



**Development of interaction- and self-leadership skills in multicultural coaching context – season 2023-2024. A diary-based thesis.**

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Degree Programme in Sports Coaching and Management

Bachelor's Thesis

2024

## Abstract

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<b>Degree</b> Bachelor of Sports Studies
<b>Report/Thesis Title</b> Development of interaction- and self-leadership skills in multicultural coaching context – season 2023-2024. A diary-based thesis.
<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 55
<p>This thesis delves into the authors professional growth in the work placement during the season 2023-2024. Author performed the work placement in South Tyrol, Italy as a part of the coaching staff of HC Pustertal, an ice hockey team which competes in the ICE Hockey League.</p> <p>The setting of the work placement generated the base for the thesis. The professional growth was encircled around of three development themes. The themes were coaching in multi-cultural environment, interaction skills, and self-leadership skills. The selected themes were beneficial for the development of the author in the context of the work placement.</p> <p>The phases of the professional growth are documented on the diary entries in the thesis during an eight-week period, from January 2024 to end of March 2024. The process contains forty diary entries and eight weekly analyses. The diary entries describe the daily actions in the work placement. In the weekly analyses the author reflects the professional growth according to the week's theme and objective.</p> <p>From week one to three, the developmental target was on the coaching in multi-cultural environment. Weeks four to six the author concentrated on developing the interaction skills. The last two weeks from six to eight, the focus was on self-leadership skills. For each week, the objective was different.</p> <p>The essential findings of the process were that the coach needs to understand the coaching context to be able to apply his coaching skills efficiently. The significant effect of the competent use of interaction skills and the multicultural work environment to the coaching process. Development in self-leadership skills impacts positively to the daily working of the coach.</p> <p>The author was able to achieve professional development on the field of the selected learning themes. The progress of the development is analyzed in the weekly analysis and discussion.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> multicultural, coaching, interaction, self-leadership

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis follows the journey of pursuing professional growth in addition to my experiences and learnings through the 2023-2024 ice hockey season intertwined with the work placement in an Italian ice hockey club HC Pustertal, which competes in the multi-national ICE Hockey League. The thesis aims to delve into my professional development in ice hockey coaching, focusing on to the pre-defined themes point of view.

The interval of the diary entries in the thesis started on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> of January and ended on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2024. The daily entries are written in the final part of the hockey season, including the end of the regular season and the start of playoffs.

The employer is HC Pustertal, founded in 1954. The club has long roots in ice hockey in the South Tyrol region of Northern Italy. Home of the team is a town of Bruneck within the South Tyrol region. South Tyrol is bilingual area where Italian language is a minority while German is more dominant. The club represents the cultural mixture of the region.

During the recent years the club has been taking steps to develop as an organization. They have been promoted from the Alps Hockey League to the multinational ICE Hockey League and in 2021 they moved to brand-new hockey arena. HC Pustertal has been rising to be one of the top hockey clubs in the region.

The work environment at HC Pustertal is limited to the operations of the sports team itself. The sports team consists of the players, medical staff, equipment staff and coaching staff. There are people from different cultures, dominant presence of North Italians and North Americans. Most of the work is done together with the coaching staff, following the staff's daily work agenda.

The work responsibilities as an assistant coach in our staff are gathering information for the head coach from different parts of the game, informing the team about the practical matters, bringing good atmosphere and in general assist the head coach in his job. At the start of the thesis process I have been performing the job tasks around four months.

The expertise required for the work is versatile. When working with people, the most important expertise are inter- and intra-personal skills. Competence of the sport and coaching is needed when working with individual players. Self-management skills such as scheduling, and work-life balance are important. The computer skills are also essential in order to be able to bring information in forms such as videos and statistics.

In this thesis, the objective is to reflect on my professional growth and experiences through the season at HC Pustertal. Following the working and interacting with the stakeholders, I can develop my coaching skills, gain knowledge in working in a multicultural environment, learn the aspects of effective interaction skills and the usage of self-leadership skills within an ice hockey team. This will help me in my goals of personal and professional development within the realm of ice hockey coaching.

Table 1. Overlay matrix of the in-text connections

Own professional development objective	Theoretical framework	Observation week	Results of own professional development
Coaching in multicultural environment	3.1	4.1, 4.2, 4.3	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5
Interaction skills of a coach in multicultural environment	3.2	4.4,4.5,4.6	4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5
Self-leadership skills	3.3	4.7,4.8	4.7, 4.8, 5

## 2 Description of the initial situation

The coaching job in HC Pustertal started in August 2023. The contract lasts until the spring of 2024 and the exact length of the season is affected to how well the team is managing to compete. The work role name is a “video coach.” The season consists of the pre-season, regular season and post-season. My work responsibilities and assignments does not vary significantly on what part of the season is going on.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to notice that during the season our coaching staff went through a major change before the process of the daily entries started. The reigning head coach left his position, and the assistant coach transferred to be the new head coach. This change affected to my responsibilities and assignments. A coach’s objectives in this elite-sport context to develop the athlete outcomes are to set the training for deliberate practice, plan and prepare the athletes to be rested mentally and physically for the consistent competition performances, and to provide information in the athletes to assess their physical, technical, tactical, and mental skills (Côté & Gilbert 2009, 317). After the change, I was given a higher responsibility to coach accordingly to the coach’s objectives in this context.

### 2.1 Analysis of the work in HC Pustertal

The task in my current work follows the daily needs of operating in a coaching environment of a professional ice hockey club. The tasks can be divided to two categories, the tasks in practices and in games. Tasks can be found in Table 2, below.

Table 2. List of the work tasks, divided to game-related tasks and practice-related tasks

Specific tasks in relation to practicing	Specific tasks in relation to games
planning and execution of the ice practices with the coaching staff	providing statistics of team’s and individual’s performance
running the ice sessions with the coaching staff	providing the video clips of the team’s performances
leading and planning the extra individual practicing	analyze via video the team’s and individual’s performances in games
leading the pre-game skates and assigning roles to the other coaches	express my notes and thoughts of the performances in games

Specific tasks in relation to practicing	Specific tasks in relation to games
informing the players about schedules	individual feedback for the players on the performance in games
helping the goalie coach in on-ice goalie practicing	sharing the players' shifts via email
set up the recording of the practices	pre scout of the opponents via video
providing video clips from the practices	creating statistics of the opponents
fostering the atmosphere in the team according to the team values	informing the media team of the lineup and changes during game days
helping the coaching staff in giving feedback for the team	filling the game sheet before the games
creating the schedule for the team	responsible of the coach's challenges during the games
sharing the timetables for the whole organization	providing information to the bench during the games via walkie-talkie
set up the timetable of the practicing	providing information of the game during the intermissions
communication with the hockey arena organization about the changes in schedule	fixing the game sheets after the games

Effective coaching consists of three components. Coaches' knowledge, athletes' outcomes, and coaching contexts. To coach effectively a coach needs to constantly integrate and inspect the interacting of these three components. (Côté & Gilbert 2009, 309-310.) Coaches' knowledge includes the professional knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, and intrapersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert 2009, 310-311). The knowledge and skills needed to cope with the job are following these three aspects to coach in a professional sports organization. Sport specific expertise such as understanding of the ice hockey strategies and training methods. Leadership and communication skills to be able to lead and be a part of a coaching staff and the whole team. Technical and analytical skills are essential in the work tasks related to working with analyzing and creating statistics via video. In the overall working collaboration skills, adaptability, and being able to put attention to details are important to perform successfully in the work role.

The expertise for the skills above is acquired so far through the learning process of the previous experiences in the ice hockey coaching field, in addition to the studies in Haaga-Helia's Bachelor's Degree in Sports Coaching and Management.

The stage reached in the professional development during the hockey season was moderately high. During the season as my competence was developing, I was granted more demanding work responsibilities.

For the future, the most crucial factor is to be able to reflect the work-related decision making daily. All the experiences working in the multicultural environments helps me developing myself further. Learning of the local language could be a considerable investment for the further development. Understanding of the roles and the effects of different stakeholders seemed to have a major impact on the role of a coach in professional ice hockey context.

Assessing my competence in relation to the requirements of the job, my competence level at the beginning of the hockey season was somewhere in between of a novice performer and a skilled performer. There were parts of the coaching work, where I was already a skilled performer and parts where the skill level was more in a novice level. However, at the end of the season the competence level was somewhere between a skilled performer and an expert level. The growth in the skills could be seen in the emerging growth in responsibilities and the role inside the coaching staff.

## **2.2 Stakeholders**

In this chapter the stakeholders are introduced. The daily working happens inside the operating staff of the ice hockey team. I am in daily interact with the players, coaching staff, equipment staff, and medical staff. Most of the work is done within the coaching staff, which consists in total of five coaches.

The internal stakeholders engage in the work on weekly basis. With the club management and sports director, we agree on scheduling, daily operations, and other related matters to the operations of the ice hockey team. The board and sports director helps in the decision making of the coaching staff.

External stakeholders consist of the board of the league where the team competes, sponsors, fans of the club and the media. All these stakeholders have their influence on the work, but the contacts with the external stakeholders are extremely minimal.

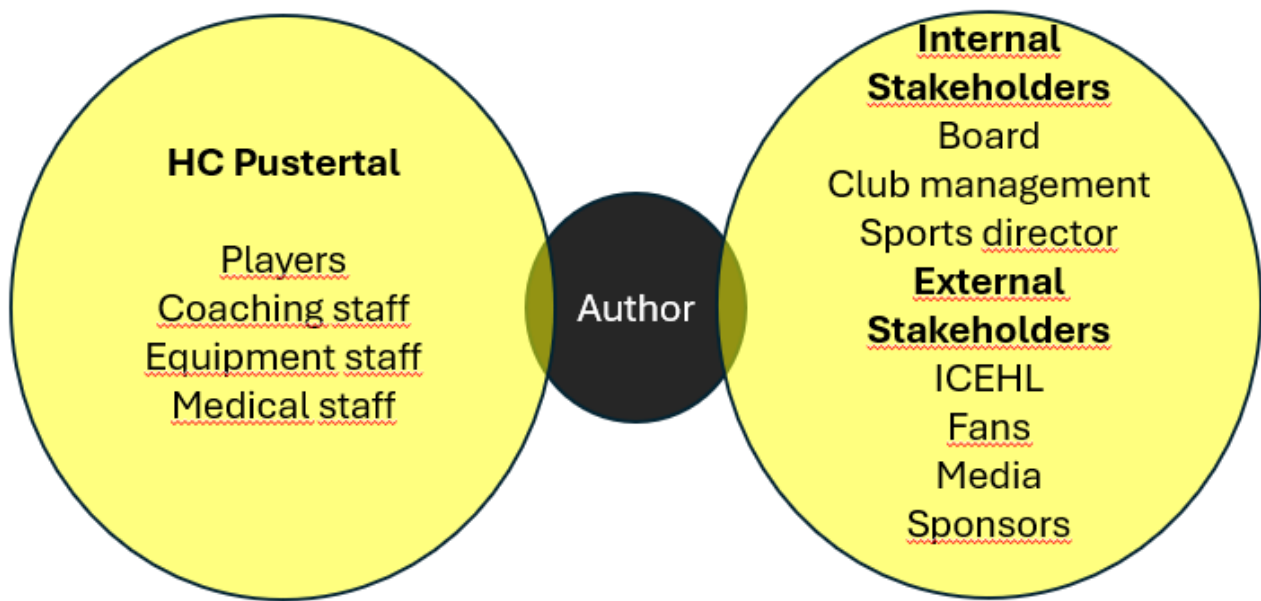


Figure 1. The stakeholders of the organization

### **3 Theoretical Background**

In this chapter, the theoretical background for the professional skills affected to the development process is concluded. The reflection in the weekly analysis is made through the theoretical background in this chapter.

#### **3.1 Coaching in multicultural environment**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, coaching has become more cross-cultural because of the mobility of the people around the globe has become more convenient. Therefore, the cultural perspective to coaching has become relevant. Holistic approach of coaching which includes the integration of culture is effective for cross cultural coaching. (Abbott 2018, 324-326.)

Sociocultural competence is effective for coaches to work and coach effectively in socially and culturally diverse work environment. The competence consists of awareness, knowledge, and skills. Understanding and interacting effectively with the diverse backgrounds and the social and cultural differences is crucial. (Burden & Lambie 2011, 5-6.)

Sociocultural sport coaching competency includes standards what the coach should be able to regulate. A coach should be able to value and respect different cultures and to be aware how their own culture, experiences, attitudes, and biases effect the athletes. Coaches needs to have ability to appreciate the race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, and beliefs. Acquiring of knowledge about the cultures of the athletes. To understand and apply the sociopolitical effects to the multicultural sports coaching environment. Apply interaction methods appropriate to different cultures. Ability to recognize possible limitations of the cultural backgrounds and to be able to eliminate all discrimination in the sport coaching context. To be involved in interaction with the athletes in various sociocultural contexts. (Burden & Lambie 2011, 12-16.)

#### **3.2 Interaction skills of a coach in multicultural environment**

Coaching effectiveness is dependable on the interactions of an individual and groups. Coaches' have to interact with different stakeholders depending on the level of coaching. For a coach it is important to be able to develop the interpersonal skills in order to communicate effectively in coach-athlete relationships or with other stakeholders. The age, background, and competitive level of the athletes set coaches to apply the interaction skills to match the particular coaching context. (Côté & Gilbert 2009, 310-311.)

