

**HOW COCHES ESTABLISH TRUST IN TEAM SPORTS?  
-A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF COACHING LEADERSHIP**

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Master's Thesis in Sport and  
Exercise Psychology  
Fall 2017  
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Taru Lintunen for her guidance and support throughout this thesis project. I am thankful for giving me the idea to interview elite coaches. That has provided me an opportunity to learn so much more from this thesis than I could ever imagine.

Special thanks to all the coaches for sharing their stories and providing me with the valuable data that made it possible for me to conduct this thesis.

I am also grateful to Dr. Mary Chasandra and Dr. Montse Ruiz, as well as my fellow students, for their valuable assistance and encouragement in writing the thesis.

Gratitude and love to my friends who have given me support and encouragement during my thesis work. Finally, my deepest appreciation to my parents for always being there for me and for their unquestioned love and support.

## **ABSTRACT**

Havia Tuire, 2017. How coaches establish trust in team sports? A qualitative research on coaching leadership. Master's Thesis in Sport and Exercise Psychology. Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences. University of Jyväskylä. 70p.

There has been a significant amount of research dedicated to understanding the interpersonal relationships in sports from various viewpoints. The current literature identifies the concept of trust and knowing the individuals within team crucial in coaching context. However, there is very limited research on how to foster trust in teams in elite level coaching context, especially in Finland topic is poorly covered. Hence, this study aimed to describe the coaching philosophies and the specific methods used to establish trust in coach-athlete relationship and within team environment of four coaches (1 female, 3 male) in elite level sports in Finland (floorball=1, football=1, ice hockey=1 and ringette=1). The data was collected using a semi-structured interview as the data collection method. Coaching experience of participants ranged from 20 to 45 years. An interpretative thematic analysis with both inductive and deductive reasoning was utilized in the analysis of the data. The data was transcribed and further coded through Atlas.ti software, (version 7.1). The results revealed a comprehensive picture of the factors that describe trust in the whole sport team and the organisation, and which can be linked together under an umbrella of trustful environment. The coaches agreed that the true core of trust is captured in every day coaching actions by supporting individuals, on and off the field, and getting to know them as individuals, as well as involving them in different ways and encouraging them to see mistakes as a part of learning process. In conclusion, this study provided new information regarding practical methods and principles about how to establish trust in coach-athlete relationship and within teams. The findings may be beneficial in coaching education, in teams and on a broader perspective also within individual level of sports. The findings support similar previous research and thus speaks to the worthy pursuit of establishing trust in teams which in turn may benefit not only individual wellbeing and motivation but also team performance outcomes.

Keywords: Trust, communication, team environment, individuals, coach-athlete relationship, feedback, holistic approach

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## APPENDIX

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The leadership styles and the coaching strategies used by coaches have a great effect on the well-being and the performance of their athletes (Jowett, & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, Jowett, & Lavallee, 2007). The role of a coach is demanding. Understandably, there is no denying that a coach's comprehensive knowledge of their respective sport in itself plays a crucial role in the athletes' impressions of their coach (Jowett, 2005). Côté and Gilbert (2009) define that effective coaching encompasses the following components: coaches' knowledge, athletes' outcomes and specific coaching contexts. They also state: "It is important for coaches to continuously develop their interpersonal knowledge base so they can communicate appropriately and effectively with their particular athletes and other people" (p. 310-311). Consequently, respect, empathy, understanding, support, acceptance, liking, honesty, responsiveness, cooperation and positive regard are the basic ingredients that an effective coach-athlete relationship is based upon (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Thus, the dynamic relationship between coach and athlete can be defined as a situation which is influenced and shaped by coaches and athletes' cognitions, behaviours and feelings; and moreover, the interactions between the coach and the athlete (Jowett & Cockerhill, 2002; Jowett & Poczawardowski, 2007). In addition, in team sports both the coach and the team members have conscious and unconscious needs, rules and norms that create and shape the culture inside the group (Rovio, Nikkola, & Salmi, 2009). All these characteristics are related with trustful relationship between the coach and the athletes. The coach-athlete relationship should be studied from various standpoints to deepen understanding about this relationship and strategies to improve the relationship in team sports.

The focus in the research on team sports has largely been on studying coaches in school-based context. Still, only a limited number of studies about trust within a team is available. Sport psychology research has thus far focused on group processes and content of coach-athlete relationship. This literature review serves as a reference point for the remainder of the study. To achieve sufficient level of depth, the literature review focuses on studies related to both coach-athlete relationship and trust research. Hence, the focus of this study is on coaching philosophies and on the specific techniques used to establish trust in coach-athlete relationship and within team environment. The study describes and analyses trust-related experiences of Finnish team sport coaches. The coach-athlete relationship in Finnish elite level team sport coaching is poorly covered in the current research. This study extends

the research on this field by studying team sport coaching in this field. The study particularly focuses on the trust-related experiences of the coaches.

### 1.1. Research on coach-athlete relationship

There has been an expansion in sport coaching research during the last decades. The yearly mean in publications has grown from the 19 publications at early seventies, to 33 per year between the years of 1998-2001 (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004) onwards to at least 70 published research in years 2007-2008 (Rangeon, Gilbert, & Bruner, 2011).

Perhaps the most comprehensive review of the coaching research, conducted by Gilbert & Trudel (2004) identified coaches' behaviours as the main research interest in studies from 1970 to 2001. At first, the dynamics between coach and athlete were largely studied from a leadership perspective. The two earliest and most prominent models of leadership effectiveness in sport, the mediational model of (MM: Smith, Smoll, Curtis and Hunt, 1978; Smith and Smoll, 1989) and the multidimensional model (MML; Chelladurai 1978; Chelladurai and Carron, 1978), were used to study the dynamics involved between coach and athlete, mainly focusing on coaches' actions, behaviours and coaching style. The models had many similarities, but researched was conducted with different participation groups. However, this approach was criticized by many to be limited, since they were leaving out the more profound aspects of athletes'. Afterwards, there has been a significant amount of research dedicated to understanding the interpersonal relationships in sports from various viewpoints. For example, various versions of The Leadership Scale For Sports (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) have been used to study athletes' preference for specific leader behaviour, athlete's perceptions of their coaches' behaviour, and coaches' perceptions of their own behaviour.

