from stakeholder engagement to tactical and technical preparation for the Pre-Playoffs. The Vorarlberg Alliance for Ice Hockey Development campaign was temporarily put on hold as the author awaited feedback from other clubs. The break allowed the author to devote full attention to the team's Pre-Playoff series, which provided opportunities to refine skills in video analysis, strategic planning, and opponent preparation. Additionally, an unexpected challenge arose midweek in the form of misinformation spreading among local hockey clubs, which required immediate intervention and aligned with principles from Kotter's (2012) change management framework.

Application of Video Analysis in Tactical Preparation

Throughout the week, the author was tasked with detailed video analysis of the opponents' gameplay, focusing on anticipating and countering tactical adjustments. This aspect of the role closely ties to the application of Reid et al. (2004), who underscore the effectiveness of video analysis in enhancing decision-making and tactical awareness. By scrutinizing past clips, particularly the opponent's power play strategies, the author was able to predict possible moves and prepare the team to respond proactively.

This work reflects an important professional development milestone, as the author has gained confidence in using video analysis to support strategic planning. The ability to interpret data and anticipate an opponent's next move is crucial for high-level coaching, as it ensures that teams remain adaptable and prepared for various scenarios. As noted by Côté and Gilbert (2009), effective coaching in sports involves integrating knowledge with decision-making processes, which was evident in the author's growing competence in this area.

Communication and Team Preparation

The coaching team's decision to withhold excess information from players during the pregame meeting demonstrated a refined understanding of how to balance communication and cognitive load. In the lead-up to Game 2, the author participated in a brief video session that highlighted key takeaways from Game 1 while ensuring that only targeted information was provided. This reflects an understanding of cognitive overload theory (Sweller, 1988), which suggests that too much information can hinder rather than help performance.

By focusing on reinforcing successful plays and highlighting two areas for defensive improvement, the coaching team made sure the players were not overwhelmed, but rather, remained confident and prepared. This strategic communication demonstrates the author's evolving ability to manage complex information and distill it into actionable insights for players.

Crisis Management and Stakeholder Engagement

Midweek, the author faced an unexpected challenge as rumors spread among local hockey clubs that Feldkirch aimed to undermine the Lustenau junior program. This development required immediate crisis management and a strong emphasis on clear communication. According to Kotter's (2012) framework on managing change and resistance, addressing misinformation swiftly is key to ensuring stakeholder alignment and preventing opposition from escalating.

In response to this challenge, the author, in collaboration with the President of the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Federation, convened an urgent meeting with all club presidents to clarify the situation and dispel any misunderstandings. The author's ability to quickly adapt and organize this meeting reflects both leadership and crisis management skills. Open communication, transparency, and direct engagement with stakeholders were critical to managing this situation, as it presented a potential risk to the future success of the Vorarlberg Hockey Alliance.

Reflection and Personal Growth

Week 5 presented a dual focus on technical development and stakeholder management, highlighting the author's growing competence in both areas. The work on video analysis and tactical preparation demonstrated a strong ability to interpret complex game data and translate it into strategic advantages for the team. At the same time, handling the misinformation crisis showcased the author's increasing confidence in navigating difficult conversations and reinforcing collaboration among stakeholders.

This week also highlighted the importance of maintaining balance between technical coaching tasks and broader strategic goals. While the primary focus was on ensuring the team's success in the Pre-Playoffs, the ability to quickly shift back to the broader stakeholder agenda when needed reinforced the author's adaptability and leadership.

Conclusion: A Week of Tactical and Leadership Growth

Week 5 was pivotal in terms of both tactical preparation and leadership development. The author successfully applied Reid et al. (2004)'s principles of video analysis to support the team's strategic adjustments, contributing to the team's success in the Pre-Playoff series. Additionally, the ability to manage a stakeholder crisis midweek, utilizing Kotter's (2012) change management strategies, highlighted the author's capacity to handle complex and high-pressure situations.

Looking forward, the author should continue refining the balance between tactical preparation and leadership responsibilities. Ensuring that the lessons learned from video analysis and game preparation are consistently applied will help solidify the author's role within the coaching team, while maintaining open communication with stakeholders remains crucial to the long-term success of the Vorarlberg Hockey Alliance.