A way to develop coach-athlete relationships is by exploring task- and interpersonal related rules. It is proposed that for rewarding interpersonal rules for a successful coach-athlete relationship,

communication and closeness were characterized as a quality indicator. For preventing and minimizing interpersonal conflicts and difficulties, well-defined boundaries of coach-athlete relationships were noted. Interpersonal feelings, thoughts, behaviors and interdependence were concluded to a model of closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation. The model can be useful for a coach to consider the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. (Jowett & Carpenter 2015, 7-11; Jowett 2017, 7-8.)

The fundamentals of interaction skills can be divided into different subcategories. Non-verbal interaction skills in social interactions, which are also necessary in effective coaching in the author's context are facial expressions, gestures and body movements, eye contact, posture, proxemics, paralanguage, authority cues and emotional intelligence. These skills help to communicate emotions and regulate interactions, illustrate, and emphasize verbal messages, to signal attention and regulate the flow of conversations, convey the attitudes and emotional states in communicating and to clear the power, dominance and status in the interactions. (Burgoon & Bacue 2003, 186-207.) Emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to perceive, access, generate, regulate, and understand emotions (Burgoon & Bacue 2003, 182).

It is relevant to note that there are several factors which has its influences on the functioning of the non-verbal skills. These have to be taken into consideration when applying the knowledge of non-verbal skill to practical use. Culture, sex or gender, individual differences, and the ability to observe non-verbal cues are influencing the functions of the non-verbal interacting. (Burcoon & Bacue 2003, 183-185.)

### **3.3 Self-leadership skills**

Self-leadership can be described as a process of self-influence and set of strategies which addresses what is to be done, why and how is to be done. It is dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic incentives. Self-leadership sets strategies to self-observation, self-management, self-goal setting, self-reward/criticism, and rehearsal. (Stewart, Courtright & Manz 2011, 186-190.)

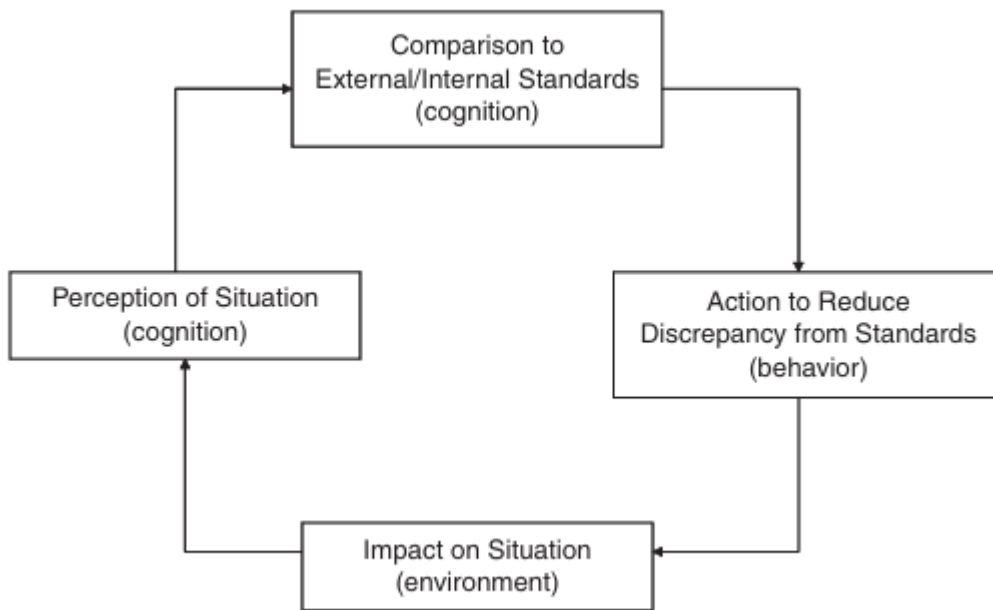


Figure 2. Theoretical framework for Self-Leadership. (adapted from Stewart et.al 2011, 187)

The significance of self-leadership in the effectivity of a leader is underscored. Sports world has become more competitive, consequently self-leadership skills help the leader to be effective in the realm of sports. It can be considered as one of the key aspects of career success in sports. (Daud 2017, 5.)

Self-leadership consists of different competencies and skills. Self-awareness and self-knowledge are crucial skills to master. Self-awareness is an ability to inspect yourself clearly. Self-awareness is a benchmark for self-control and self-regulation, and it is a vital part of perceiving ourselves inner reality and state. Self-knowledge explains the needs, motives, and drives of a person. Understanding of personality traits, personal strengths and weaknesses, values, talents, and interests are elements of self-knowledge. Identifying desired experiences helps to being more motivated to pursue the attained goals and to identify opportunities to act in line with one's values in life. Capability to understand constructive thinking and decision-making including the development of a growth mindset is important in self-leadership. Aspects such as, practicing positivity to think creatively and innovatively, and practicing mindfulness are necessary skills. Competence in planning and goal setting helps to turn dreams into milestones, and later to goals. Optimizing motivation adjusts the goals to become more pleading by emphasizing the intrinsically motivating goals and aligning those to the one's values. Utilization of the ecosystem helps to get support from the environment where the person lives. Three techniques; high-performance planning, self-coaching, and functional imagery training helps in self-leadership performance. Lastly, embracing failure and cultivating grit are useful for the self-leadership eventually. (PositivePsychology.com 2020.)

## 4 Diary entries

This chapter consists of eight weeks, in total forty days of observing through the selected themes. Each subchapter includes the daily entries and the weekly analysis at the end of the chapter.

### 4.1 Observation week 1 – Recognizing and observing the effects of multi-cultural environment to my work

My goals for the week are to focus on my development in inter- and intrapersonal skills and work-related competencies in multicultural environment and context. During the first week I will aim to recognize the coaching situations where the effects of multi-cultural environment are taking place.

Monday 08.01.2024

For this day, the main task for me is to do the pre-scout for tomorrow's opponent HK Olimpija Ljubljana and go over with the leadership group the plan for the pre-game morning practices. Arriving at the rink, I had a feeling, that the team seems to carry on one day at a time, because of the recent change in the coaching situation. We had a meeting with the leadership group about the ice practices. I expressed my thoughts. In my opinion, the pre-game skates are firstly for the players and their needs, and my job is to facilitate those. They were really happy and shared their thoughts openly. In the leadership group, there is a mix of locals and more experienced players from North America, and I noticed that the North Americans wanted to have their word on almost everything as the locals were more compliant. Their biggest wish was that they are able to decide, do they come ice or not. Considering this, I got to use my negotiation skills, when we were agreeing on the "code of conduct" of the timetables and informing.

Tuesday 09.01.2024

Today, I will aim to take into consideration what kind of work environment matters I will face when being in charge of running an ice practice alone. I was feeling a little bit anxious for this because it is first time for me to be in charge of the ice practice alone. I tried not to show my anxious because I thought I do not need to add any confusion for the team. I concentrated mainly that I can maintain a cheerful outlook during the practice and that it goes according to the plan. Nevertheless, the ice and preparation for it was successful according to the feedback from the players. I was going through my head to see if my approach is appropriate to the ice practice because the meaning for the game day ice session is different for me than to bunch of experienced players in our team.

After the changes in the coaching staff during the Christmas holidays, I was given more responsibilities and one of those is being in charge of the morning ices before the games. The coaching

staff personnel changed, as the head coach and management decided to part ways. There was nothing specific drama in the decision. The management decided that we will continue the daily work with the same coaching staff. Understandably, a head coach change influences the team's daily life, but in this situation, the change is not so major because we will stick to the created plan. It was interesting to see during the days of change, how people can react to same situation so differently. Some of the players who had experienced it before, did not have any glaring reactions, but of course for some it was more remarkable. As a coach, I was trying to offer myself as an asset for them, if somebody would like to talk or go through thoughts, I am available.

In the afternoon, coming to the rink for the game, I had calm and relaxed feeling. I did the pre scout for Ljubljana with a high quality, as I want to prove that I am worthy for the added responsibility. Nevertheless, there were some extra expectations for this game from the board and club management of the club. The management visited us before the game and it was interesting to hear what they think, but same time interact with them with emotionally intelligent way, as not showing them if I would disagree. Personally, I felt that did not fully understand this, because week before we had the first games after the changes in the coaching staff. We won both derby games against Italian teams, which on my understanding are big games for this club and region overall. I was thinking is the "pressure" justified?

The game was really good for us. We scored lots of goals and many different players got some success which I think is exactly what we needed now to give a boost to our confidence. For me, this day was a great test how I can create a clear plan for the use of interpersonal skills for myself.

Wednesday 10.01.2024

Today, the objective is to go through the yesterday's game with coaching staff and plan and confirm the exact timetables and information for the upcoming three-day road trip. I have an opportunity to take note and learn something new working with different stakeholders. One of my responsibilities is to inform the team about the schedules, so this meeting is important because I want to be sure that everything goes smoothly. I realized quickly there were different approaches to the planning of the timetables. I was constantly approaching how the player would feel, and the counterpart was having a larger point of view considering matters such as money, bus drivers, law's etc. The team's wish was to have a hotel near the ice rink. Therefore, we don't need to worry about bus schedules, so the players are able to move freely. It was agreed by the club management and then we confirmed all the ice times and double-checked everything, and I was then ready to send the information to the players.

I noticed during the meeting, that the old habits and ways to work were dominant, so I had to concentrate to express my wishes while trying showing respect towards the counterpart's work and thoughts. The people have been working in the club for a long time and have been collaborating with many different coaches, and I could feel it as the expressions were straight forward in the meeting. After the meeting I asked to check everything on the PDF-file, and agreed to send me it back before 3.00 pm. However, it did not come before three o'clock and I had to ask it after. I realized that it is a part of the culture here that the ongoing business does not necessarily happen as agreed, it is always happening much later.

Thursday 11.01.2024

Today is the start of a long away trip. My main goal for today is to make sure everything goes as planned with the trip and manage the hotel check-in. While travelling on the bus, I started to do the pre-scout for the game on Friday against Vienna Capitals. It was a challenge to concentrate on the game on the bus so I made a plan that I will do the more mechanical work of tagging the game and then do the mentally more demanding work in the evening at the hotel.

Arriving in Wien did not go as planned because there was misinformation about the hotel. The plan was to be next to the rink so players could come and go freely. It was meant to be an advantage for us this weekend, but now we are 15 minutes bus ride away from the rink. Now, it was a challenge for me and the coaching staff, to decide what is the most appropriate approach to this challenge. Firstly, we made a plan with the head coach. The planning was straight forward and fast, it was crucial to first get the plan ready with the head coach so then I can start managing it with all the others. It was interesting to see how more straight-forward the decision making was with a person from the same culture and who speaks the same language.

The head coach demanded me to handle this with a positive note, he said that we will discuss this mistake later, but we cannot add any more frustration for the team. So, I came up with a plan that I will ask the leadership group downstairs of the bus and ask one of the goalies there also. I wanted him because I knew that he would lift the mood up. I started by explaining the situation and I got some incredulous looks. I continued by saying that it has been our theme to turn the "bad things" to a positive energy so you and we as coaches need to show an example of it now. We got to a consensus on the approach.

The mistake had different reactions. The North Americans were clearly having a laugh at the situation and were belittling considering what happened. For the younger players, it did not have so significant impact or at least they did not express it. Overall, I would say that the local players were the most reactive for this as they were asking why this happened and were worried about

tomorrow's schedules. I expressed to the equipment and physio staff to help calming the locals down and explain that this is now on the past and we need to concentrate on what is coming up. For all this time, I was feeling stupid, because yesterday we went through everything many times with the people responsible on planning and reserving everything and still, we faced this problem.

Friday 12.01.2024

Today is a game day and my responsibilities are leading the morning ice and providing the videos for the players. Starting the day with the morning ice I had an approach where because of the issues in the schedule and hotel of yesterday, I tried to make everything easy-going and stress-free for the players that they would not need to wait and be unaware of what happens and when, but again we faced similar problems as yesterday. There was incorrect information about the ice time. Thanks to our equipment manager, he was able to agree with the staff of the Wien's ice rink, that the ice will start on the time what we told to the players. It saved us coaches from telling again new information. It was a great reminder that having a connected team staff can help the coach a lot and save you from different issues. I was really relieved how the equipment manager handled the case as he did everything without causing any extra confusion.

The ice itself was maybe the worst so far what I have led. I decided to not have a meeting with the players before the ice, instead I wrote the information about the pre-game skate to a board in the locker room. I wanted to highlight our plan to make everything easy-going on the trip. However, on the ice couple players were coming late. It is not acceptable and in addition to this some of the players did not clearly inform are they participating to the ice. It got me thinking, was there something what I could have done differently, for example should've I kept the meeting before the skate. The game was intense and tight, but we managed to come out with a win.

Saturday 13.01.2024

The trip continues with a game in Szekesfehervar, Hungary against Fehervar AV19. Today, I will observe how differently the players act in back-to-back games in away trip. Day started at Wien ice rink, where I was doing the pre scout of the opponent of the day. At the same time, I was discussing a lot with players when they wanted to go through some situations from last game. Additionally, many of them wanted to hear what I think about their performance. The purpose for the morning was to give an opportunity to the players to prepare for the game in the way they want. There were many approaches, some of the players were doing mobility and small practice, some of the players were hanging out and talking in the locker room and some of the players did not even stay at the rink, they left to have a coffee in the city.