During the last few decades, and especially during the last fifteen years the interpersonal relationships have been widely studied in sport psychology and exercise research. Several conceptual frameworks underscoring the importance in interdependence were developed. One of the most empirically significant conceptual model was created by Jowett and colleagues (e.g. Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Olympiou, Jowett & Duda., 2008). This model offered a comprehensive analysis on the dynamic coach-athlete relationship, and it is also known as the 3 + 1 Cs model, along with an 11 item

“The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire” (CART-Q; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). The framework is influenced by principles from social exchange theory; closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation. Independently closeness represents the emotional aspect (e.g., trust, like, respect), commitment represents the cognitive relational aspect, complementarity refers to the behavioural-relational aspect and finally, co-orientation concerns the communication (thoughts, knowledge, values and feelings) (Jowett, 2007a; Jowett 2007b; Olympiou, et al., 2008). Henceforth, coach-athlete relationship is described as a situation in which the emotions, thoughts and behaviours of both the coaches and athletes are interconnected.

Overall, there has been a considerable amount of previous academic research concerning the nature of the coach-athlete relationship with the purpose on how to strengthen the relationship and the positive outcomes of the relationship. One recent study (Weinberg, Butt & Culp 2011) carried out with 10 National Collegiate Association (NCAA) head coaches from a variety of sports explored mental toughness attributes from the coaches’ perspective. The study mapped out the different strategies used by the coaches to develop mentally tough athletes. According to the study, the creation of a positive atmosphere was an integral component when building the qualities of mental toughness, such as “confidence” or “persistence”. These attributes of mental toughness were also directly linked to athletes’ performance.

### 1.3. Motivational climate

A coach has a huge possibility to support the motivational climate and the growth of athletes’ motivation. This is highly important, since it is essential for optimal functioning that the athletes have high inner motivation. When an athlete has a high level of inner motivation, she or he is able to stay motivated even when facing obstacles; such as injuries or other setbacks either outside or inside the field (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivated person can become internally motivated if he or she can practice in a favourable motivational atmosphere. However, being extrinsically motivated is not solely a negative issue as it may be an effective way to learn new skills and take on challenges. Indeed, all of us have features of both types of motivation. It is therefore important for a coach to focus on how to effectively apply different coaching methods to motivate athletes with different types of motivation in different situations (Liukkonen, Jaakkola, 2012; Jaakkola & Liukkonen 2006).



Much of the current research supports the importance of the three basic human needs for establishing intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation. Magneu and Vallerand (2003) proposed the “motivational model” to explain the relationships between a coach and an athlete, and to describe how coaches may influence their athletes’ intrinsic motivation and self-determined types of motivation (Figure 1). According to the motivational model, coaches’ personal orientation towards coaching, the context within which they operate, and their perceptions of their athletes’ behaviour and motivation influence their coaching behaviours. In line with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs - autonomy, competence and relatedness - determines athletes’ intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation. In light of these research, it should be expected that when the coach succeeds to nurture these needs of their athletes, it has a beneficial impact on them.

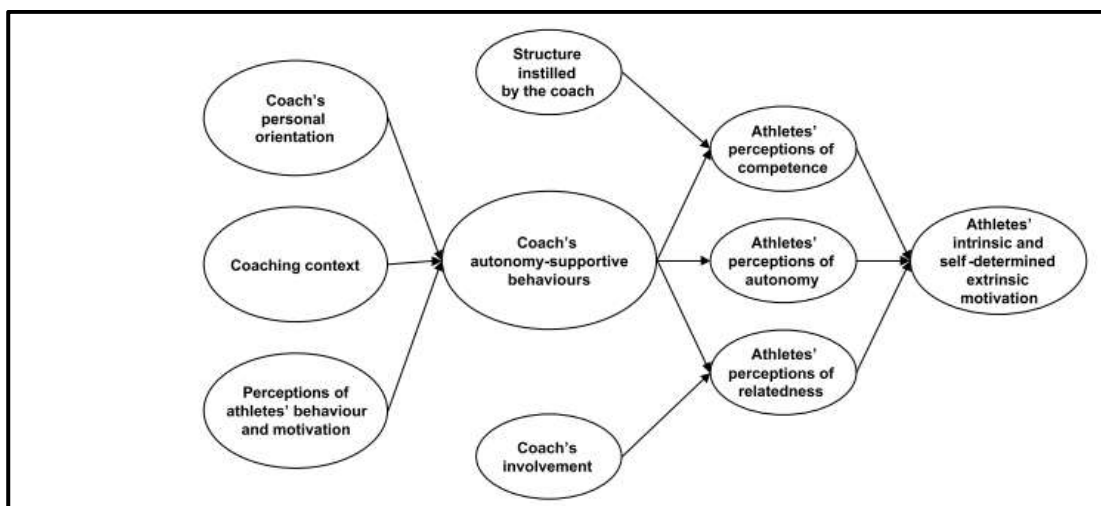


Figure 1. The motivational model of coach-athlete relationship (Magneu and Vallerand, 2003).

Consequently, effective coaches are creating an optimal motivational atmosphere for athletes by using several pedagogical and didactic choices. According to Ryan & Deci (2000), coaches can support athletes’ inner motivation by allowing the athletes to experience competence, autonomy and relatedness in many ways. Research and literature provides several examples regarding these. For instance, Hollebeak and Amorose (2005) used self-determination theory as a framework in a study conducted with both individual and team athletes within college and high school settings (n= 581). They tested whether perceived competence, autonomy and relatedness mediated the relationship between perceived autonomy-supportive coaching and athletes’ motivational orientation; and the results highlight the motivational benefits of autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours. Also, well planned goals are often noticed to establish autonomy, competence and inner motivation (Liukkonen,

2017). In addition, feedback given by coaches has been strongly linked with the motivational environment (Liukkonen, 2017).