3.6 Observation Week 06

Week 6 marked a significant shift for the author, both personally and professionally. After becoming a father for the first time on Friday, the author returned to work on Monday. This week brought a mix of important moments on the ice, tactical preparation for the ongoing playoff series, and balancing new responsibilities at home. The challenge of juggling work and family life became a central theme, alongside the ongoing efforts to refine the message of the Vorarlberg Hockey Development Project for an upcoming stakeholder meeting.

Monday, 04.03.2024

Returning to the office after the birth of his first child, the author quickly shifted focus to playoff preparations. The Pro Team had pulled off an unexpected victory in Game 1 of the Quarterfinals against Klagenfurter AC, the first-seeded team of the regular season. The win boosted team morale, but it was clear that adjustments were needed to stay competitive in the series. The primary task for the day was a detailed analysis of Game 1, with a focus on identifying areas where the team could improve and exploit weaknesses in the opponent's game.

The author immersed himself in video analysis, seeking potential adjustments in gameplay that could give the team an edge in the upcoming game. On the ice, it was a light skate session with a focus on tactical drills. The author dedicated time to working individually with players, particularly centers, refining their faceoff skills to ensure they stayed sharp during this critical phase of the season. As Reid et al. (2004) emphasize, deliberate practice and focused skill work are essential in maintaining high performance under pressure, which was the author's primary objective for these sessions.

Tuesday, 05.03.2024

Game 2 of the best-of-seven series took place today. In the morning, all preparations had been completed, and the team went through their established routines. At this stage of the season, consistency in routine is critical for maintaining focus and mental sharpness. The author was fully prepared for the game, but new personal challenges arose.

Balancing the demands of coaching with the responsibilities of being a new father became a central focus of the day. Managing energy levels, staying focused at work, and ensuring all tasks were completed while finding time to support his family were significant new challenges for the author. Ericsson et al. (1993) suggest that maintaining high performance in professional settings requires consistent mental focus and energy, but the author had to find ways to manage these demands in light of his new personal responsibilities.

Thursday, 07.03.2024

With the Pro Team already on the road to Klagenfurt for Game 3, following a narrow 0:1 loss in Game 2, the author stayed behind to focus on preparations for the upcoming meeting with stakeholders in Vorarlberg's hockey community. This meeting was critical for the future of the Vorarlberg Hockey Development Project. The author dedicated the day to refining the presentation and ensuring that the message would resonate with all parties involved.

The main focus of the meeting preparation was to address concerns from existing junior organizations. There had been misconceptions circulating about the project being an attack on these organizations, and the author aimed to clarify the true nature of the project as an addition to the existing development pathway in Vorarlberg, not a replacement. Kotter's (2012) principles on managing change and addressing resistance were particularly relevant here, as it was crucial to reassure stakeholders that the project aimed to enhance development opportunities for young players without threatening the roles of existing clubs.

Weekly Analysis Week 6

Week 6 was a particularly unique and challenging period for the author, combining significant personal developments with high-stakes professional responsibilities. Balancing new fatherhood with the rigors of playoff preparation for the Pro Team added a new layer of complexity to the author's role. In addition, the week also saw further work on the Vorarlberg Hockey Development Project, as the author focused on clarifying the project's goals ahead of a critical stakeholder meeting.

Balancing Work and Personal Life

One of the most significant challenges this week was the author's return to work after becoming a father for the first time. The ability to balance personal and professional life is critical in high-pressure environments such as professional sports coaching, and this was a central theme for the week. According to Ericsson et al. (1993), maintaining high performance in professional settings requires not only skill but also the ability to manage mental and physical energy effectively. The birth of the author's child added an extra layer of responsibility, requiring a delicate balance between maintaining high performance at work and attending to new family duties.

This challenge highlights the broader theme of personal development in leadership roles, where the demands of the job often extend beyond the workplace. The author faced the need to manage

time and energy efficiently, ensuring that his focus on team performance didn't detract from his ability to support his family during this important time.

Tactical Preparation and Use of Video Analysis

Professionally, the week was defined by the team's progress in the Quarterfinals of the Playoffs. The author's tactical role focused heavily on the use of video analysis, which has become a crucial tool for improving team performance. This aligns with Reid et al. (2004), who highlight the effectiveness of video analysis in sports for refining tactics and decision-making processes. In reviewing footage from Game 1, the author identified key adjustments that could give the team a strategic advantage over Klagenfurter AC, the top-seeded team of the regular season.