On the bus ride, I worked with the scouting and luckily, I got it ready before the player meetings. When arriving in Hungary we started going through the videos for the game. We decided with the coaching staff to change the daily schedule by changing the team meeting to individual meetings. We did it with each d-pair and offensive line separately because we wanted to keep the situation more as a chatty situation where we reflected yesterday and started to prepare for today's game.

The game was good, even though the result was not what we were hoping for. Against a top team in a league, after a tight game yesterday this was a heroic effort from our team. The level of commitment to our two main topics; being active and positive was visible during the whole game.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Week analysis

During the first week of observing, it was clear that this week was a lot about the coaching context. For effective coaching, it is critical to understand the settings where the coaching takes place to improve the athlete outcomes. Three specific coaching contexts are introduced: recreational sport, developmental sport, and elite sport. In addition to these two forms of coaching were suggested; participation and performance coaching based on the level of the athletes. (Côté & Gilbert 2009, 315-316.) Comparing this to the context of my working environment, it can be said that I work in elite sports which requires performance coaching. I think that understanding the coaching context helps me as a coach in decision making for example, when planning practices, communicating with people and self-reflecting. Mastering the identifying of the coaching context is crucial. Developing on this will definitely help me in my future.

For example, on Friday after all the misinformation and changes in the schedule, I felt that the morning at the rink was bad. The team felt indifferent. From my perspective, the pre-game skate is the only ice session where I am in charge and I have certain expectation of the level of commitment, but for the players it is completely different. After the ice, I felt that by selecting the drills to the ice, I tried to please the players by respecting too much their wishes, even though I believed those would not be beneficial for the performance. After, I think the situation with the schedules was affecting them more than it really did.

For some players, the morning ice is a habit, for some it is a way to prepare to be ready in the evening. The preparing is very individual, so the idea of pleasing everybody is not efficient. Now, on the morning, I tried to control the whole situation by trying to please everybody. Even though, on the ice there were players from totally different backgrounds, who play in different role, different amounts, and value different practicing. When coaching elite-athletes, their game performance is a measure of how good or bad the practicing/coaching is, therefore all the energy and effort spent during the practice should be focused on making them better when it matters the most.

The athlete outcomes which should be a result of effective coaching are confidence, competence, connection and character (Cote & Gilbert 2009, 314). On the pre-games skates we should be hitting two of the four C's: confidence and connection. I feel that these two parts are what I can offer the most to the players during the mornings. Design of the drills, the length of the repetitions and feedback on the ice are aspects which I can influence and from which I think the players are able to get confidence. Also, I feel it is important to help the players to have an environment where they can have fun with each other on the team.

I feel that the connection- outcome is where I succeed overall at the moment, because I bring my own excitement towards the sport and practicing so strongly to the practices, so it has an effect to the players experience of the session. Also, I try to only concentrate to the positive actions on the ice by encouraging them to celebrate goals or good efforts. I like to involve the players in the planning and during the session itself as a way to help them to acquire the athlete outcomes.

It is good to notice that, as a coach I am younger than most of the players, with close to nothing experience in professional ice hockey. I feel that this gives the starting point to be successful on hitting the two C's (connection & confidence) on the practices when the hierarchy between me and the players is already more balanced in a way that I perceived the players more as my colleagues than as an authority. Also, the involving of the players influences their personal connection to the practicing positively according to the feedback from the players. Referring to Friday's morning ice as an example, it would have been exactly the time to only concentrate to the two C's, rather than worry about the overall situation.

Reflecting through the week, second point what can be highlighted is the environment where my work happens. The cultural environment has its effects on the coaching context, but also to the daily work life. A suggestion for a definition for culture is as how people live as an individual and in a group (Berry 2002, 248). To use this in my context the aspects such as language, way of communication and norms are affecting my everyday working environment. For example, the workday itself differs from what I am used to in Finland. Workday starts normally in the morning, but during the day there is a two-hour break so things such as agreeing on something with the office is not possible during some parts of the day.

Cultural competence rises to be a big factor when working with people from different backgrounds in fields like teaching with students (coaching with athletes). Approach which takes account the differences between groups and individuals results in better success on a variety of outcomes. (Stevens, Jussim, Stevens & Anglim 2018, 658.) For example, when discussing with our local players from the region, it is easier for me and for them to get along and have fruitful relationships when I have some knowledge about their life and experiences. The same applies, when I speak with

players from North America and with the head-coach from Finland. To be an effective coach in the context now, I feel like this framework is a major factor to succeed on it. Situations like deciding who is out of the lineup, managing a crisis or giving positive feedback turn out to be first of all more effective but also easier when having the cultural competence backing it. From this perspective, Current year in the work placement offers me the best possibility to learn and therefore develop me further as a coach.

#### **4.2 Observation week 2 – Comparing the cultural difference to my previous experiences in coaching**

For this week, my objective is to compare the cultural and context differences to my previous experiences in Finland. The context means the differences between professional hockey with adults and junior ice hockey.

Monday 15.01.2024

On Monday, I went to the ice rink to handle all the stats from the weekend and prepare those ready for Tuesday. At the rink, I was working with the computer, and at the same time with me at the rink, there were some of injured players. With the recovering players, the player which were not on the trip with us were practicing. For my surprise, the physical coach asked me to go to keep the ice session for them seven minutes before it started. Nobody had sent me anything before so I could prepare something. I had my own work what I needed to do also. Because of the circumstances, I had to go to do the ice session.

I felt bad for this, because in my opinion this is not the efficient way to use the coaching resources. I was thinking that why use the valuable time for just going to do something without any plan or idea what and why to do it? On the ice, there were players from different ages and backgrounds what made me think even more why on earth this is something what is beneficial to do. Situation like this is something that I haven't experienced before, but during the morning I was doubting that maybe these extempore practices are more common in here. It differs a lot from the Finnish way of working, as these extra practices would be planned according to the players' individual needs.

Tuesday 16.01.2024

On Tuesday, I did research on the goal scoring chances against from the weekend and made conclusions about the reasons behind the situations, that the head coach can analyze those with the players. Days like these are effective for my development focus as I can compare in live mode the cultural differences in coaching as it is possible to collaborate with a Finnish person also. With the head coach we were planning some changes to the locker room area. The coaches' room is

spacious room with lots of space and it is a good place to work, but we were lacking some interaction with the coaches and players. It is notable that the decision-making process in Finnish culture is lot faster than with for example North Americans or Italians, but the communication is lot vaguer.

At the moment, the daily life at the rink can be easily like that the coaches sit on their room and players at the locker room, which is not the ideal situation. Consequently, we were planning to move the coaches' room to this small changing room, which would reduce our time there, and therefore increase the amount of encounters with each other.

The old coach room would then change to be a lounge for all the people at the locker room area to hang out. Also, all the video meetings would take place in there. It is a room with big window from which you can see the mountains and sun shining. The room itself is small for twenty players, but having some intimacy is good for the team and from the development focus point of view it creates more reflecting situations. For my development, this change is extremely beneficial. The encounters between different cultures and the amount of interaction would increase significantly.

Wednesday 17.01.2024

Today, my main responsibility is leading an extra session for our young players. I plan to make notes on how the cultural aspects differ in on-ice practicing. I was looking forward to it because it is one of the few chances this season to use my coaching abilities such as drill designing and leading the ice session. I was preparing for the ice by talking with the players that if they have something that they feel they need to work on. It was a win-win thought, I got the topics for the ice, and I could light some personal relativeness for them to the ice. I was happy when I got a couple wishes, especially because those were really game-like related wishes, such as being able to observe the ice when under pressure and being able to challenge the defenseman better when entering the zone. It was noticeable that the young players were surprisingly direct and detailed with their wishes.

Planning the practice, I had multiple options for the drills on those topics and I decided to see on the ice that how much time we need on each drill, and if some drill is good, we can do it longer. For my understanding, it was inevitable that the players have done enough practicing in a closed environment in their life, so I wanted to implement the non-linear way of doing straight from the beginning. I provide the feedback to everyone individually and according to the technical performance. My feeling was that it created some excitement for the players that they did not need to focus on how they did the drill, more to the result. During the ice, I made observations that here the players are more attached and reactive to practicing if compared to my previous experiences in Finland. It feels that on the practicing you are on a constant interaction with the players. Also, they are highly reactive to the feedback.

Friday 19.01.2024

Today's main topic is the normal work responsibilities during game day. We will play away against Villacher SV in Austria. I am today focusing to the working of the team staff. What kind of observations I do and how the way of working differs from my previous experiences. Before going through my scouting work, we were seeking for information with the coaching staff, does the opponent's top players play or not, because it effects a lot to the decision-making what we will show to the players and talk about the opponent. Luckily, there were not any major changes in the opponent's lineup, so we could use the created scouting work.

On the morning ice, I wanted to bring one new drill to the repertoire. I have tried every week to bring something new to the ice practices, and so far, it has gone really well, the players have seemed to be excited about those. I had a feeling on the ice that today some of the players are totally lacking the effort. Of course, as a coach I started to think that it is because of the drill design or the way how I am acting or doing the things. Also, the goalie coach on the ice noticed that some effort was lacking. However, we decided to not to worry about couple players' attitude. I then concentrated on the players who were on to it today.

In Villach, I was preparing for the game and observing the team staff's preparation to the game. Some members of the team staff carried the pressure about the result, even though it is the coaches worry mostly. It influenced the body language and all the other interaction which has a big effect on the team cohesion and atmosphere. People who collaborate with the team are from the same city where the team is, and according to the talks with them, they feel that it is a measurement how they do the work. I feel like this is a significant difference to Finnish environment where the team staff only concentrates to their job and to create positive atmosphere.

Saturday 20.01.2024

This weekend we play back-to-back games, so I decided to continue with the same topic as yesterday to see the actions of the team staff.

On the morning, I came early to the rink to make sure stats are on point and started to do the scouting for Vienna game on the evening. We went to the morning ice only with one goalie and did two drills. The goalie coach came to praise the ice session, he said that he and some of the players really liked the atmosphere and the ice session, everybody had a nice feeling on the ice, and they "bought" the new drill nicely. Now the coaching staff works seamlessly, but the question on my mind is can we help the equipment and physio staff to get tighter with the mindset of the coaching staff? Again, on the morning I noticed some worrying about the result, because today we will face a team who is just behind us.

Before the game, the board members visited the locker room, and it opened my thoughts that the worrying of the staff members can happen as a consequence when the board is too close to the operating team. For me it is harder to feel because I am not local, but for them it can be a huge thing as they are representing the hometown team, and if the results are bad, they can feel it personally.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Weekly analysis

During the week of analyzing the cultural differences between here in North Italy and Finland, the differences can be seen in multiple situations, and it has a big effect on my work as a coach. Working daily in a competitive environment together with the cultural effects has its influence on the behavior and decision making. For example, on Monday the actions of the coach were not understandable for me, as there was no plan or agreement about the ice session. For me, it was more about whether the coach itself looked good for the players rather than the actual adaptations of the practice would be as high as possible.

When figuring out the situation, one explaining factor could be in the culture of the region and their history. I will try to find a solution for the situation next week when the plan is to reflect on my own actions on influencing the culture. The people in South Tyrol have been fighting for their culture, language, and region for decades. From the will to fight against Italianization under the fascist regime until the self-government nowadays has its influence on the people. (Grote 2012, 11-16.) Therefore, as a coach, one approach to implement in the future in a new coaching context, understanding the culture and its history gives a more comprehensive understanding of the actions of the people. It narrows the field of key factors such as interacting, decision-making and personal relativity.

Even though narrowing the comparison between the South Tyrolean and Finnish cultures ice hockey environment, this season the team has a mix of cultures across the world, which has its impact on the work of a coach.

Table 3. Cultural backgrounds of the members in the organization. \*Four players of the twelve North American has an Italian passport, but are considered as a North American

Region	Players	Team staff/directors	TOTAL
North American	12 (4) *	0	12
Italian (South-Tyrol)	12	6	18
Nordic	3	2	5

During the observation period, I noticed that there are some differences in the interacting between all of the three groups. For a person from North America, it seemed to be important to be able express their feelings and emotions, while the Italians were more obedient, at least when working in bigger groups. Specially in on-ice coaching, overall, the players in our team seems to be more reactive comparing my experiences in Finland. While giving feedback, the body-language and responses can be felt more strongly. The players here are asking more questions, for example asking the coach to be more detailed and answering by words and gestures to the feedback.

Cultural backgrounds effect the decision making. Cultures can be divided to individualistic and collectivist cultures, which both represents different values and therefore influences the decision making. Consequently, if there is a problem to solve, the effect of the culture lead to different approaches to the problem solving. (Guess 2004, 6-7.)

A model that could help my work in the future in similar context with a multicultural team is about decision making between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The model suggests the use of different decision-making strategies according to the cultural value orientations of a person. The strategies can then be stretched to a concrete decision-making strategies. (Guess 2004, 14-16.)