Moreover, a task-involving motivational climate where athletes get supportive and positive personal feedback on their effort and improvement are shown to be effective. With respect to The Achievement Goal Theory (AGT), Duda & Balaquer, (2007, 129) listed suggestion of structures and strategies for coaches to foster athletes' task oriented motivation by using the TARGET taxonomy. The model refers to climate features in coaching related to task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation and time. In this context, Liukkonen & Jaakkola (2012) are writing that in an optimal coach-cultivated motivational climate a coach is making everyone feel important, and sees his/her own mistakes in coaching as a part of learning process. Taken together, it should be expected that task goal oriented athletes do not primarily compete against each other, but enjoy learning new skills and as a result they feel good about themselves and become more confident.

For instance, findings of Olympiou et al. (2008) support this notion. The research group investigated the motivational significance and perceptions of the coach athlete relationship of 591 (m=70%, f= 30%) British athletes from various team sports by using The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004) and Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2; Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000). Perceived task-involving coach climate (i.e., important role, co-operative learning, and effort improvement) was found to be associated with athletes' perceptions of feeling close, being committed, and interacting in balance with their coach. They concluded that these elements support the team sports athletes' motivation. On the contrary, ego-involving environment where athletes are punished for their mistakes and treated as rivals instead of equals, has been associated with lower levels of perceived closeness, commitment, and complementarity with the coach (Olympiou et al., 2008).

Moreover, research has shown that the communication and feedback styles of coaches are crucial in creating an optimal and motivational environment. Coaching behaviours and how athletes perceived them have been strongly linked not only with positive but also with various problematic issues. For instance, Vealey et al. (1998) found a relationship between athlete's perceptions of coaches' behaviours and athlete's negative self-concept, emotional/physical exhaustion or even with athlete

burnout. There was a link with athletes' perceptions of their coaches' communication and feedback behaviours and coaching styles. Furthermore, athletes who scored higher levels of burnout perceived that their coaches a) did not give social support b), were lacking empathy c), emphasized winning over the development of athletes d), focused on negative feedback, and e) implemented an autocratic coaching style (Vealey et al. 1998).

However, it can often be difficult for coaches to know what kind of feedback an individual would like to have. Even athletes themselves might not be that self-aware of the fact how they would like to be given the feedback. Therefore, coaches should take time to communicate and learn to know their athletes and their preference of which type of feedback works best for them (Staley & Moore, 2016). Communication is not the only way to find out individual differences. One useful tool to understand the individuals, their preferred leader style and preferred means of communication more, could be for example The Process Communication Model (PCM) developed by Taibi Kahler. Feuersenger and Naef are presenting the model in a book called "If you want them to listen, talk their language." (2011). According to the model, there are six personality types and each of us has an individual personality structure. The names of personality types are self-explanatory: Promoter, harmoniser, thinker, rebel, persister and imaginer. Each type has strengths and weaknesses and no one type is better or worse than other, but each type prefers a specific way of communicating and feedback. With the help of the model a coach can individualize communication and he or she is able to listen and communicate more effectively. The model enhanced through continued research for more than 30 years. It has been used globally in a wide range of fields, also in a connection with astronaut selection in NASA (Feuersenger and Naef, 2011).

Feedback timing is also important: the closer the performance the more positive the feedback should be. When there is need to improve something, enough time should be given to do so, otherwise a negative influence on the performance may occur (Liukkonen & Jaakkola, 2012; Liukkonen, 2017).

#### 1.4. Team environment

"Team members who do not trust their leader act as a broken link in the chain, preventing the snowball effect of trust in the team. Furthermore, high levels of dispersion in members' trust in the leader may reflect disharmony or favoritism and may suggest the absence of a shared reality and, hence, an

increased likelihood of misunderstanding and the subsequent decrease in team trust (Mach & Lvina” (2017, 144).

There is a vast difference between coaching an individual and coaching a team. A team is a combination of different individuals who bring their experiences and personalities with them into the team. Understanding that every person in the team is different and has his/ her own background, and has different ways of receiving information and feedback is essential. Moreover, it is fundamental that the leader knows the individuals and their backgrounds; attitudes, skills, goals and motivations to coach the team to its best potential (Jowett, 2007; Kaski, 2006; Vilkmán, 2016).

Therefore, coaches in team sports should not only focus on coaching the team but put more focus on the individuals of the team (see also Rovio, 2002). In this regard, it is notable that it is not possible to separate the player as a performer from who he/she is as a person. All athletes in team should be valued. Jowett and Poczwardowski (2003) state: “Both performance enhancement as well as psychological wellbeing lie at the heart of the coach-athlete relationship.” As the relationship is characterized by high levels of interdependence, which may result either in positive or negative effects depending on how the situations are experienced by the parties, probably one of the most important thing for a coach is to create an environment where each player has value and worth - whether the player is a starter or non-starter (Becker, 2009). Also, respecting the individuals has been said to increase trust between team members (Mäkipeska & Niemelä, 2005). Coaches should note that respecting and valuing the athletes as a person and valuing the athletic skills the athletes possess are two different things (Packalen, 2015).