The author also continued to focus on working with individual players, particularly centers, to refine their faceoff skills. This kind of focused, one-on-one skill development is vital in high-pressure playoff situations, where small margins can make a significant difference. The author's confidence in using these techniques reflects a growing mastery of deliberate practice, a key component of skill acquisition noted by Ericsson et al. (1993).

Stakeholder Management and the Vorarlberg Hockey Development Project

In addition to his coaching duties, the author also made progress on the Vorarlberg Hockey Development Project. With the Pro Team away for Game 3, the author was able to dedicate time to preparing for the upcoming stakeholder meeting. A key focus for this preparation was addressing and dispelling misconceptions that had arisen among some junior clubs in the region. These clubs had expressed concerns that the project might undermine their existing programs.

To address this, the author drew on Kotter's (2012) framework for managing change, which emphasizes the importance of communication and transparency in overcoming resistance to new initiatives. The author aimed to reassure stakeholders that the project was not intended as an attack on existing junior organizations but rather as a complementary addition to the region's development pathway. This approach reflects an understanding of the complexities involved in managing stakeholder relationships and the need to align everyone's interests toward a shared goal.

Conclusion: Growth in Leadership and Strategic Communication

Week 6 presented a multifaceted challenge for the author, combining the demands of personal life, professional coaching, and project management. On a personal level, the author's ability to balance new responsibilities at home with the demands of playoff preparation reflects growth in time management and personal resilience. Professionally, the continued use of video analysis and individual skill development showcased the author's growing confidence in these areas, reinforcing the importance of deliberate practice and focused skill refinement in achieving success during the Playoffs.

From a leadership perspective, the author demonstrated a clear understanding of how to manage stakeholder concerns effectively, preparing for the upcoming meeting with a focus on clarity and reassurance. By addressing concerns head-on and providing transparency about the project's goals, the author is demonstrating the principles of Transformational Leadership (Blane, 2017) and effective stakeholder communication.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, the author should continue refining the balance between personal and professional responsibilities, ensuring that both aspects are managed effectively. Further progress on the Vorarlberg Hockey Development Project will require ongoing communication with stakeholders to address any remaining concerns and build consensus around the project's goals. On the coaching side, the focus will remain on tactical preparation and player development as the team advances through the Playoffs.

3.7 Observation Week 07

Week 7 brought both professional highs and personal challenges for the author, as the Pro Team's playoff journey continued, and the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project reached a pivotal point. While the team managed to extend their playoff series, ultimately the season ended with a loss. On the project side, the author faced resistance from stakeholders, highlighting the difficulties of leading cultural change in the region. The week concluded with the author falling ill, a consequence of the physical and emotional toll from balancing these significant professional challenges.

Monday, 11.03.2024

With the Pro Team trailing 1:3 in the Quarterfinal series, the author did not travel to Klagenfurt for Game 5. Instead, he focused on finalizing the presentation for the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project. This marked the culmination of weeks of work aimed at persuading stakeholders across the region to unite in a shared vision for youth development in ice hockey.

After completing the preparations, the author watched his team secure an unexpected 6:1 victory against Klagenfurt, forcing a Game 6 back home. This was a historic moment for the young club, and the energy in the author's home city was palpable, with a sold-out arena reflecting the growing support for the team. It was a proud moment for the author, witnessing the team's resilience and the local community's engagement with the sport. Such moments reinforce the power of transformational leadership in fostering unity and inspiring achievement in high-pressure situations, as outlined by Blane (2017).

Tuesday, 12.03.2024

The author entered the day with a singular focus: ensuring the success of the upcoming meeting for the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project. He reviewed the presentation once more, carefully considering how to convey the message most effectively. By evening, the meeting took place, and while the presentation was well-received, the outcome was far from ideal. Although all stakeholders agreed on the necessity of collaborative efforts to improve the region's development pathway, the majority of clubs declined participation, citing poor timing as their reason for opting out.

One stakeholder even shared a long-term vision of building a new ice hockey arena in Vorarlberg and suggested postponing any cooperative efforts until the arena was completed—a process that could take up to 10 years. For the author, this was unacceptable. The urgency of the project was clear to him, but only three of the seven clubs in the region agreed to join the initiative. This disappointing outcome underscored the challenges inherent in cultural change, where even with well-crafted messages, resistance to change can persist. The resistance encountered aligns with Kotter's (2012) framework, which emphasizes that timing and stakeholder readiness are critical factors in driving successful change initiatives.