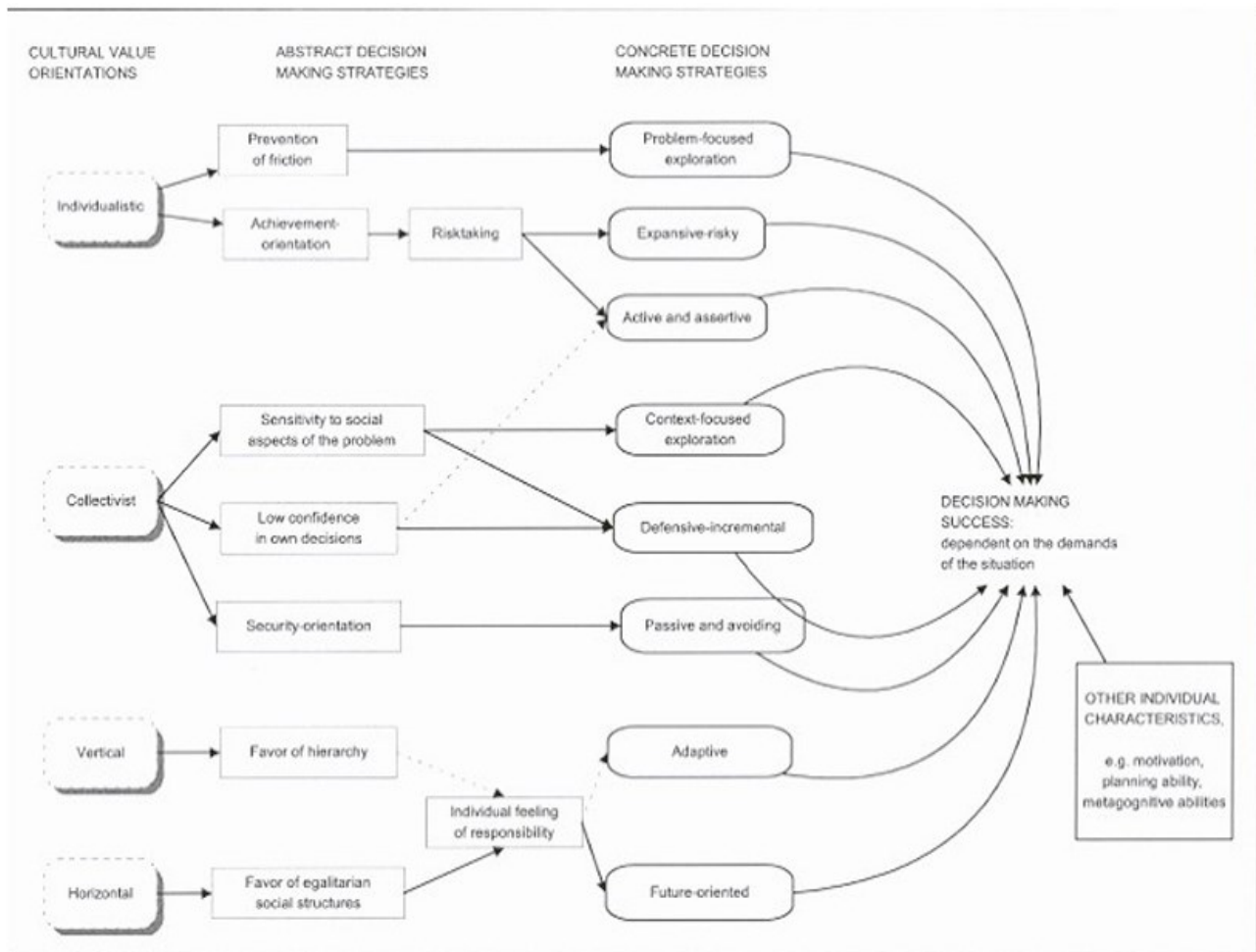


Figure 3. A model for Decision Making in Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures (adapted from Guess 2004, 15)

A practical way to use the model above, is to divide the players according to the value orientations. It could give a more individualized approach towards each player and member of the team staff. For the coaching, it gives more effective options to have an impact on the development of a player, for example giving tools for the form of feedback.

#### 4.3 Observation week 3 – My influence – tools to find effective ways to enhance team culture in multicultural environment

Monday 22.1.2024

This week, my focus is on my contribution to the culture from the perspective of our team values. To find effective and versatile ways to foster our team's culture and environment. To point out ways to enhance the team cohesion and atmosphere in multicultural context.

After a satisfactory performance on the weekend and a deserved day off, we came back to the rink and went through what will be this week's agenda. It is a three-game week so I wanted to schedule my own working, because I knew it will be a lot of work coming up. This week there should be a new coach coming, so for me it is an opportunity to have an influence.

There were people coming to say their greetings from the board and the club management. After the conversation, it was a little bit controversial situation. We had slightly different point of view towards the upcoming game. According to the management the Tuesday's game in Ljubljana will be an important game. The pressure from them is understandable but still the way things are brought up is not the most efficient way. I was thinking that I can have an effect here. Coaches needs to collect all the pressure to themselves, consequently when collaborating with the team we must keep the pressure within the coaching staff.

Tuesday 23.1.2024

Today, I will consider my influence on the team's culture on game day. We had a game against HK Olimpija Ljubljana in Slovenia. It is a decent trip there so we hoped that everyone would put effort that they are ready in the evening. We spoke a lot about preparation, so I wanted to also keep a decent morning ice practice. The morning ice practice was going well. I tried to bring small amount of higher demand level with a casual approach. Our games against Ljubljana have been tough, and according to my discussions with the players the rink itself is a hard place to play, so arriving in Ljubljana I sensed little bit of nervousness from the group before the game. I wanted to have a small chat with some of the players, just to try to get the nervousness away. I was making fun about lots of things and tried to make them laugh.

This was one of those games where there were lots of situations happening which were out of our control. At least now, I feel like we are not able to control our emotions and accept what is happening. Then our decision making get affected and therefore the game starts going against us even more. That is something what needs to be fixed and I believe that I can have a small influence on that.

Wednesday 24.1.2024

Today, I will concentrate on having my influence on the coaching staff as the players have a day off. I came to the rink to make all the statistics from the last game. During the day, we went to run before the game with the head coach and had some nice talk about life and the team and sports in general. I was thinking during the morning that after the decision was made that the interim head coach will stay until the end of the season, how I can help him and support him on his job as well as possible.

I concluded that I would try to avoid at any costs to being negative or speculate about things or worrying about something, because there are plenty enough people and situations which and who will offer those things to him. One practical idea is that for example on the intermissions I will be just asking how he felt about the period or some specific situation instead of coming with my own notes immediately. For me, if something is worrying me or I have some negative thoughts I need to find a way to discuss those with somebody.

Thursday 25.1.2024

Our coaching staff got a new member as the new assistant coach arrived. Consequently, my focus for today is the briefing of the team's values and culture and introduction of everything to him. The coach will come to help us to have two more extra hands. It is lots of work for three coaches to run the team when one coach has a second job next to the ice hockey. So, in the morning we had a meeting with the coaching staff just to address the who does what. The new coach will work with certain aspect of the tactics and overall help us on the things what we need.

I was having a talk with the new coach, and I expressed that whatever he needs I will help him. Then we were talking about the players and their personalities. I tried to give some tips on how approach certain players. One idea was that as he is a local and experienced coach, he could work as a "bridge" between the team and the management, which could be an important asset for us to keep the possible distractions away from the locker room.

Friday 26.1.2024

Today I will be again considering my influence on the team's culture on game day. During the morning ice, I wanted to continue from the Tuesday evening approach. I started the ice with humor and got the team to laugh and therefore continued to explain the practice. We had a good feeling all the time on the ice, and I was feeling that the players were having fun when the ice went smoothly. Again, one new drill did its job to keep ices interesting and motivating. In the evening the game against Black Wings Linz was overall excellent for us, we played against the top team in this league in tough situation. We dominated the game but still as they are a good team, we lost our lead and won after the penalty shots.

However, after the game I was amazed in a bad way when the team or the club were not celebrating the victory. The management came down to the coaches' room and they were not happy at all, in their opinion we lost one point today. Again, from their perspective it is reasonable. This situation was tough to influence on the moment as it was difficult to find a way to express myself when the whole organization was upset. We with the head coach were surprised and we were discussing that this is something we will find in front of us.

Saturday 27.1.2024

Today, the main objective for me is to bring my opinion and ideas for the situation between our team and the league, as we have a meeting with the league management. In the meeting, we went through some situations which have caused some differences between us and the league. This is something what has been causing extra emotion and negativeness and it is good that we get this going today. Our two main things now are being positive and active so for the first one it has an immense help. I was asked by the management to bring my thoughts as I have different perspective when I am not on the player's bench during the games.

It came up during the meeting that the referees have something personal about our team, which does not have anything to do with the current situation on the team. That was something what was creating emotions for our team and organization during and after the games. Again, I needed very closely think how I will react to it myself, and I decided to be indifferent towards the situation as the club took it somehow personally. Consequently, there was lots of emotion in the room during the meetings, so I did not want to fuel the flames even more. I tried to be as objective as possible when I was sharing my opinions.

Sunday 28.1.2024.

Today we have a game day away against Migross Supermercati Asiago. As the last day of the observation week, I will use it to foster the team's culture during a game day. In the morning, I planned the pre-game skate and discussed it with a couple of players. However, starting the ice on the board, I totally forgot one part of the practice, which was a big mistake. The first thought in my mind was that I did not do my job well enough. On the situation, I tried to take it more from humor perspective rather than starting to worry in front of the players. With the help of the players, we went through it and after the situation the morning ice went well.

We had to start the bus trip early because the Sunday game is always earlier and trip to Asiago is long. On the bus we went through line by line the pre-game videos and had talks what are the key points for today. Still, the game was one of the worst performances after the new year. After the game we had a long talk first with the head coach, and then in the locker room. I said to the head coach that this is the first moment where we need to test our beliefs to our values and agreements. I tried to highlight that the foundation of the culture after the new year would be for nothing if we would change the way drastically now. It was a tough conversation for both of us. In the locker room the head coach then went through with the players, that now it is a good chance for us to test one of our two topics, how to stay positive. We promised that nothing in the practices change, we keep the positive atmosphere and keep the certain freedoms for the players.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Weekly analysis*

During this week, the focus was on finding ways to be effective to foster the team's culture (tark-enna) and to have a positive effect specifically on the team's cohesion and atmosphere. Our team's two main topics have been "active" and "positive." "Active" means, that when the team is on the practices or games, our team is present, well prepared, and ready to put 100% effort and be proactive on and off the ice. "Positive" means our team's mindset towards daily life. Approaching the day with a positive grasp can be seen as greetings, e.g., good morning and goodbye. During the games and practices, the ability to turn the negative things into positiveness.

A way to influence the culture, is through interaction. It is stated that high performing cultures are developing as a product of the interaction between the players and management through their beliefs, targets, and expectations. (Cruickshank & Collins 2012, 349.) The findings of Donoso-Morales, Bloom & Caron (2017, 510) suggests that for coach education in the future, one considerable research area is developing the emotional intelligence, specifically in high performance sport context.

Skills such as emotional intelligence are required in high-performance coaching. Emotional intelligence can have influence on the performance outcomes, interpersonal relationships, and functioning. Emotional intelligence consists of abilities of emotional management, such as perceiving, use, understanding and managing emotions. (Chan & Mallett 2011, 315-320.) I notice from the daily entries that I have the abilities to be emotionally intelligent as I am approaching the situations in my head through the emotional states of the athletes and the overall state of the situation.

During the game day on Tuesday, I was acting according to how emotional intelligence has its effects to coaching, as I was trying to influence the players emotions in a tough situation. However, my actions could be more individualized according to who I am interacting with to increase the effectiveness of my actions. I will try to find solutions for the interaction situations in the coming observation weeks and on the weekly analysis.

On Thursday, I had a great chance to have an influence as the new assistant coach had a first day with our team. Reflecting the day through the development theme with our team values, it can be said that I was enhancing the "active" – value of our team, as I was pursuing that the new coach can feel relativeness to our team as we were dividing the work through his interest and competences. Getting familiar with the new coach is important because I feel that it is crucial for the effectiveness of the coaches' job that the coaching staff is on the same page. Therefore, all the impacts what the coaches have to the team, includes similar content regardless of who the player is in contact within the coaching staff.

Reflecting on my reaction to my mistake I made on Sunday when I forgot one part of the practice while I was explaining it, I was thinking about was my actions after the mistake appropriate. Now when coming back to the situation, it was a practical example of our values as a team. Reflecting through the whole season, our tolerance and acceptance towards mistakes has been developing. In the beginning of the season, according to the players, many of them had feelings of fear and nervousness towards mistakes. I think in situations as above, the development can be seen, the team knows that we can manage the possible mistakes or problems by trusting each other and believing to our group. The emphasis is more on the learning from the mistake, rather than focusing on that happened.

For the future development in the theme of enhancing the team culture, one considerable factor is to investigate the working with the external stakeholders. It is suggested that management of the external stakeholders' perceptions can have a major influence on the coaches' ability to maintain the fostering of the team culture. The stakeholders can have a major influence on the team's culture as they are affected by the team's success. (Cruickshank & Collins 2012, 350-351.)

During the weeks of reflecting the work with our team, I have noticed that in my work environment the mindset and nature of the director's and club owners has a direct influence on the well-being of the players and to the atmosphere of the team. Aspects such as are salaries paid on time, are the apartments in condition or are there enough hockey equipment for everybody are in hands of the stakeholders. Referring to the weekly analysis above the reactivity in the Italian culture can be felt on this matter as well. Upsetting results in the games can cause concerns that all the club's responsibilities are not fulfilled. Therefore, it causes distractions for the coach, and for the players as the focus from the agreed values and beliefs are interrupted with the external factors. As noted in the daily entries, for example the situations on Monday and Saturday, where the stakeholders outside of the team are affected, causes immediate impacts to the team. At least, our coaching staff did a respectable job on keeping the possible negative external impacts away from the players.