Respectively, although managing game results and managing the people are two distinctively different tasks, both are needed to get the best out of a team and its individuals. The fine line between focusing on tactical side of management and communicational leadership and interpersonal relationships within the team is encountered often by many coaches. This happens especially in elite sports where the ultimate goal is to win the games, the coaches may struggle to find enough time to focus on the latter (Rovio et al. 2009). Since interpersonal conflicts or misunderstandings in relationships inside the teams often have an influence on their performance, the positive emotional state of the team could be an important focus area (Rovio et.al, 2009). Players do not have to be the best friends with each other, but a positive atmosphere helps them to work together as a team (Bull

& Shambrook, 2005), in addition, teams with tight social bonds between players often have possibility to reach higher in tight situations (Carron, Hausenblas & Eyes, 2005). Indeed, positive and supportive atmosphere is found to be a cornerstone in the creation of a confident athlete. It has been stated that the athletes with confidence and self-belief simply perform better and are motivated to aim higher and attempt bigger challenges (Weinberg, et al., 2011). Werthner (2009) supports this notion by providing conceptual evidence of the factors leading to Olympic medal performance or achieving personal best. The researcher interviewed 27 Olympic and Paralympic athletes and 30 coaches for the study after 2008 summer Olympics. According to the study, the coach-athlete relationship is a crucial factor when the target is to reach the personal maximum performance, and ultimately to win an Olympic Medal.

#### 1.5. Communication in team environment

Another thing to remember, for any coach, not only in team sports, is that athletes needs changes across the developmental spectrum, and coaches will need to tailor their coaching to fit the needs of an athlete. For instance, elite athletes have different demands than recreational young athletes when talking about the behaviours of the coaches in training, competitions and organizational settings or the coach's knowledge, skills and competencies. (Côté,et.al, 2009). However, being close with the coach is important to everyone; a study conducted with 431 collegiate athletes suggests that athletes across competitive level, age, gender and sport discipline demonstrate more similar than dissimilar needs of being close with their coach (LaVoi, 2007).

Overall, if not attention is paid to individuals and their needs it may be difficult to maintain a high level of communication with each athlete in the team, nor get the team to commit towards the same goal. It is notable that goals of the team are not always the same as the goals of the individual players. For instance, Forsblom et.al (2015) examined how unanimous the players were about the collective outcome goal within their teams (n=18) and it was found that in nearly half of the teams (44%) that participate the study, there was a conflicting opinion about the collective outcome goal. This underscores the importance of communication which should take place often to ensure that goals are understood and comprehended in the same way by everyone. However, it is notable that conflicting opinions are not automatically a negative thing. Rovio et al. (2009) states that conflicting opinions help to grow the feeling of safety inside the group. Conflicts helps team members to see things from another point of view when team members became aware of each other's opinions. Also, Kaski (2006)

points that in a healthy team environment there is a trustful understanding between team members; team is transparent, and no one is judged from having an opposite opinion. In addition, the possible misunderstandings are dealt with openly.

Team can be thought as analogous to an iceberg. Above the surface is conscious and visible behaviour. Below the surface there are often unspoken rules and things (e.g. attitudes, values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings) that drive the behaviours and influence how team members interact and contribute towards common goals. The elements under the surface are often unconscious and hidden from other team members, especially from the team leader. Therefore, one of the important starting points when coaching a team is to discuss about unspoken rules and norms and raise the awareness and appreciation of each other, which would make it easier to commit to common goals (Rovio 2012; Lintunen & Rovio, 2009).

Having a common goal and a safe environment in a team enables trust within the group. (Mäkipeska & Niemelä, 2005). Stepping out to the broader domain, also Stephen Porges, developer of Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011), speaks for the importance of psychological safety among group members and within the group. He claims that positive social behaviour cannot occur unless one feels safe. He also suggests that the behavioural reactions one makes in a group are connected to evolutionary nervous system. In other words, how one reacts is not based on conscious acts, but on automatic responses (Porges, 2011). Theoretically, this notion can be pragmatic from team sport perspective; when we feel safe and connected with others we have more capability to control our reactions, but even minor signals that remind us of negative experiences in the past can trigger the autonomic nervous system's flight or fight responses. This results in making us feel unsafe and to use defensive strategies; either to withdraw or to attack. Although the assumptions in the polyvagal theory in this perspective may be too simplified, the results from Google's study speaks for the importance of investing in the feelings of safety of the group's psychological environment - in the most effective team's psychological safety matters the most (Duhigg, 2016).

The question is how can a coach know each athlete's individual differences and styles and establish a trustful relationship as well as group's psychological environment? To succeed in this, a coach should first be aware his or her communication habits, and secondly, to be able to manage and control

his or her own reactions in these situations (Packalen, 2015). Furthermore, several studies have shown that communication is a key component in coach-athlete relationships (e.g. La Voi, 2007; Rhind & Jowett, 2010) and that it is the most effective way to find out how the other party may respond in different situations. For example, to share knowledge about their goals, values, beliefs or opinions coaches and athletes must communicate with each other (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). In their master's study Koho & Teittinen (2012) explored the impact of performance appraisal or development discussion in Finnish team sport coach-athlete relationship. According to their study, majority of the Finnish professional coaches hold these fixed talks regularly to create stronger bond between them and their athletes.

However, it should be noted that spontaneous communication is important too (Jowett, 2005). For instance, Aarresola (2016) conducted 26 interviews with young athletes aiming at elite sports careers. She found that a minor thing for a coach might be huge to athlete. Therefore, since it is impossible to know in advance what the meeting holds, spontaneous communication is extremely important. This is especially true for the athletes, but it also for a coach a possibility to get new and valuable information about the athletes. Moreover, it is natural that coaches who take an interest in the athlete's life and spend time on getting to know their athletes by talking with them spontaneously on a daily basis are likely to know their athletes well. Besides, at the same time they create a trustworthy relationship with them (Jowett, 2005). On the contrary, a lack of communication results easily in misunderstandings, lack of trust and poor results (Becker, 2009) which may lead to difficulties in relationship and have an impact on both the coach's and athletes' well-being, motivation and performance (Jowett, & Cockerill, 2003). Non-verbal communication is also an extremely important factor. Coaches should be aware of personal non-verbal messages to avoid misunderstanding. For instance, facial expressions, gestures, and/or postures of a coach may draw a picture that a coach is disappointed. However, it could mean that the coach is disappointed in his / her personal choices, not in someone else (Packalen, 2015)