Wednesday, 13.03.2024

Game 6 at home represented another crucial moment for the Pro Team. Despite being disappointed by the previous night's meeting, the author shifted focus back to game preparation, eager to help the team force a decisive Game 7. However, despite the team's efforts, the game ended in a 1:5 loss, bringing the season to an end. The result was difficult to process, especially given the team's overachievement throughout the season and their ability to sell out the arena for the first time in two decades.

The loss was a stark reminder of the emotional highs and lows inherent in professional sports. While the team's playoff journey had exceeded expectations, the abrupt end of the season left players and coaches alike struggling to come to terms with the finality of it. The author reflected on this difficult transition, noting that, despite the disappointment, the season had shown the value of perseverance and the potential for future success. This resilience aligns with Ericsson et al. (1993), who emphasize that deliberate practice, even in moments of setback, builds long-term expertise and fosters growth.

Friday, 15.03.2024

By the end of the week, the stress of the past few weeks took a toll on the author's health. Falling ill, the author was forced to stay home and rest for almost 10 days. The combined pressure of managing the team's playoff run, working on the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project, and balancing personal responsibilities had clearly caught up with him. This period of illness reflects the physical and emotional cost of high-level leadership roles, where intense periods of work often lead to burnout without careful self-management, as noted by Northouse (2019).

Weekly Analysis Week 7

Week 7 was marked by significant highs and lows, both professionally and personally. The Pro Team managed to extend their playoff series, but ultimately the season came to an abrupt end. Simultaneously, the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project hit a critical juncture, with disappointing resistance from stakeholders despite the author's well-prepared presentation. The pressures of balancing these significant professional challenges, along with personal responsibilities, culminated in the author falling ill by the end of the week. This week highlights themes of resilience, strategic communication, and the difficulty of driving cultural change, all while managing the demands of leadership in high-stakes environments.

Leadership and Resilience in Playoff Preparation

The playoff series against Klagenfurter AC presented the author with both thrilling moments and profound disappointment. Securing an unexpected win in Game 5 on Monday revitalized the team and kept the playoff dream alive, demonstrating the power of resilience and collective belief. The author's role in preparing for Game 6, despite the setback in the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy meeting, showcased the importance of focusing on immediate goals, even in the face of broader challenges.

In professional sports, the ability to stay focused and maintain emotional composure is critical. According to Ericsson et al. (1993), resilience in high-performance settings is developed through deliberate practice and consistent effort, even after setbacks. The team's performance in Game 5 was a prime example of this, as they managed to push through adversity and extend the series against a top-seeded opponent. However, the eventual loss in Game 6 highlighted the emotional toll of such efforts. Despite exceeding expectations for the season, the abrupt end to the playoff journey was difficult for both players and coaches to process. This reflects the inevitable ups and downs of competitive sports and reinforces the need for emotional resilience among leaders in such environments.

Cultural Change and Resistance in Stakeholder Management

The author's presentation of the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project on Tuesday evening represented the culmination of weeks of careful planning and strategic communication. While the presentation was well-received and stakeholders agreed on the need for collaborative efforts, resistance remained. Most clubs declined to join the initiative, citing poor timing and other concerns, including one stakeholder's vision of a new ice hockey arena in Vorarlberg that could take up to 10 years to materialize.

This resistance is a classic example of the challenges of driving cultural change, particularly in environments with long-standing independent structures. Kotter's (2012) model for leading change highlights the importance of timing and readiness among stakeholders, which can significantly affect the success of initiatives. In this case, while the author effectively communicated the project's goals and secured some support, the overall hesitation reflects the difficulty of aligning multiple interests, especially in a region with a history of rivalry and differing priorities.

Professional and Personal Strain

The pressures of this week were exacerbated by the author's personal challenges. Balancing the demands of the playoff series, stakeholder management, and new family responsibilities placed significant stress on the author. By Friday, the culmination of these pressures resulted in illness, forcing the author to take time away from work. This highlights the importance of self-care and stress management in leadership roles.

According to Northouse (2019), effective leadership not only requires technical skills and decision-making abilities but also the capacity to manage personal energy and well-being. High-stakes environments often lead to burnout if leaders do not adequately manage stress, and this week demonstrated how the accumulated pressures of professional and personal responsibilities can take a physical toll.