As stated on the chapter above, the stakeholders can have an influence on the culture of the team. Therefore, it is beneficial for the coach to have considerations or a plan on how to react if the external stakeholders are having a too significant impact on the team. The approach needs to be planned carefully, because it is important to remember that the stakeholders can define the future of the coach and of the team how he feels and thinks. Consequently, in the solution it is smart to take also the stakeholders' point of view into consideration but consider mainly on how to help the athletes and the team in most efficient ways.

#### 4.4 Observation week 4 – Creating an understanding of my actions in interaction situations

Starting from this week the development focus is on interaction skills. During the first week of this development focus I want to have an overall picture of my actions in different interaction situations. For example, how to be clear and effective when giving and receiving information with overall reflecting on the interaction situations.

30.1.2024 Tuesday

First day of the week after day off. We had agreed that we are leading the practice with the other assistant coach. We concluded with the coaches that I will assist the other coach on the practice, and he will take the lead, so before the ice we went through the practice. I had some trouble to understand all the key points of the practices. I felt that for him everything was clear, and he was explaining it kind of to himself, so I was little bit lacking the full understanding of the ice practice.

During the day I was putting more focus on how I interact, behave, speak etc. I tried to listen and talk clearly with the other assistant as now we did not have the head coach there with us, I think I was there for him and supported him, but also when we were going through the practice I should have said at the end that I did not get all the main points. I think that today I did well on keeping some of my thoughts as my own and bringing up points which could be helpful for the team.

31.1.2024 Wednesday

On Wednesday, we had some players out from the lineup because of some minor injuries, so we needed to get some junior players in order to get a good practice as we play already on Friday. So, on the morning I was confirming that are there enough players coming as we agreed before. We agreed with the coaches that I will call to the players and confirm. During the moment, I thought that these should be done already before than couple hours before the practice. So, actually one player what we have been using during the season was actually on the way to the junior national team, so he was not available. The head coach had planned a team practice with twenty players, so it was important to get the right amount, and I had to get the player. All this was just lack of clear communication between groups, and of course it is not the appropriate way to contact the players to come to the practice just before it starts. Luckily, one of our injured players was already capable of practicing with red shirt to fill the eighth defenseman's spot.

During the day, I felt a little bit frustrated to take care of the situation with the players because I knew that this could have been easily avoided, but I am proud that during the interaction situations I was able to remain calm and positive which is important. I think overall the coaches' mood or

situation cannot be seen on the communication situations because usually it is not the players thing in any way to know that how was guilty to what.

1.2.2024 Thursday

Today was the last practice before the first game of the week. During the morning, we had a talk with the coaches. We were speaking about the overall mood of the team and the quality of practicing. The head coach pointed out that the mood what we have had now does not correlate to the quality of practicing. I noticed that I was a little bit annoyed when the other assistant coach started to compare on his previous experiences with an experienced team. His reasoning behind was lacking as he said that the players are not interested to practice during the long week before the game, specifically when the season is coming to end. Even though I was annoyed, I did not take part to the conversation because I had a feeling that also the head coach was not happy with it. The only thing for me was the lack of reasoning behind that why in our team this happens, and if there is something what the coaches could do to it. We continued the talk that we will see in the upcoming games could we see the things what we have practiced.

I was really listened when I said that I think with this team there is a choice available, either we let go from the practicing and accept that sometimes the practices can be not so perfect. Then we would trust to the atmosphere what we coaches have been able to create so far. Or then the other choice would be to tighten the rope and start really demanding all the trivial things on the practices, but then we should accept that it could have an effect to the atmosphere. We agreed that we need to trust to the way we started after new year and trust the players.

This day was helpful for me as with the long discussion with the coaches I had to put energy to feel the mood in the conversation and figure out the appropriate way to bring my thoughts.

2.2.2024 Friday

On Friday we had a game against Klagenfurt, which is currently the best team in our league. Before the morning ice I had long talks with the players, we were discussing that now the overall atmosphere inside the team is good. On the discussion the players noticed that now we are less distracted to the things such as what people, media, or the management talks. We are now just focused on our thing, and I felt good to hear that as we are getting more near the playoffs.

I was discussing the pre-game morning ices with some key players who usually has the most opinions. I said that now we discuss about the ice practices what we have had during the segment after new year, and so far, it seems that the setup of the Ices (2-3 drills + small area game, 15-20 minutes long) is something they are really satisfied on. They also noted that the atmosphere on the

ices has been developing throughout the weeks. They expressed that now it can be felt that the morning ice is for them as they have room to make mistakes and to have fun, but still having the demand level high enough. I was trying to listen carefully what they say and not to interrupt their discussions.

I had a feeling when going to the game on the afternoon that it should be inevitable that we start well today and have a good game against a good opponent. Even though, the game itself was ok, the result was 1-7 loss. I was sure when I go down to the locker room it is going to be tough feedback from the management, but I was surprised as we were able to communicate with all the people straightforward. We agreed that the result should not be 1-7 today but still it is true that results like this on home ice on a Friday night are not acceptable.

#### 4.2.2024 Sunday

Game day against Innsbruck away. Today, the game is crucial from the standings point of view. I had a great lesson again in my mind that even though we had pleasant atmosphere with trust and belief on our thing, still the pressure what belongs to professional sports was palpable. On the morning, we were going through the pre scout video with the coaches and when I was telling the main points I could feel the pressure on the coaches also, the usual small talk on the talking was lacking, everybody were really concentrated. We discussed with the head coach that when I go to keep the ice session for the players, I need to be as relaxed and calm as I have been.

On the ice, two of our local players who are the hardest working players on the team came late to the morning ice. This has not happened since the Vienna game. Now there was something with the media why they were late by one minute, but I still agreed with one of our leading local players that I notice them being late, as they did not inform me. So, for the first time I had to really give them negative feedback and for the couple minutes before I whistled, I was trying to think carefully how I do it. I whistled when the players who were late came, and I said that now when we have more freedom how we work here, we still have some responsibility, not towards me but towards every other player. I continued by saying that the morning ices starts every time 10:00 not later or before, and if there is something to inform you need to let me know. I finished positively by saying a joke about one player still tying his skates, and then I continued with the practice. For me, this was powerful moment, because I could feel the respect towards me when everybody listened to me silently and agreed what I say.

On the evening, the result was on our side, as we won the game 1-4 and got three points away from the fourth place. It was a last game before the last national team break of the season. I was after the game talking with couple players in the gas station, and they said that they really wanted

to perform good today because of the starting break and the situation on the standings. I said that I could feel that in the morning, by continuing saying that I was surprised that the atmosphere changed that fast, but couple players disagreed. They said that it was more about the concentration and noticing that today is a big game rather than the locker room mood would change.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Weekly analysis

This week's objective was to create an understanding of my actions and communication in the interaction situations during the week. Reflecting the week, I could describe myself to be present, diplomatic, and tactful in the interaction situations. Being present enables me to be diplomatic and tactful. It can be seen during the week, for example when I am referring to my thoughts on the situations. Diplomacy can be noted in the situations when I am respecting the hierarchy of the interactors in different situations. Tactfulness as an interaction skill can be noted in the interactions situations when I am listening and understanding the body language and tone of voice of the interactors, and therefore I can respond in appropriate ways.

Being able to interpret and observe other moods and emotions helps to understand what the athletes' needs are and helps to acquire information on the possible behaviors and reactions of the athletes. Perceiving the emotions gives information to help the decision-making of a coach. Having an understanding of how the perceived emotions affect the athletes, helps to create ideal conditions for performing in coaching. (Chan & Mallett 2011, 319-322.)

I consider myself skillful in recognizing the context, direction, feeling, and the overall nature of the interaction situations. These skills make the use of emotional intelligence possible. I approach the interaction situations in emotionally intelligent way, but I have to be more efficient on how to benefit from the ability to perceive the emotions and feelings of the team and individuals. For example, if I see a player having angry or sad emotions, only the perceiving of the emotion does not help the situation. Now, I feel that I can manage my own emotions better in relation to having an influence on others' emotions. Therefore, a way to solve this kind of situations, I could show my own example and lead the situation by managing my own emotions. Nevertheless, the better I understand the athletes also as a person, the easier it is to be effective in the decision making considering how to influence the athlete.

A field of development for me is the expression of the disagreement. To be better on it I need to remember that disagreement is not a bad case. I need to remind myself that it is an opportunity to learn. The nature of my mindset also affects the interaction situation as it sets a frame for the subject of the communication and therefore direct the use of different methods of interacting.

I found myself too often not expressing my thought or ideas if I feel that it would create an uncomfortable situation. Reflecting the situations, I noted that sometimes I can have too much respect towards the other people in the team, even though the expression of my thoughts does not necessarily indicate my respect towards other people. A model, what could be developing me in this field is the concept of growth mindset. Growth mindset revolves around the belief that people's characteristics such as abilities and intelligence can be developed with emphasis on the constant learning and improvement. On the contrary, fixed mindset is believing that the characteristics of a person cannot be changed. (Dweck, 2017.)

There is indications of growth or fixed mindset in effective and ineffective interactions. Fixed mindset can have influence on the interacting being not effective. Instead, growth mindset can have positive effect on to the effectiveness of the interaction. The growth mindset can help on changing the interaction from ineffective to effective. (Campbell 2019, 49.) These findings underline the value of the interaction skills, but also the effect of the mindset to the interacting. Therefore, the nurturing of my mindset is important from the point of view of development of the interaction skills.

By following the concept of the growth mindset, my doubts for the people's reactions and emotions could be turned down, as I could concentrate on the learning and development of myself and therefore the development of the coaching staff and the whole team on the situations like on the beginning of the week. Nevertheless, I need to understand that I presumably cannot change the mindset of the other people in one interaction situation. Also, my approach towards the disagreement situations could be different, as I feel that if I say something I am only arguing against the other person, even though the primary goal for both in the interaction situation is probably to develop the functioning of the hockey team. This has happened specifically when interacting with the coaching staff.

An approach for the theme is to assess my level of argumentation skills, which are a part of cases of disagreeing. The confrontations can be approached in different way. During the weekly diary entries, I point out that I disagree or think differently with somebody, but I overlook the questioning of the other counterpart. By asking clarificative questions or questions from a different perspective, I might find a way to express my thoughts in appropriate ways and expand my understanding and thinking concurrently.

#### **4.5 Observation week 5 – Expanding and developing my communication skills**

During this week, I continue with the development theme of communication. I want to concentrate that I can express myself in more versatile ways, specifically in the situations if the interaction situation is not positive or I do not agree on something.

6.2.2024 Tuesday

This day was given free for all the players, because of the national team break. The break will last for the whole week as we will have our next game in a week from this day. Nevertheless, we went to the ice rink with the head coach to prepare statistics for him to help in the board meeting on the next day. I was counting all the averages from the time this team has played in this league, and then compared it to our averages from these twelve games after the coaching change. Point per game, goals scored and conceded were the main numbers which we were counting. From our behalf the stats looked good as with this form, we would have been third in season 21-22 and fifth in 22-23. I had a feeling that the way we were reflecting the season on the same time as I was doing the stats, was preparing, and helping the head coach.

I noticed that in an occasion like this that there is no others and no pressure from the games or some other distractions, I was accidentally taking the lead in the discussion as the head coach was more listening when I was talking. It felt that the hierarchy in the interaction situation was different as we were now more together, but as I was leading the situation. I was feeling confident when giving my opinions from individual players and why some of the stats look like those looks. It was a good moment for me to notice how significant impact the hierarchy in the interacting situation can have.

7.2.2024 Wednesday

Today, my main job is to plan and lead the ice practicing. Most of the players were either with national team or coming later the day to do only an off-ice practice at the ice rink. I was leading the ice session for all the players who were coming in the morning. There was a lack of information because it was hard to get the information how many players were coming to the ice and therefore it made the practice planning tough. Also, it is important to know who exactly are coming because it influences the planning. On the ice we were doing skills, started with puck control, continued with passing and ended up with shooting. We had three players from our own team and there were two players from the junior team, so I could really put effort to the feedback. I feel that it is easier to bring my thoughts for the local and junior players as they are already interested in their own development. With this number of players, I could go to the detail with the feedback. The players were responsible, and I could see the notes from the feedback in the following repetition. I took the approach that I will give only individual feedback, for the whole group together I gave only the instructions how the drills will be done.

After the ice, I had a chat with both young players individually as they were first time with the senior team. I was thinking it could be appropriate to close the practice with the chat for them and make

them feel important. In the interaction situation, we were sitting on the knee side to side, so the situation was more that we were discussing together than that I would ask him questions or give feedback. That was a good move because they opened up nicely how they felt.

#### 8.2.2024 Thursday

Plan for this day is that we continue to concentrate on the skill practicing. For today, we had already a little bit more players, but still we are missing the national team players, and a couple are injured. On the ice, we are dividing the forwards and defensemen to do position specific drills. However, when I got to the rink, I was told that I needed to keep a skating session for two players who have upper body injury. It was a challenge, because leading skating sessions is something where I feel little bit uncomfortable, because that is an area of skill development where I have most room to develop. In addition to that the players are already experienced guys and our star players. I wanted to talk with them before the ice to ask do they have any wishes what kind of practicing they would want to do, and the answer was what I was imagining of; "surprise us." So, on the ice we started with basic edge work, and after that we went through some turns, and some crossover skating.