It has been speculated that communication with each athlete may be more important in women's team games, and that women tend to respond differently to a given coaching style than men (Liukkonen et.al, 2006; Rovio, 2009). Moreover, recently it was found that gender is a significant moderator of the cohesion-performance relationship. (Filho, Dobersek, Gershgoren, Becker, & Tenenbaum, 2014). So, from a performance perspective, it would seem especially important for coaches to prevent

conflicts in team and attempt to maintain high cohesiveness, especially in female teams. (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, Stevens, 2002). The consequences of poor communication can be broader than just underperforming on the playing field; girls may even suffer negative psychological consequences if they feel that they are unable to create a trusting relationship with their teammates and coaches. (Liukkonen et al., 2006). However, in an experimental study conducted in basketball settings by Dirks (2000) it was found that it is more important to have trust on coach than to have trust between teammates. Recently this was supported by Mach & Lvina (2017). The research was similarly conducted in basketball settings, the researches reinforced that trusting the coach and his or her good judgment and benevolence helps to develop trust among team members as well as to save energy. When the players trust their coach, they do not have to try to impress the coach with individual results in turn they are more open to build mutual trust within the team while they work towards a common goal. Furthermore, they state: "Trust in the leader determines the dynamics of the team–member exchange, changing the ratio of self-serving versus collective good outcomes, supporting the second critical dimension of team trust—the belief that other team members will not jeopardize the individual's well-being and efforts in achieving the collective goal." (Mach & Lvina, 2017).

As outlined earlier, the role of trust in a female team is crucial, and the task of the coach is not only to tell what to do, but also to explain why. As Hayley Wickenheiser, a female hockey legend, states in Penny Werthners' study (2009), "women want to know why, or else they tend to jump into conclusions." Still, this is not important only in women's teams. For instance, Dirks's study about trust in team sports (2000) was conducted with a sample of men's college basketball teams. Results supported the fact that trust in leadership is not central only at a general level; it was also claimed to be a product and an element of team performance.

There are many factors of team's or individual athlete's performance, from which trust and good interpersonal relationship are only one aspect. However, the coach–athlete relationship is one of the most important elements; open communication and mutual trust between coach and athletes is critical when the aim is to perform at an optimal level (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). "Not only does trust in the leader shape trust in team members but also the sense of trust that coaches are able to instill in their players in turn allows a team to become more effective." (Mach & Lvina, 2017, 144). Thus, an important duty of a coach includes the creation of a positive environment and atmosphere for practising and competing (Rhind & Jowett, 2010).



## 1.6. Athlete-centered coaching

”In Finland there have been discussions and debates about a holistic approach to coaching since the 1990s. There have always been coaches working in a comprehensive and athlete-centered way but there was a strong tradition of authoritarian coaching. The holistic approach was accepted but there was a lack of concept and proper definition for that.” (Hämäläinen & Blomqvist 2016, 339).

Coaching has changed vastly during the last decades. In traditional beliefs and philosophies the coach was the one who was in charge of what, when, where and how everything should be done while the modern coaching style places the athlete in the center (Kidman, 2005). The current trend is athlete-centeredness - the athletes are involved in several ways, for instance, they have become more active and responsible for their training process. Athlete-centered coaching is inspiring and supports continuous developing of the athletes both on and off the field (Hämäläinen & Blomqvist, 2016). Again, this means that the coach knows the individuals well enough to be able to set individual goals to develop them. Athlete-centered coaching also enables the athletes to attempt to reach higher levels of performance than before, because they become aware of their strengths through self-reflection when the coach states questions to them (Kidman, 2005). Correspondingly, by knowing the individual strengths of an athlete, a coach has a possibility to set the bar higher every day (Packalen, 2015).

Inspiring individuals to use their strengths is a beneficial standpoint for a coach and a fundamental part of growth and success of individuals. Along to discussion, positive psychology can help discover individual strengths. For example, a beneficial technique to help build people’s strength is first to identify them by psychological assessment tool and then support them in action. (Seligman, 2008). In perspective of sports; a team could fill in the surveys and share the results. Team members become aware not only their personal strengths and how to apply these during games and practices, but also others’ strengths which might be useful in the light of trust establishment within the team.

Overall, in a team environment athlete-centeredness means that the coaches hand-tailor what they say at an individual level and how they treat each athlete to achieve maximum coaching effectiveness. It is not only the wording per se that is central, but how an individual player interprets these words and the meaning she or he give to them is essential. It is never possible to completely know how the other party will react, but by spending time to know the athletes and with the help of communication, the coach will get a solid idea of it.

All in all, the effective coach-athlete relationships are holistic, pursuing to positive growth not only in sport context but also outside the field. In an optimal situation the needs, motives and goals are

discussed in a clear, consistent and co-operative way (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). In addition, an effective working relationship with the coach makes an athlete's life immeasurably easier; open communication enables functional feedback, and most importantly, results in, and from, trust and respect between the coach and the athlete (Heino 2000; Jowett, 2007; Mero et al., 2007). As mentioned, the coach has a possibility to enhance not only the physical performance but also the self-worth (Packalen, 2015, 43) and the well-being of athletes by involving them in the coaching process and by discussing about their goals and expectations as well as by showing interest related to sports and life in general. This kind of relationship gives an opportunity for both the coach and the athlete to grow (Jowett, 2005).