Conclusion: Lessons in Leadership and Managing Change

Week 7 underscored several important lessons in leadership, communication, and resilience. On the one hand, the author's ability to remain focused and guide the team through critical playoff games highlighted his capacity to perform under pressure. The use of strategic communication in preparing for and delivering the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy presentation demonstrated the author's growing competence in managing complex stakeholder relationships, even in the face of resistance.

However, the resistance from stakeholders also revealed the challenges of cultural change and the importance of understanding the broader landscape when advocating for new initiatives. Timing, readiness, and stakeholder alignment are key factors that must be carefully managed to drive successful change, as emphasized by Kotter (2012). Finally, the personal strain experienced by the author during this week serves as a reminder of the importance of managing stress and balancing personal and professional life, particularly in leadership positions.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the author should continue to refine his leadership approach, particularly in managing resistance to change and ensuring that all stakeholders feel aligned with the project's goals. On the personal side, it will be important for the author to prioritize self-care and recovery to ensure sustained performance in the weeks ahead. As the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project

progresses, ongoing communication and relationship-building will be key to overcoming the resistance encountered in this week's meeting.

3.8 Observation Week 08

After a prolonged illness, Week 8 marked the author's return to work with renewed energy and focus. With the Pro Team's season concluded, the author's attention shifted entirely to advancing the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project. Despite not having full participation from all regional clubs, the author and the engaged stakeholders aimed to start the academy for the upcoming season. This week was pivotal, with strategic discussions taking place and positive developments from the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation moving the project forward.

Monday, 25.03.2024

The week began with an online meeting involving the clubs that had agreed to participate in the academy project, along with the Vorarlberg Ice Hockey Federation. The primary focus was to discuss strategy and next steps in light of the challenges posed by the absence of full club participation. Encouragingly, the President of the Federation shared good news: since the men's team of Lustenau had been relegated to the third league, it was no longer classified as a professional organization. As a result, the project could now move forward with the remaining two top-league teams on board, which satisfied the government's criteria for permission and funding.

However, a key challenge remained: the participating clubs did not have enough players in the right age groups to field either a U15 or U17 team. The only viable option was a U16 team, but even that faced limitations. The author, showing leadership and strategic thinking, proposed one final attempt to overcome this issue. He suggested leveraging his connections with the Austrian Federation to secure a special permit, allowing the team to field more overage players than typically permitted. This move could provide the flexibility needed to ensure the project could start with a competitive team in place.

Wednesday, 27.03.2024

A phone call with the Austrian Junior League Commissioner was the centerpiece of today's agenda. The goal was to convince the commissioner that the Vorarlberg team needed the Federation's support to launch the academy. The author presented several key points during the call. First, the U15 league needed an additional team to reach an ideal total of 12 teams for league operations. Second, the author highlighted Vorarlberg's historical contribution to national teams and

emphasized how this project could help revitalize talent development in the region. Finally, the author offered a compromise: the Vorarlberg team would play only the regular season, thereby not taking a playoff spot from another club.

The commissioner seemed receptive to these arguments, recognizing the potential benefits for the league and Austrian ice hockey overall. He promised to discuss the matter with his colleagues and provide a decision by the end of the week. The author's ability to present a compelling case while maintaining flexibility demonstrates his growing confidence in stakeholder management and strategic negotiation, key components of effective leadership as highlighted by Kotter (2012).

Friday, 29.03.2024

Initially planned as a day off, Friday quickly turned into a crucial moment for the project when the league commissioner called at 09:00 am with positive news. The Austrian Federation had agreed to grant the Vorarlberg team permission to participate in the U15 championship with six overage players, rather than the standard three. However, the team would not be allowed to participate in the playoffs. This decision was seen as a major step forward, allowing the project to launch with enough players to field a competitive team.

The author swiftly organized an online meeting with all involved parties to share the good news and discuss next steps. During the meeting, discussions centered on building a social media presence for the team, enhancing the project's infrastructure, and planning for an open tryout in July. The author and the other stakeholders agreed that the first year of the project would be critical, not only for developing the players but also for establishing the academy as a sustainable and valuable initiative for the region. Building partnerships with schools to better integrate education and sports for young athletes was identified as the top priority, reflecting the project's long-term vision of creating an environment that supports both academic and athletic development for young players in Vorarlberg.