I was thinking that I will try to bring all my excitement towards the practicing and show vulnerability to the players. Also, from the communicating point of view I had a plan to take more an approach where I just ask specific questions and encourage them. I think the plan worked and affected the players because I felt more that we are doing the session together instead of I was on charge alone. Also, I could feel that the players were really engaged, maybe because the drills were new for them, but I believe the way I was interacting had an impact also. Overall, I felt really good after the session, and it was nice to hear positive feedback from the players.

#### 9.2.2024 Friday

Today, I went to the rink again a little bit later than usually, just because the head coach is keeping one-on-one meetings with each player, so I do not have so many things to do now on the national team break. On the ice, we had similar amount as yesterday. On the ice I was leading the defensemen- part of the practice for the whole time. We did simple things, worked on breakouts, and then started shooting from the blue line. I was not feeling the best on the ice because the context is something where I felt it is not possible to succeed. The drills were all without opponent and just aiming for the repetition. With these exact players their motivation for this moment can be low, as tomorrow will be a day off during the break. Ice session went fast but the level of doing was not high. I really felt on the ice also the context of coaching. I was thinking that "normally" I would stop

the practice, give feedback, demand more and then continue. But now I knew that this is not so relevant for the team's performance what we do now, only that we do the less "damage" as we can.

11.2.2024 Sunday

For today, the main objective is to get a full team practice after and start to prepare for the game on Tuesday. Our ice session took place in the outside rink, which caused some unnecessary negativity on the team. My objective was to lead the discussions away from the ice issue and try to discuss the decided approach for the upcoming game. I used the idea of trying to affect one individual at the time rather than a larger group.

During the morning, I was not with the coaches so much, I was going all over the locker room area and lounge, going through the players one by one or groups of two or three. I started the discussion by asking them about their free day, and then continued by just asking them questions, in a way that with the questions I lead the discussion to the way I wanted. I was not saying anything, I just reacted for their sayings, so it was more asking and listening.

5<sup>th</sup> Weekly analysis

During this week, the aim was to continue the development of the interaction skills, with a focus on my actions in a more negative or a case of disagreeing interaction situations. From the diary entries, I found ideas which can develop the interacting skills. In general, I noticed that I try to approach the upcoming interaction situations from an appropriate perspective accordingly. Therefore, the objectives of the week were matched daily as I had the intention to try different techniques in the interaction situations.

On Thursday, I took the learnings from the last week's reflection to practical use on the ice session with the two players. The point I made about asking more questions, was now helping me even though the interaction situation was not specifically negative. It can be used as a way of getting the players more committed and to add personal relateness as they get to reflect themselves what is important to them, for example during the ice practice.

The biggest learning this week came from Tuesday in the meeting with the coaches. I noticed that the setting of the meeting influenced my interacting, as I was feeling confident and influential. It made me to conclude that my status on the team and organization can give me a pre-setting to my head in different interaction situations. Status is characterized to refer the hierarchical position of a person in social groups. The higher the status, the higher power the person has in interactions. Nevertheless, it does not unambiguously determinate the power-setting, as the status can be powerless. (Burgoon & Bacue 2003, 200)

Therefore, an area of skills to develop are in the realm of acquiring power and dominance in the interaction situations. As stated, it helps me to be able to express myself better regardless of the influencing factors, for example the status or age. Also, the comprehensive understanding of how the power of the interaction situation affects the ability of expressing emotions and thoughts is beneficial to master.

Skills to develop are direct eye contact, specifically surveilling, staring at others and the purpose of breaking the eye contact last are ways to acquire power in interacting. Tone of voice, usage of silence and usage of the space, distance and touch are considerable skills to use for affecting the power-relationship in the interaction situations. (Burgoon & Bacue 2003, 200-201.) In next week's reflection, I will implement these skills to practical use.

To apply the skills of influencing the power-relationship in interaction situations to my work as a coach, I need to adjust the use differently depending on am I interacting with colleagues, players, or external stakeholders. For example, if I want to have a flowing conversation with a player, I can shape the environment that we are with the player towards same direction, in same height and use the verbal skills to give the player the feeling of power. On the contrary, the shaping of the environment can work also vice versa, depending on the purpose of the meetings. In the situations, where I am not able to shape the environment, for example if interacting with people higher in the social hierarchy, then the usage of the skills where I can influence is important. To point out for the future, it is necessary to figure out in what kind of situations the conscious acquiring of power and dominance in interacting is necessary and appropriate.

A modified strategic choice model can be used in daily conflict situations. It starts by assessing the nature of the conflict by what kind of consequences the conflict might have. Understanding the individual differences and interpretation of the attributes in the conflict helps to give more information in order to take a step towards the solution and goal generation. Message production is the phase of responding and it consists of various verbal and non-verbal strategies and tactics. In a conflict, at least two persons are part of it, so the model's last phase is the other person's response. (Dillard & Marshall 2003, 519-540) As the week's factor of concentrating was my actions in case of disagreement or negative situations, a clear step-by-step model could be helpful for my development.

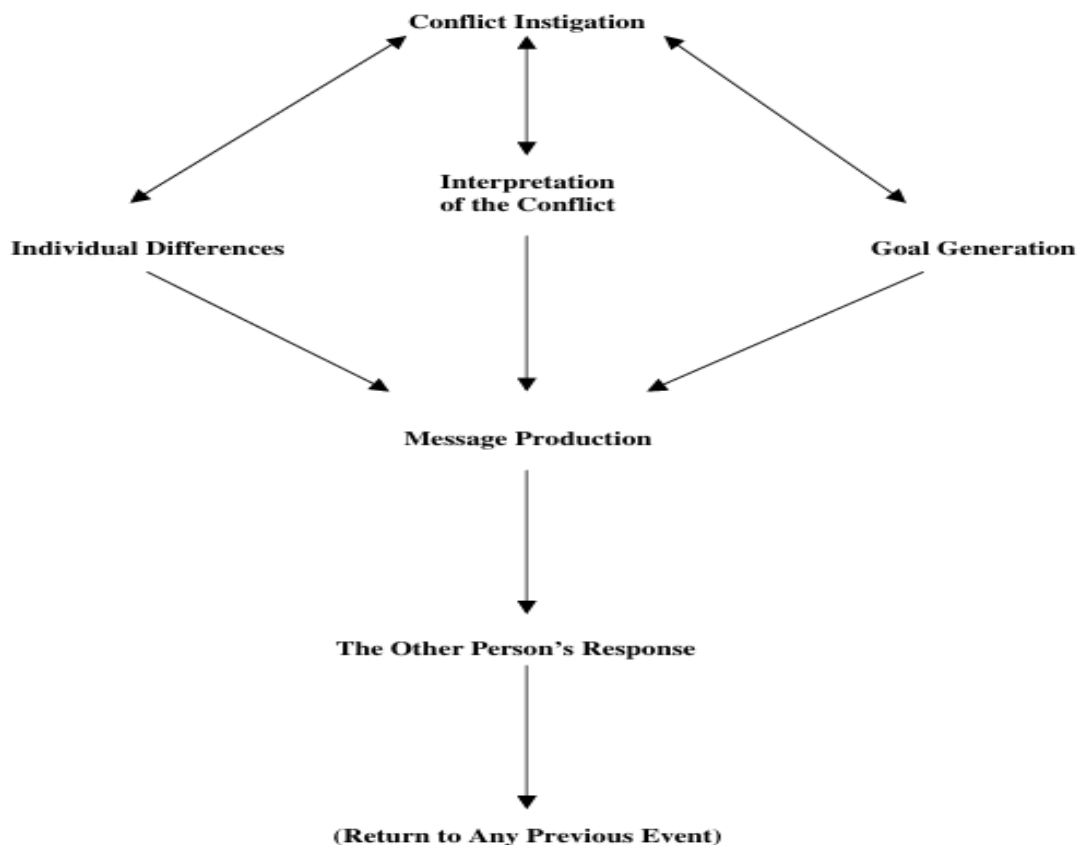


Figure 4. Modified strategic choice model. (adapted from Dillard & Marshall 2003, 520)

The key factor to understand from the model are the steps of a conflict. To implement the steps in the coaching, I need to apply the information to the context where I am coaching. For example, to understand what kind of conflicts there might be inside a sports team. Knowing the athletes as a person helps to figure out the individual differences and interpret the attributes in the conflict. After this, the goal generation and message production will be more effective, the better the knowledge of the context and the athletes is. Also, the overall development in the interaction skills, helps me to solve conflict situations better.

#### **4.6 Observation week 6 – Ways to effect team's & individual's performance by using interaction skills which determinates the dominancy in interacting**

This week, I will put my focus on finding ways to have an impact on the team's or individual's performance by using the developed interaction skills as a tool. I will follow is there noticeable impacts from my actions when communicating with the players. For my development as a coach, I would benefit from a possibility to find if there are some certain preferable interaction skills to use consciously to help the players performing. I will divide the interacting during the week for coach-dominant and athlete-dominant situations.

Monday 12.2.2024

On Monday, the plan was to get good preparing practice for the game tomorrow. I decided to put a goal for myself for these two days, to choose two players from similar positions in the team, and with other I will use different interacting than with other one, Then I will do the same with two more players with different kind of position in the team. During the day, I started the process. With the players, I had a talk before the ice session and then gave feedback during the ice practice according to the plan. Ice practice today was one of the best ones after the new year. We spoke with the head coach that even though the ice was fine effort wise, from this team it does not indicate at all to the next day. Also, we talked with that for this team in this environment two good practice days in a row is the maximum to get the benefits from the practicing.

For "Player 1 and 3" I put effort that the posture, positioning and tone of voice is mild and uplifting. Also, the verbal communicating was more positive and approaching more from the players' strengths point of view. For "Player 2 and Player 4" I tried to keep my position higher, strong posture and serious tone of voice. The verbal communication consisted more of that I suggested ideas and was more leading the discussion.

Tuesday 13.2.2024

Today, my focus on to continue testing the different interacting, and I will focus today that with "Player 1 & 3" I will be only questioning and listening and with "Player 2 & 4" I am suggesting and leading the communicating. I will concentrate on these on the morning, because today is a gameday home against Bolzano, which is the biggest game for this region and for our club. We have had two good practice days behind us so today in the morning it was all about getting ready for the evening. For me, the focus task-wise was on the pre-game skate and I decided to bring one new small-area game for the ice session. On the ice I had a feeling that they were surprised how well it worked because first there was some doubts. During the morning, I had the encounters with the players. I noticed that with "Player 1 & 3" their gestures and facial expressions were more compelling and attached to the interacting and they were more unfolding about their thoughts considering on their performances on feelings. With "Player 2 & 4" the conversations were more leaning towards the task-related problem solving and the expressions were skeptical but also determined towards the suggestions what were made in the conversations.

The game was a tough one. We lost a four-goal lead and lost in the overtime. Reality is that we could have lost it on the regular time already and we were fortunate to have a four-goal lead overall. After the game we discussed in the coaches' room that big picture is still staying the same, but the way of losing is causing now bigger negativity than more "tight "result. After the game, one

player came to say that he needs some help and attention going through his tough times, what is a good sign of the environment of the team.

Thursday 15.2.2024

Today's objective is to continue with the plan connected to going through what happened on Tuesday. I will now change the approaches between the players and on today to put focus on the non-verbal interaction skills. For "Player 1 & 3" I will be shaping the interaction situations now in the way that I am more powerful and will lead the interaction, whereas "Player 2 & 4" are given the stronger position on the interacting.

The day's topic gave me a good chance to put the plan to action and gave some good implementation thoughts. We were talking about the last game, which ended in a chaotic situation after loss of the four-goal lead. The "Player 2 & 4" I talked after the practice in a chatty way, I was sitting next to them, in a similar position and height. My gestures and expressions were mild and acceptive. I really noticed the difference, when the players were opening on their feelings, thoughts and opinion, whereas the other two players, we were reflecting more on the perspective from the coaches, and they were expressing the thoughts leaning on the perspective.

Saturday 17.2.2024

My objective is to continue with the plan, and luckily the context of this workday gives me a good topic for the discussion with the players. We are facing in tomorrow's game Graz99ers, which is on the last place of the league and has lost all the possibilities for the playoffs, and therefore has nothing to play for.

The focus will be now on the verbal communication skills, and the setup is like the discussions on Tuesday. For example, the difference between the communication was clear as with "Player 2 & 4" I started by asking, *"what are your thoughts on tomorrow and about Graz?"* and continued by asking clarificative questions depending on their thoughts and feelings. Whereas with the "Player 1 & 3" I started with a statement *"Tomorrow we need to put all in in order to be successful"*. The conversation the continued by them answering and commenting to different statement, but the space for their own reflecting was not so much there.

6<sup>th</sup> Weekly analysis

The way how the coach is interacting with the players has for me surprisingly high influence on players, regardless of the state of mind and the individual differences of the players. The leading conclusion from the week is the use of the interaction skills as a tool for a coach to use as a *"boost"*

for the initiative purpose of, for example, in player meetings. However, while using the different interaction skills to aim for certain outcomes and reactions, the individual needs and differences need to be considered. For example, to apply the learnings from this week in the future, I would not use these ways in the first phases of the season, because at that point there is not enough information about the players. After the coach has a broad understanding of the athletes as a person, then there would be a possibility to use different interaction methods to have a specific effect for the athlete.

When selecting the approach to develop interaction skills for the week, I was doubting that is the way of applying the two different approaches appropriate to do in my working environment. I came to the conclusion that for the players, this way of working as I am changing purposefully the interaction between the days was not probably the appropriate way to work. It might have been not the most beneficial for the performance. I still think that for developing the interaction skills which were the initial developmental target, the approach used was advantageous. I wanted to focus on doing it as gently as possible. Also, the purpose of the interaction situations was not harmful for the players, only the approach was changing. I think that I succeeded in keeping the interacting casual, and still having the aimed purpose.