## 1.7. Trust

Despite that the good knowledge of the individuals and the presence of trust has been highlighted by many (Kaski 2006; Liukkonen et al. 2006; Mero et al., 2007) as an important component of successful coaching, trust has not been studied much in the sport context, especially in the level of team sports. Establishing trust is often presented and discussed in books through cohesive team activities. For instance, Liukkonen et al. (2006, 376-389) listed fifteen different team games to build trustful relationships in sports teams. Most of the studies that discuss about trust in coach-athlete relationship are limited to individual sports, and thus there is not that much information about trust in team sports. The previous studies in team sports and the international research literature focus mainly on coaching behavior and coaching principles on a general level, for instance on cohesion and group forming. Accordingly, trust is represented under the emotional aspect (closeness) in Jowett's (2007b) three +1 C's, but to the best of the author's knowledge trust itself has not been widely discussed, nor are the specific techniques and strategies to establish it extensively studied in sport context.

### 1.7.1. Research on trust

In general, trust is described as a cornerstone in interpersonal relationships. But defining trust also involves reaching out to a broader domain, outside of the sport context. Overall, there are several definitions of trust and new ones emerge frequently (Fink, Harms, Möllering, 2010, 101). One of the best-known definition of trust is by Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer: "the psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (p.395). Another, fairly poetic metaphor is from Guido Möllering (2017) who recently described trust in editorial in *Journal of Trust Research* (Volume 7/2017) as follows: "like a growing plant, it has to build itself up but we can influence the conditions for its growth". Vilkmann (2016) describes trust as an emotional state, that is guided by our beliefs.

Although the researchers are increasingly searching for common definitions and theoretical frameworks of trust, there is very little consistency in the use of trust measures (McEvily & Tortoriello, 2011). In 2006, Lewicki et al. reviewed research literature on interpersonal trust during the first 50 years of the field of research. They concluded that several definitions and conceptualizations of trust have been proposed, but the problem is that mostly studies have measured trust only at a single point in time. This does not give a full picture of trust and how it grows and declines within interpersonal relationships. More recently, McEvily & Tortoriello (2011) analysed 171 research papers published and identified a total of 129 different measures of trust from which

only 24 that have been developed with care and thoroughly validated. In addition, 11 scales of these replications were by the same authors who originated the measure.

In the review of Lewicki et al. (2006) trust research is divided into four different approaches: a behavioural approach (which views trust as rational choice behaviour, such as cooperative choices), and further three psychological approaches (which attempt to understand the complex interpersonal states linked with trust, including intentions, affect and dispositions). These approaches differ slightly in how trust is defined and measured and from at what level trust is thought to begin, and in defining which elements cause distrust. In short, they explain the psychological approaches by describing that distrust and trust are two separate dimensions. Also, they explain that the nature of trust transforms over time, and that trust is a continuum that ranges from high trust to low trust. In addition, they clarify that trust grows with a positive relationship history and increased knowledge of the other, and when parties develop an emotional bond and shared values. Trust is seen to grow when behaviour of other party is predictable. In contrast, trust was described to decline when expectations are disconfirmed (Lewicki et al. 2006).

In literature, trust is described as a self-reinforcing and dynamic process that is not very difficult to create (Mäkipeska & Niemelä, 2005). Establishing trust in organisation requires mutual respect, valuing others, honesty, commitment, and predictability (Figure 2). Focusing on any of the mentioned elements can help to increase trust inside the group. Getting into a virtuous circle requires that these themes and actions need to become habits and values inside the organisation. Therefore, the leader's task is to take responsibility and support the individuals in creating a culture where people care about each other (Mäkipeska & Niemelä, 2005, 35.).

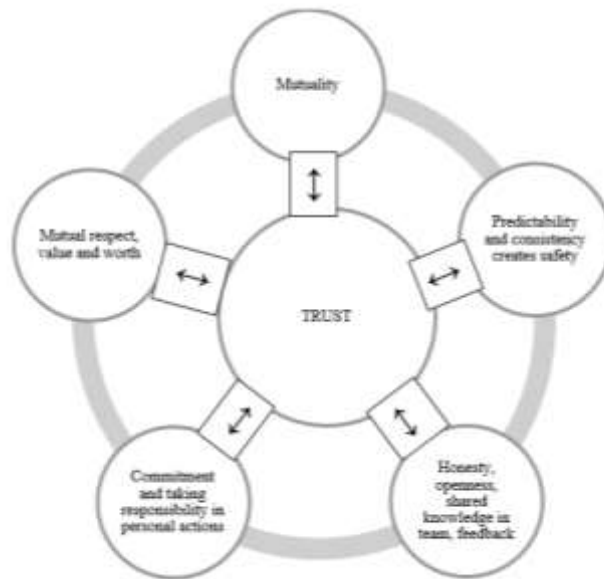


Figure 2. Establishing trust in organisation (Mäkipeska & Niemelä, 2005, 35).

Similarly, Vilkmán (2016) agrees that open communication between a leader and a follower establish trust in business organisation. It is crucial that the rules, roles and goals are clear to everyone (Duhigg, 2016). The problems within a team and the lack of trust either between team members or between a leader and a follower may even lead to a change of job. A strong culture and the feeling of belonging is important since they create alignment among employees. Therefore, the leader must spend time on creating a positive culture and on getting to know his or her team. When team members feel valued and have strong feeling of belongingness, their commitment is stronger. (Vilkmán, 2016).

### 1.7.2 Optimal level of trust

But what is the optimal level of trust in relationships? The more trust the better is not necessarily true. While Lewicki et al. (2006, 1016) reviewed the history of trust research, they found that many authors suggested that high trust can lead to situations in which the trustor is taken advantage of and this is why the authors thought that some distrust can be appropriate. Similarly, Rovio, Eskola, Kozub, Duda & Lintunen (2009) found that high social group cohesion does not necessarily lead to better performance in all situations. Instead, it was found that, high cohesion was associated with negative factors, such as pressure to conform and groupthink phenomena. This led to deterioration of team members' willingness to say their true opinions openly. However, this does not mean that coaches should not promote cohesiveness, but only that they should be aware of various aspects of group's

processes. Establishing an open and honest communication environment is a key factor, the research group concluded.