Weekly Analysis Week 8

Week 8 marked a significant turning point for the author as he returned to work after illness with renewed energy and focus. This week was crucial for the advancement of the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project, with a mixture of challenges and breakthroughs that pushed the initiative closer to realization. Without the distractions of the Pro Team's season, the author was able to fully commit to moving the academy project forward. The central themes of this week revolved around strategic leadership, stakeholder management, and resilience in driving long-term cultural change.

Leadership and Strategic Negotiation

A key development this week was the author's successful negotiation with the Austrian Ice Hockey Federation regarding the composition of the proposed U15 team. Faced with a shortage of players in key age groups and the reluctance of several clubs to participate in the academy project, the author needed to find a creative solution to ensure the project could move forward.

By securing an agreement from the federation to allow six overage players in the U15 team, the author demonstrated both strategic thinking and effective negotiation skills. This flexibility provided a viable path forward for the academy, even though the team would not participate in the playoffs. The author's ability to negotiate this outcome aligns with Kotter's (2012) framework on leading change, which emphasizes the importance of finding win-win solutions that address stakeholder concerns while advancing key objectives.

Furthermore, the author's approach reflected the principles of Transformational Leadership, where leaders inspire change by presenting a clear vision and adapting to the needs of the situation. In this case, the author's willingness to compromise on playoff participation while still securing the academy's launch demonstrated adaptability and a commitment to the long-term success of the project.

Stakeholder Management and Communication

This week also underscored the complexities of stakeholder management, a recurring challenge throughout the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project. Although the author had previously faced resistance from some clubs, the positive developments this week indicated progress in building relationships and aligning interests.

The online meeting with participating clubs and the Vorarlberg Federation on Monday illustrated the importance of clear communication and strategic alignment. By keeping stakeholders informed and engaged, the author ensured that all parties remained committed to the project's goals, even as challenges emerged. The author's use of data and strategic messaging helped emphasize the necessity of moving forward with the project, even without full participation from all clubs.

The challenge of managing stakeholder resistance, particularly from clubs that were hesitant or unwilling to join the project, reflects the broader difficulty of driving cultural change in long-standing systems. As noted by Kotter (2012), resistance to change is often driven by fear of the unknown or concern over potential losses. By focusing on the long-term benefits of the academy and aligning

the project with the federation's broader goals, the author was able to overcome some of these obstacles and secure important buy-in from key players.

Building the Foundation for Long-Term Success

The discussions around building a social media presence, enhancing infrastructure, and planning an open tryout for July demonstrated the author's understanding of the importance of building a strong foundation for the academy. The first year of the project is critical not only for the development of the players but also for proving the academy's value to the wider hockey community in Vorarlberg.

This forward-thinking approach aligns with Kotter's (2012) emphasis on the importance of generating short-term wins to build momentum for larger, long-term goals. By focusing on tangible, achievable outcomes in the first year—such as developing the players and building relationships with local schools—the author is laying the groundwork for the academy's future success.

Furthermore, the focus on integrating education and sport reflects a holistic approach to player development, recognizing that successful athletes must also succeed academically. This commitment to creating a supportive environment for young athletes echoes Northouse's (2019) perspective on leadership, which emphasizes the importance of supporting followers' growth and development in multiple areas.

Conclusion: Strategic Leadership and Persistence

Week 8 highlighted the author's strategic leadership in navigating the challenges associated with launching the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy. The ability to negotiate key concessions from the Austrian Federation, maintain stakeholder engagement, and focus on building a strong foundation for the future reflects the author's growing competence in managing complex, multi-faceted projects.

This week also demonstrated the importance of persistence in the face of obstacles. While the academy is not launching with full club participation, the author's focus on making progress with the resources available shows an understanding of the need to keep moving forward, even if not all challenges are resolved at once. By continuing to build relationships, communicate effectively, and adapt to changing circumstances, the author is positioning the academy for long-term success.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, the author should continue focusing on building momentum for the academy by executing the next steps agreed upon during the week, including establishing a social media presence and organizing the open tryout in July. Additionally, ongoing communication with the federation and participating clubs will be essential to ensure that the project stays on track and gains broader support over time.

4 Discussion

Comparison to Initial Situation

At the outset of this thesis, the author faced a dual challenge: managing his professional responsibilities as a coach for the Vorarlberg Pioneers and leading a project to establish a regional ice hockey academy. The author initially identified two key areas for growth: implementing transformational leadership strategies, particularly in influencing and uniting historically rival clubs, and honing technical coaching skills to maximize player development on both professional and youth levels.