The effects of my interacting for the players were not measurable, and therefore the goal of having a positive effect is hard to assess being successful. However, from the athletes' reactions I could draw some conclusions and learnings. The interaction skills which enhance the athlete's dominance helps in situation where the athlete should open his thoughts, feelings, and ideas. The actions what I used in those situations during the week seemed to have a positive impact. To highlight something or to show importance and significance, methods which support the coach's dominance in the interaction are useful. In the future, if I use an approach like this week, I need to create a questionnaire or use some existing assessing methods to assess the effects of the approach.

Coach-athlete relationship is a situation where the coach's and athlete's cognitions, feelings, and behaviors are in relation. It aims to achieve excellence in personal growth and the excellence in competence for the athlete and the coach. A positive coach-athlete relationship has positive effect to the athlete outcomes. (Jowett & Poczwardowski 2007, 4.) The nature of the coach-athlete relationship has its influence on the effectiveness of my approach this week. Vice versa, I think the more competent the coach is in interaction skills, it is positively impacting the development of a coach-athlete relationship.

For psychosocial development of athletes and coaches, the impact of the coach-athlete relationship is critical. Developing the relationship help to develop purposeful environment. To achieve the goals what the coaches and athletes have set, the development of the relationship is essential.

(Shanmugan & Jowett 2016, 235.) Consequently, I noticed that it was different to use the interaction skills depending on what kind of relationship I had with the athlete. It was important to notice that the coach-athlete relationship gives a starting point for the use of what kind of interaction skills are relevant to use. Also, the conscious aim to have a certain effect using certain interacting most likely has its effects to the coach-athlete relationship.

A skill what I realized to be crucial in the interacting situations is listening. Specifically, in the situations where I tried to give the player the lead role and to open his feelings and emotions in the interaction. Therefore, the ability to ask appropriate questions was dependent on how well I was able to listen to the athlete and recognize the main information. The right kind of questions are important to keep the interaction flowing and to direct it towards the goals of the interaction situation. On the contrary, when I was having the more dominant position in the interacting, the listening and questioning skills were not so essential, as the focus was not so much on what the athlete is saying.

Asking open-ended questions, giving cues of interest, use of silence, observing body language cues while listening, giving signals of listening, avoiding interruptions, and being able to disagree are all valid skills to develop the competence in the communicating (Metts & Grohskopf 2003, 390). These skills are valid to develop to be more effective in achieving the wanted results in the interaction situations. For the future, the development of the skills has significant effect when coaching younger athletes. From my previous experiences the flow in the interaction situations with younger athletes is not as smooth as with adults. Overall, these skills help to facilitate the discussions whenever possible.

The week of reflection around the theme gave me an idea of expanding the development of interaction skills also to the athletes in the future coaching processes. As the three weeks of reflection has shown the importance of the skills, I believe that the impact can be multiplied if also the players are included in the development. However, the coach needs to have a broad and deep understanding of the interaction skills to apply those for the coaching process most effectively, and to focus on the most relevant interaction skills according to the coaching context.

#### **4.7 Observation week 7 – Self-leadership skills – understanding of my strengths and weaknesses**

As the last two weeks of observing are starting, I will put my focus on the development aspect of self-leadership skills. The last full week of regular season is starting, and then it is time for the most important part of the season, the play-offs. Fostering the self-leadership skills can have a positive impact on my work when it matters the most. This week, I reflect on my current level in self-

leadership skills, according to the competencies and skills needed. The goal is to find effective tools and implications to use now and, in the future, to be able to coach effectively.

Monday 19.2.2024

Today the objective is to do the analysis of yesterday's game and start to prepare for the next game on Wednesday. Already on the first task, I made a deal with myself that I can get the morning coffee after I have done the first part of the analysis. I noticed that I was eager to complete the work assignment with a good motivation.

I came back to the rink in afternoon when there is not so many people at the rink. When I was starting the process of the pre-scout in the afternoon, I put earphones on and put music, took advantage of the peaceful environment to avoid any distractions during the work. It was a great usage of harnessing the work environment, as it was much easier to focus to the demanding work task than in the morning.

Wednesday 21.2.2024

Today we will have our last away game of the regular season in the city of Feldkirch in Austria. I will reflect on my actions during the game day. I have noticed during the season that it is crucial to optimize the energy and concentration levels during the game day. Of course, the levels need to be at highest in the morning and the time when the game starts. The workload is optimized between the coaching staff in a way that during the game day I can come to the rink in the mornings whatever time I want, because I have the most work before the game days and to ensure the maximum level of energy as I will be in charge of the ice practice.

During the trip, I took the chance to rest as we had the pre-game meeting already on the morning. I wanted to make sure that when we get to Feldkirch I am fully rested. Arriving in Feldkirch, I went to run to raise my energy levels and to be sure I am concentrated when the game starts. These actions definitely help me to be on my best and follows certain self-leadership skills. However, I could find more versatile ways to use self-leadership skills.

Friday 23.2.2024

Today, we had our last game of the regular season against Red Bull Salzburg. I came to the rink full of confidence and excitement, I have felt during the week, that only being more aware of the self-leadership helps me being more aware and do my work well.

I started the morning watching the pre-game skate of the opponent, and I tried to acquire information about their line-up, because for them the game did not matter so much, but for us it is the

most important game so far. However, the evening gave me a good chance to test my usage of self-leadership skills from the game day perspective. The game was delayed by two hours, because the referees were caught by a snowstorm, and at the same time it was confirmed that the other game which result has is affecting our position, was cancelled and the team above us was rewarded a 5-0 victory. It was tough to find motivation and to optimize the energy levels towards the game. Afterwards, it can be said that my approach was inspired by the growth mindset, I knew that I cannot change what happened, but I could influence how I will react to it. That is why, I was trying to pass on the mindset to others as we could still take the most out of the game against a top team in the league before the playoffs begins.

After the game, the work to prepare for the play-off series against HK Olympia Ljubljana started. We worked until three o'clock to the night, I had really put all the grit what I had to accomplish my goal, which was to do the best scouting report possible for the coaches and players. In my head, I was setting small goals, that I could feel the progress during the work.

Sunday 25.2.2024

Today is the start of the pre-playoff series and first home game. For these games, the coaching staff has put effort to get everything out of everyone, and for me it gives the opportunity to use the self-leadership skills when the environment is optimized for the performing. However, I need to have an understanding what is efficient for me, to come early on the rink or later? Have a coffee, or no? Have discussion with people or to be more in my own peace to get ready for the ice practice? Even though, it was a start of the playoffs, I wanted to keep the morning ice practice similar as before and implement our team values, being active and positive. However, before the ice practice I found myself imagining on the situations on the ice and on the evening, what was new. Maybe, it could be my unconscious way to handle the upcoming big event and prepare for it.

7<sup>th</sup> Weekly analysis

The goal for this observation week, was to create a clear understanding of my current strengths and weaknesses in self-leadership skills. Reflecting on the diary entries, my strengths are in my self-awareness. I am conscious of what kind of actions I need to make to prepare myself for the games, for example on the game days the optimizing of the energy levels by going to run before the games.

The daily reflecting on the self-leadership skills provided increased ideas and thoughts considering on how I can get an advantage of the usage of the skills in the future. For example, I can use the methods to optimize my energy levels wherever I work. I know that I need physical exercising to get energy and I need certain type of working environment to boost my concentration. I can

implement these ideas to the coaching processes in the future, to guide athletes to find ways to develop their self-leadership skills and help them to become more aware of themselves.

Personality traits reason person's actions in different situations, and a person with high conscientiousness are efficient self-leaders. Knowing the personal strengths and weaknesses helps to understand the efficient working habits. Values, talents, and interests gives the reason to work on something and gives information on how to utilize all the chances to succeed. (PositivePsychology.com 2020.) I have a strong understanding of myself on all these aspects of self-awareness and self-knowledge. These are fundamentals and gives a foundation for the usage of the self-leadership skills. In the future, it is important to enhance these skills even further and reflect my actions and decisions constantly. Even though, I consider myself to be aware of my strengths and weaknesses, there is room to expand my self-knowledge and self-awareness further by experimenting new methods to enhance my working. So far, the actions, for example the sleeping on the bus and going for a run before the games are learned behaviors.

Other clear strength of mine is the harnessing of the work environment. Utilization of the work-and living environment can give support for achieving goals. A person can get benefit from the social, organizational, community, political and physical environment where one's living. (PositivePsychology.com, 2020.) During the week, I was shaping the environment to be more suitable for myself to work. Deciding where and when to work to avoid distractions and procrastination is an effective way to help me succeed. However, I could use even more of the people in my work environment, to give me new ideas and approaches, specifically if the work assignments are considering the tactical aspects of the game where there are no absolute right answers.

To develop, I need to put effort to amplify my self-leadership skills. Planning and goal setting is an aspect of development. Increasing my competence in these skills helps me to accomplish my goals possibly more efficiently and pleasantly. Also, I can expand my competence in the area of self-leadership techniques, such as self-coaching and the imagery training. An aspect to consider for my development is to create ways to use self-leadership skills being not so dependent on the work environment, because during the reflecting week, many of my actions are too affected to the work environment. For example, the imagery training and self-coaching can be effective ways to solve this.

For the goal setting and planning the use of SMART goals is beneficial, the challenge for me is to apply the framework for my individual goals and to apply it to my daily work assignments. SMART framework gives a starting point for effective goal setting. It suggests the goals to be designed as specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based. Implementing reflection on the process has a beneficial impact. (Day & Tosey 2011, 4-5.)

A model of imagery training to use for implications in the future consists of four elements. Sport situation, imagery type, imagery ability, and outcome create a framework which can be implemented to sports. Motivational type of imagery modifies cognitions and effects thoughts and beliefs. (Martin, Moritz & Hall 1999, 248-250.) To use the model for the development of a coach, the motivational type of imagery can have positive impacts. Its outcomes aim to direct behavior, coping, feelings, stress, and arousal to positive direction (Martin et.al. 1999, 250).

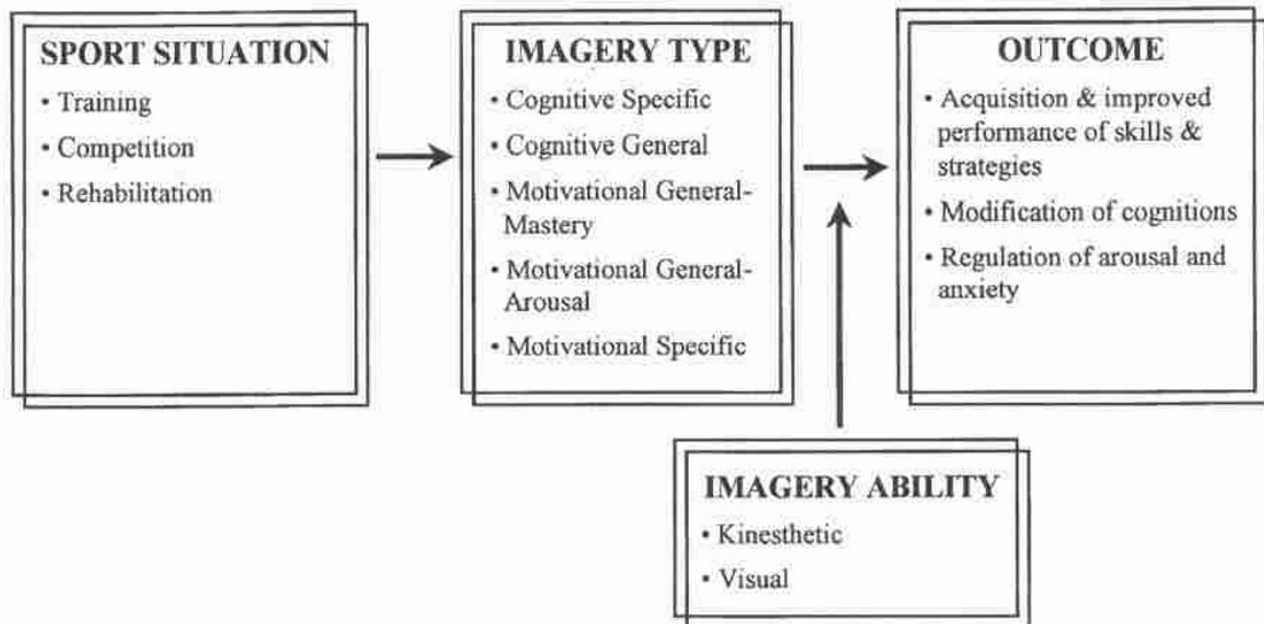


Figure 5. Model of imagery training in sport (adapted from Martin et.al. 1999, 248)

Overall, I found myself multiple times putting lots of effort ensuring that I can bring my energy fully for the team and the work assignments. That shows that the motivation towards my role and work is intrinsic, and I act value orientally as I want all the time to be able to develop myself to become better in my work as a coach. For next week, I will create SMART goals from my work assignments, to practice the goal setting and to gain the benefits of effective goal setting. I will implement the self-coaching techniques and imagery training to my daily work assignments.