In conclusion, there are several definitions of trust and very little consistency in the use of trust measures. For the the purposes of this study, the author did not use any specific definition; trust is defined by the interviewed coaches.

### 1.7.3. Gaps in research

Trust is often studied through questionnaires; however, it can be argued that these commonly used questionnaires used to measure and define trust do not provide comprehensive picture of the concept. Thus, qualitative approach within this study as a data-collection method was considered an ideal tool for understanding the complex phenomena of trust and the key factors in establishing and maintaining trust in coach-athlete relationships and within team environment.

Overall, more studies of coach-athlete relationship at a team level are certainly welcomed. This is because often the problems arising in sports - for instance, conflicts in relationships between coaches and athletes, lack of support, feelings of aggression or loneliness or even drop out at an early age - are primarily interpersonal (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Especially in light of the recent rise in interest in athlete-centered and holistic coaching, studying interpersonal relationships is valuable as it often contains practical proposals on how to establish empirically tested methods in real life coaching situations.

The unique characteristics of the research sample, Finnish elite level coaches, are highly topical since the development of coaches is currently one of the priorities in Finnish sport (Hämäläinen & Blomqvist, 2016). Although existing research and literature provides beneficial material on communication and feedback habits for coaches (e.g. Packalen, 2015) and valuable information on coaching philosophies regarding effective coaching exists (e.g. Côté & Gilbert, 2009), more studies about Finnish coaches and coach-athlete relationships are needed. Two coaching surveys have been recently conducted for Finnish coaches in order to understand their needs, experiences and opinions in terms of coaches' learning and development. The first was launched in 2009 (n= 2476 / 2213 actively coaching) (Blomqvist, Häyrynen, & Hämäläinen, 2012) and the second four years later to follow up the respondents' coaching careers over the period. From those who were actively coaching

in 2009, 712 responded to the latter survey (Blomqvist & Hämäläinen 2015). According to the findings, the most often cited development needs among coaches were related to interpersonal skills such as motivating athletes, ability to adapt to the situation/ person and providing feedback – strongly related to coach-athlete relationship. Moreover, observing and learning from other coaches in their own sport was cited as an important learning method by the majority of the coaches (96%). Especially the more experienced and educated coaches rated this as very important source of learning and development (Hämäläinen & Blomqvist, 2016). Still, only a handful of studies have focused on elite level coaching in Finland and specifically focused on coaches' personalities, philosophies and the strategies they employ.

To extend the research on Finnish coaching, coach-athlete relationship and trust in team sports, this study focuses collecting information of the coaches' interactions and attributes of creating a trustful coach-athlete relationship. Particular focus in this study is on how a trustful relationship can be developed and maintained. Coaches were asked for instance “Could you tell me about how you coach a team and how you coach an individual player?” and “How would you define what is trust in team sport environment?”

In conclusion, based on the studies and literature discussed in this literature review, the importance of trust and knowing the individuals within team is crucial in coaching. This emphasized the importance of the topic of this study. The gaps in the current research makes the concept of trust in Finnish team sports an important subject to study.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this thesis is to describe and analyze trust-related experiences of four team sport coaches through qualitative interviews. The main objective is to characterize how coaches describe establishment of trust within their team and how they describe their coaching philosophies. Furthermore, this study aims to describe the best practices used by these coaches regarded to trust and to describe how coaching in team sports could be further developed.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

An interpretative thematic analysis with both inductive and deductive reasoning was utilized in the present study.

#### 3.1. Researcher's background

I have always loved sports and been particularly fascinated by how team sports are coached. The mental aspect of coaching is of particular interest to me. I have played football, floorball and ice hockey throughout my life. I have had multiple coaches with different levels of effectiveness. Team sports have deeply influenced my life and have led me to do my studies in sports, to coach, and to work in the field. Major motivations and background for the theme of my master's thesis is my bachelor's thesis, where I conducted a psychological training project for a floorball team. One of the possible future research directions listed in my bachelor's thesis was to research coaching. In particular, I wanted to study which methodologies the coaches use with their teams to achieve an optimal level of performance. In addition, I wanted to know how they establish trust within their team. The design for the study was finally secured when the supervisor of my thesis suggested to interview highly experienced coaches who are well known of both their high level of coaching and interaction skills.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study aims to describe and understand trust-related experiences of four successful team sport coaches. The main objective was to study how coaches describe establishment of trust within their team and how they describe their coaching philosophies. Finally, this study aims to describe the best practices used with regard to trust and to describe how coaching in team sports could be further developed.

Semi-structured interviews with data driven thematic analysis were used to collect the research data. The nature of the interview process is time-consuming, and thus the number of interviews was limited to four coaches.

### 3.3. Participant selection

The participants of the study were elite level coaches in various sports in Finland. Three of them were male and one female. They coached football, ringette, floorball and ice hockey. Selection criteria for coaches was to have at least five years of experience of coaching in the highest national level in respective sport and/or coaching youth or adult national team. In other words, in the selection process of participants a careful attention was given to choose coaches who would have the knowledge and experience to be able to answer the research questions. Furthermore, an effort was made to recruit participants who would have experience on a range of different teams. Additional criteria was to have a reputation of having an interpersonal approach and good people skills. This reputation was derived from media and from comments by fellow student colleagues and team sport players in various sports.

As a result, four highly experienced coaches were selected for the study. The coaching experience of the participants ranged from 21 to 45 years, while age range of the coaches was between 38 to 62 years. Among these coaches, only one had coached both genders; Coach #3 had coached men and women for several years. Both Coach#1 and Coach#2 coaches females, in contrast to Coach#4 who is coaching males. Table 1 describes the background of the participants.

Table 1 Coaches and their backgrounds.