Over the course of the observation period, the author's development in these areas has been substantial. In particular, the author's ability to effectively communicate the vision for the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy evolved significantly. Early challenges, such as resistance from key stakeholders and clubs, highlighted the difficulties in driving cultural change. However, through persistence, strategic communication, and the application of leadership principles (Blane, 2017), the author managed to build critical support and gain the necessary approvals to start the academy.

In comparison to the initial situation, where the author expressed concerns about his ability to persuade stakeholders, the ultimate success of the project despite setbacks demonstrates the author's growth in both confidence and influence.

New Solutions and Methods Discovered

During the thesis process, several new solutions and methods emerged, particularly in the realm of stakeholder management and leadership. Early on, the author realized that traditional methods of convincing clubs to collaborate would not suffice, given the deep-seated rivalries in the region. Instead, the author leaned heavily on Simon Sinek's (2009) Golden Circle communication model, emphasizing the "Why" behind the project to appeal to the emotional and long-term interests of the clubs.

Another key method was the adaptation of flexible approaches when dealing with the federation and league regulations. The author's negotiation with the Austrian Junior League commissioner for an exception to the standard U15 rules was an example of creative problem-solving. By proposing a compromise allowing overage players and forfeiting playoff participation the author ensured the academy could launch in time while respecting league guidelines.

In terms of coaching, the author also refined his approach to player development, applying professional-level techniques in new ways with youth players, particularly in areas like faceoff training. This not only improved the players' performance but also created a more individualized, player-centered development model, in line with Ericsson et al.'s (1993) research on deliberate practice.

Learning from the Diary-Based Thesis

Writing a diary-based thesis has provided the author with a unique opportunity for reflection and continuous self-assessment. One of the key lessons learned through this process is the value of real-time analysis. Documenting daily challenges, decisions, and outcomes allowed the author to make timely adjustments and test different approaches throughout the observation period.

The diary format also allowed for a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership in dynamic, high-pressure environments. By regularly reflecting on interactions with players, stakeholders, and fellow coaches, the author was able to identify patterns in decision-making and adapt his leadership style to fit the evolving context of both the Pro Team's playoff run and the academy project.

New Insights and Future Benefits

One of the most interesting discoveries during the thesis was the realization that even in an environment where resistance to change is strong, persistence and strategic framing of ideas can eventually break through. The success of the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy project, despite the initial reluctance of many clubs, illustrates this point. The project's approval and launch stand as evidence that a well-communicated vision, backed by flexibility and compromise, can overcome significant obstacles.

The benefits of this thesis extend beyond the immediate scope of the author's work. The establishment of the Vorarlberg Hockey Academy not only creates a new development pathway for young athletes in the region but also serves as a model for other regions in Austria facing similar challenges. The lessons learned in stakeholder management, leadership, and player development are transferable to future projects in both regional and national contexts.

Utilizing Job Analysis

Job analysis played a key role in helping the author identify areas for improvement and focus development efforts. By analyzing day-to-day responsibilities and challenges, particularly in communication and leadership, the author was able to tailor his strategies and refine his approaches over time. For example, the author's initial hesitance in asserting his vision for the academy was addressed through deliberate practice in public speaking and strategic negotiation, eventually leading to improved confidence and success in stakeholder meetings.

The application of job analysis also allowed the author to fine-tune his coaching methods. By regularly evaluating player performance and reviewing video analysis techniques, the author improved his ability to deliver targeted, high-impact feedback to players, resulting in measurable progress on the ice.

Future Skill Development

While significant progress has been made throughout the thesis process, there are still areas for future development. The author recognizes that further refinement in stakeholder engagement, particularly in overcoming resistance, will be important for long-term success. Building deeper relationships with clubs that opted not to participate in the academy will require continued dialogue, trust-building, and demonstrating the tangible benefits of the academy in its first year.

Additionally, the author aims to continue improving his technical coaching skills, particularly in advanced areas of video analysis and individualized player development. As noted by Reid et al. (2004), continuous refinement of these technical tools is essential for staying competitive in professional sports.

Finally, the author will focus on maintaining a healthy work-life balance, particularly as the demands of leadership grow. The experience of managing both personal and professional challenges during the observation period underscored the need for self-care and effective time management to sustain long-term performance, as suggested by Northouse (2019).

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