#### **4.8 Observation week 8 – Emphasizing the usage of goal setting & imagery training to develop my self-leadership skills**

I will continue to develop my self-leadership skills by concentrating on the development of planning and goal setting. I selected these skills as the last week's reflection indicated a development need on these aspects. As the long-term planning is not relevant during the one week of reflecting, I will concentrate setting smaller goals to shape those to be effective and relevant. To amplify my skills, I

will implement self-coaching and imagery training in my daily work assignments. I will reflect the use of these aspects and strive to implement those effectively for the coach's job.

Tuesday 27.2.2024

Starting from today, I will implement goals for each day according to the SMART principles to develop the goal setting skills. For the team, the main objective is to be prepared to play in the evening. As a coach, I need to make that possible and help the players to achieve it. Consequently, my goal for today is: Make the players enabled to be prepared in the evening. It is specific because the goal does not take into consideration are the players ready, it is about are they given the opportunity to be ready. It is measurable by assessing have I done the listed assignments in high level. It is achievable, as I have been provided the relevant equipment, for example, computer, skates to be on the ice, and whistle to start the ice practice. It is relevant because the players need to have appropriate resources in order to be ready. It is time-bound, as the due time is in the evening.

The goal setting for the regular workday was interesting. I noticed that I was approaching my work assignments more systematically and the reason for the assignments and therefore the decision making during the day was clearer and meaningful. The setup of the ice practice in the morning was different than usual, now the ice practice was mandatory for the whole team. I wanted to follow the goal of the day, and we planned the ice together with the leadership group following the regular principles of the ice practices, but the players were able have their impact on the specific drills on the ice practice.

Thursday 29.2.2024

Today is the decisive third game of the pre-playoff series. The goal for today is that I will implement imagery training to prepare myself to be ready for my work assignments. There is significant mental pressure for this day. By winning the game, the team will continue the season in quarterfinals. By losing the game, our season is over, and it would end to a huge disappointment. Therefore, for today as the pressure is high, the imagery training can be helpful for me to succeed in my work assignments.

I decided to do the imagery training once in the morning, and once in the afternoon before the game. I tried to follow the model presented in the previous chapter in the training. In the morning, I came to the rink an hour before the ice practice and went to find myself a place where I can be alone. I started to imagine my actions on the ice practice. I was imagining myself fostering the positive environment on the ice and preparing my reactions to surprising or demanding situations. In the afternoon, I went to the same place, but now I was imagining the emotions and feelings before, during, and after the game. I approached the imaginary training only from the positive perspective.

After the first session in the morning, I did not notice any crucial changes in my actions on the ice. However, the most interesting effect was that during the ice practice I had a feeling that I have done this already before, and I felt a little bit more peaceful than usually. The second session in the afternoon was different. Going through the emotions and feelings was interesting and I felt it giving me extra motivation for the evening. During the game at the video room, I was more alert and concentrated than usual. Also, I noticed that the session raised feeling of determination and responsibility. Those feelings pointed how important it is that the work has to be done well before those kinds of emotions can be possible to have.

Friday 1.3.2024

Our season continues after the win on Wednesday. The purpose of this day is only about preparing our team ready for the upcoming playoff series against Fehervar AV19. My objective is to create all the needed data and analysis ready for tomorrow's pre-series meeting. The work is very comprehensive, so to help myself, I will do goal setting and apply the other self-leadership skills to have an effective and successful workday. The goal setting had positive influence on my working earlier this week, so it was inevitable to continue with it today.

I came to the rink and started by writing my goal for today to the whiteboard. The goal was: Collect all the needed information and summarize it until the evening. Again, I used on the goal setting the SMART principle. It was already easier to create the goals applying the principles and I started thinking through the principles unconsciously. As the work assignment is so broad, I added small milestones that I could feel the progression and get extra motivation. Last week's reflection pointed out my strengths in self-awareness and shaping the work environment to support my effectiveness at work. I closed the coaches' room door and took an extra chair to the room to add my comfort to work there.

Again, I came to the same conclusion that the goal setting helps me to add meaningfulness and to be more systematic. The small milestones made the working more pleasant, as I could feel the progress and get enjoyment when reaching the smaller goals.

Sunday 3.3.2024

The quarterfinals start today. I will continue to develop the use of imagery training. I will use the motivational type of imagery, because on Wednesday I felt that it had a positive effect to my attention span and alertness. Attention span and alertness are important aspects to succeed and develop in my work assignments during the games.

On the hotel room, before the game meeting I went through by imagination the emotional experiences what the game could bring. I imagined the excitement of the crowd and the team just before going to the ice, the feelings just before the puck drop, and all the nervousness what the first quarter final game can cause. Then, when the game was more near, I was imagining more of the work during the game. Being focused all the time, watching different situations as attentively as possible, how to show confidence, and how to recover from an error are examples what I was going through.

After the day, the biggest conclusion from the use of imaginary training is that it helps to be emotionally stable during the competition. I had a feeling that the emotions and thoughts were familiar. Negative thoughts, emotions or actions did not have similar effect as those would have normally. However, I think that choosing the aspect to influence with imagery training is difficult, because it feels impossible to know the possible adaptations in before-hand.

#### 8<sup>th</sup> Weekly analysis

The skills in goal setting developed during the week. The goal was to amplify my self-leadership skills and goal setting is a one core competence to restrain. The week of I can use the developed goal setting skills to help myself to achieve the goals I have set, give motivation, direct my acquisition of knowledge, and to organize my time and energy.

During the week, I used the SMART principles to set goals according to my daily work responsibilities. However, I think that the use of the principles for the small assignments is not so useful, because the process itself falls to be short. It would be beneficial to apply the SMART principles for the coach's long-term goals as well and follow the progress. The use for long-term purposes could be effective for a coach for example, to learn a certain coaching skill or to learn the use of computer program. Still, for the purpose of learning and understanding the principles the short-term use was functional. Overall, selecting the use of goal setting as one of the developmental targets was advantageous.

Monitoring the progress towards the goal, gaining feedback, and acting on it is effective when going through this cycle in short term intervals (Day & Tosey 2011, 7). This fact can be problematic in the use of the SMART principles in goal setting for a coach. Who is giving feedback and monitoring the process objectively for the coach? Considering this, the goal setting could be even more effective when it is done by colleagues or the peers in the coaching staff.

I found the implementation of the goal setting useful and helpful. It influenced my working positively and I will use it in future as well. The SMART principles make the goals feel realistic and achievable. The risen competence in goal setting helps me to use it with the athletes more effectively in the future. Going through the goal setting principles and using those to determine my own goals for

the day gave me broad understanding of the full process and its impacts on the person. Therefore, in the future when I am implementing it with the athletes, it is easier for me to share the experiences and modify the goals with the athletes to fulfill their needs.

From the week's experiences, the usage of imagery skills for the coach is complex. The situations, where the imagery training can be effective are hard to find. However, for me, the most effective implications were the imagery training which aims to have an effect to the feelings, thoughts, coping, self-confidence, and behaviors. After the imagery sessions which aim was in the aspects above, the training effected to my succeeding in the work assignments positively. Specifically, it was easier to approach the upcoming competition and to cope with different emotions and feeling during the competition. Still, I think that the use of the imagery training for coaches needs more research to specify the frame where the use of the imagery is efficient.

Imagery training consists of three factors: imagery type, function, and outcome. Imagery type explains the content of what the imagery is about. Imagery function answers to the reason and purpose. Imagery outcome concludes the results of the imagery. Imagery has been reviewed as a part of psychological skills and it has been found to improve performance. (Cumming & Ramsey 2009, 7.) For a coach, the understanding of this base knowledge about imagery training is crucial to be able to implement it to practical use. Also, it makes the process of creating the imagery training more logical, as the framework explains the steps clearly.

GROW model is a framework for a coach to use in different encounters. it consists of four phases. The first phase is the goal section, and it helps to determinate what the person wants to achieve. Reality section helps to explain the current situation of the athlete compared to the goal. Options section enlightens the actions what the athlete could do towards the goal. Will section define the practical steps towards the goal. (Wilson 2017, 1-4.) I can use this model to help me to clarify the purpose and what I want to achieve in the coaching process with goal setting and imagery training because it visualizes the steps of the process, as in Figure 6. For example, I can use the GROW model to help the athletes to guide the goal setting towards positive and solution-oriented goals. Of course, this framework is useful in other coaching processes as well.



Figure 6. GROW model framework (adapted from Wilson 2017, 4)

## 5 Discussion

For my development as a coach and a person, the experiences and learnings from the 2023-2024 hockey season were precious. The skills required in the work at HC Pustertal were demanding and versatile, as the analysis of the initial situation shows. Nevertheless, the skill development was successful, and it impacted on the workload and increased responsibilities during the season. In this thesis process, the goal was the professional development from the three pre-chosen themes perspective. The process enlightened learning and observations of myself and my skills on the chosen themes. Development was achieved on all three factors. The development was different on each of the three themes. The interaction skills and self-leadership skills taught me a great deal about myself as a person and as a coach and helped to recognize my strengths and weaknesses on the themes. The context showed me the effects of the multicultural coaching environment. It had effects on the two other themes as well. The selected themes were associated with each other multiple times during the process. Consequently, it had great benefits for my professional growth.

It was a captivating journey throughout the reflecting on the diary entries. The reflection through the themes gave me lots of ideas during the coaching process and helped me to connect the theoretical knowledge to practical ideas in a daily manner. I believe, that as a byproduct the team and individual players were impacted positively during the process. Nevertheless, this process was mostly connected to myself as a coach and my learning, regardless of the team's development and performance. Therefore, the value of the reflecting and learning in this process is eminent, as presumably I can use and apply the acquired information in coaching in the future.

Working on the multi-cultural environment, in professional sport context were both new aspects of working for me in sports. My understanding of how diverse cultural background can have an impact on the performance in the team sports expanded, as I could see and feel it in the team's chemistry and atmosphere during the year. It is important to have a certain understanding of how different athletes and persons react to different cases in a different way in different hierarchical positions in the team. To get the experience of working in a multicultural setting like this season gave lots of insight into the cross-cultural coaching. In addition to the impacts of the culture to the reactions of the athletes, also the understanding of the culture and its effects to beliefs, values, behaviors, and therefore decision making gives me a great setting for the coaching work in the future.

Selecting the theme of coaching in multicultural environment was relevant and beneficial for my development and learning. The development and learning were helping me to succeed in my first year at abroad and helped me in decision making, and to give reasoning for my decisions. Overall, ice hockey is played around the world, and the future workplaces can take place in abroad as well. Therefore, the increased competence in working in multicultural work environment helps me to be

prepared and add my confidence. Consequently, the risen competence enables me to be more effective coach in the future.

The interaction skills play a major role in the work of a coach. The interaction skills are included in every encounter with the team and the stakeholders. Throughout the season I started to put constantly more emphasis on the interacting, and my competence expanded a lot during the process. The appropriate interacting with the different stakeholders in the team helps in coaching effectively. Additionally, the impact to the coach-athlete relationship and the athletes' outcomes is immense.

My professional development considering the interaction skills was uprising during the weeks of reflection. The daily reflection and thought process what I did on the work was the most beneficial method for my learning because I could see and feel the effects of the use of specific interaction skills. The impacts of the interaction were surprisingly high, and for me it noted how important the enhancing of the skills is for the coaching in the future. Even though, the impacts of different interacting are high, my decision to approach the interaction situations during the week six in the diary entries, could have been done differently. I think the approach where I designedly approach the interaction with certain skills, does not consider the context of the situation enough. The approach has already predetermined consequences which might not serve positively the players or the team.

This process on the development of the interaction skills was substantive. In the future, I can deepen even further my understanding and competence on interacting, but this season and the process acts as a great starting point and experience for future development.

Growth in the use of self-leadership skills gives me options to coach more effectively. During the reflection, my understanding of which self-leadership methods are effective for myself was expanding rapidly. The learning of my strengths and weaknesses in the field of self-leadership skills directs the use of the skills in the future.

I noticed that self-leadership skills can have a significant effect to help the coach to be able to perform in the competition and to help cultivating grit towards the work assignments. However, I think the use could be beneficial in the elite-sport context because there the effects self-leadership skills could be used in a maximal way. There are aspects in elite-sport context, such as mental pressure of the performances of the team. Self-leadership could be effective way to solve those kinds of issues in coaching.

The use of different models and methods according to the weekly developmental themes gave me lots of implication ideas for the future coaching work. The process brought up effective methods to apply the different coaching theories to practical use. The goal setting principles and the GROW model will be used when I am setting goals for myself, and athletes in the future. The broader

models such as the framework for self-leadership, and the decision-making model clarified the fundamentals of the themes and to visualize the application of the theory to practical use.

The process of writing this thesis was eye-opening from the perspective of being able to visualize learning. It is interesting to read afterwards how the learning takes place and what kind of thoughts and feelings lead to certain outcomes. Additionally, the expanded competence to use the written English language can help in the future coaching work.

In addition to the growth in developmental targets in the thesis, also the sport-related competencies were developing throughout the season. During the season I noticed the power of peer learning and reflection. Tactical understanding, teaching skill acquisition, and enhancing the team's culture were all aspects where I see my self developed during the season. I think the chosen development themes in this thesis helps in the overall growth as a coach in multiple aspects.

The significance of this process for my career is moderately high. It enlightened the importance of the selected themes to the coaching process. The competence rise on all three developmental targets. However, I think the biggest effect this thesis process brought up, is the ability to apply the use of the skills to the coaching context. Overall, the context determines the framework for the coaching. The coach needs to be competent enough to apply his skills, such as interaction skills and self-leadership skills to the given context to work in the most efficient way.

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