	Coach #1	Coach#2	Coach#3	Coach#4
Years of coaching	Over twenty years	21 years	45 years (25 years volleyball + 17 year floorball)	23 years
The sport that coach is coaching	Football	Ringette	Floorball (used to coach volleyball)	Ice hockey
Highest level of coaching	National team (females; U19).	National team (females).	National team. (females).	National team (males).
Has been coaching males / females	Females	Females	Both	Males

### 3.4 Procedure

An interview guide is based on relevant theory and literature as well as themes and topics related with trust and coaching. Before the actual interview it is suggested to run pilot interview(s) in order to gain valuable experience and information needed to conduct a good interview (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 72). Therefore, two pilot interviews were conducted to test the interview protocol and to gain feedback on the content of the interview, as well as to check its approximate length. Pilot interviews were conducted with two coaches prior to the actual interviews. Slight modifications were made to enhance the clarity and consistency of the interview guide after the pilots. Also, the research supervisors were asked guidance with regard to the final version of the questions.

The first contact and invitation to participate was taken by e-mail. On the first contact the participants were introduced about the purpose of the study and the process; they were informed that they can withdraw anytime. Additionally, participants were informed that the interview is anonymous and confidential. Four coaches were contacted and all of them agreed to take part. When the coaches had shown willingness to participate to the study a convenient time and location for the interview was arranged. Interviews were conducted face to face in a place suggested by the coach, with only the interviewer and interviewee present. The length of the interview ranged from 55 minutes to 85 minutes, with 67 minutes being an average length.

At first, the examiner started by explaining the procedure and the purpose of the interview. All sessions were recorded by an iPhone and a computer so that the data could later be coded. The permission to recording was asked already in the first contact and repeated in the beginning of each interview. Also, the coaches filled in the consent form regarding ethical and confidentiality considerations (Appendix 1).

### 3.5. Data Collection

The semi-structured interview was the methodology used for data collection. This method was chosen because it is a particularly good tool for gaining detailed information where the research question and the theme of research needs more empirical evidence to widen the scope of topic (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 35). In addition, according to Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2015, 205) the nature of semi-

structured interview gives the possibility to the interviewer to follow different tracks of conversation that emerge over the course of the conversation. This can be seen as flexibility with the order and wording in questions in each interview, likewise to ask participants to clarify and expand on certain points when needed. Also, during face-to-face interview it is possible to see body language and gestures (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 35).

### 3.5.1 Instrument

The interview was divided into three parts: 1) coaches' stories and backgrounds, 2) coaches' philosophies, and 3) questions related to trust. The first section covered demographic information of the coach (e.g., the participant's gender, sport discipline, the length of coaching career). To deepen the background information, coaches were asked motives behind their coaching with a question "Could you tell me about what made you start coaching?"

The second and third section were the central part of the interview. The second section started with a general question: what kind of attributes are essential when coaching a team? When the interview continued the coaches were asked to describe their coaching philosophy and their way to lead their teams. To get a holistic picture of their coaching the following questions were asked: "What kind of coach you want to be remembered as?" and "Could you tell me about how you coach a team and how you coach an individual player?" It is notable that during the first interview the researcher wanted to add an interview question outside of original interview protocol concerning coaching team enrolling, as the importance of teamwork and positive atmosphere between colleagues in coaching team was a theme that rose up during the first interview in several occasions. Therefore, the following question was added to interview protocol and asked from every coach: "Do you want to enrol your team by yourself and could you elaborate your answer?"

The main research question studies how trust is established in team sport. The third section therefore covered variety of questions related to trust. The section began with a question "How would you define what is trust in team sport environment?" This section focuses on collecting information of the coaches' interactions and attributes of creating a trustful relationship with the athletes of their teams. Specifically, how they think such a relationship can be developed and maintained. In order to get answers to the research problem, coaches were also asked to describe their relationship with their players. Correspondingly, in order to understand their relationship and attitude towards feedback, it

was asked “Could you describe when, where and how you give feedback? As well as “Could you elaborate your communication style in training and game situations?”

Throughout the interview coaches were asked to expand or clarify their comments if the researcher thought it was necessary. Likewise, in the end of the interview a possibility was given to coaches to give any additional explanations, simplify, or expand on any comments they made during the interview by asking “Is there anything else regarding this study that you would like to tell me?”

### 3.6 Data analysis

At first the interviews were transcribed verbatim to get an overview of each interview. This led to 75 pages in total (1.5 spacing, font size 12). Then the transcripts were read several times as well as the audio recordings were re-listened. As a result, data relevant to the study was highlighted. When analysing, Atlas.ti software (version 7.1) was used for coding. The interview material was thematically analysed to find recurring patterns and significant statements within each interview. These patterns were identified as meaning units and further clustered into groups to develop major themes & sub-themes, which are later presented in the result section. A second coder was used to ensure that the analysis will be completed with unbiased and neutral manner.

### 3.7 Ethical Issues and Trustworthiness

According to Hirsijärvi & Hurme, (2000, 68-69) in qualitative research the steps taken during the process of research should be described and explained as clearly as possible in order to show that the findings have applicability.

This study followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the ethics committee of the University of Jyväskylä. Even though the coaches were informed that the interview is anonymous, it was discussed that it is possible that a reader would identify the coach from when his / her story even when using pseudo names that were given already during data analysis to ensure privacy and confidentiality of the coaches. All the participant gave written agreement to present their story and background, as they told, with knowledge that it is possible to be identified.

The interviews were conducted in coaches' native language (Finnish) and the quotes used in results section are translated in English, which leaves a possibility that some information can be interpreted differently than it was meant to be. Regarding this, it was highlighted that coaches will get the

preliminary results prior publishing. Thus, a draft of preliminary results was sent to the coaches for agreement. The coaches were asked for feedback to check and verify the accuracy of the result from their behalf, so they had the possibility to clarify their statements, add some information and correct errors if needed. When asked, none of the coaches wanted to change the information presented in the result section.

In addition, the data was stored so that only the researcher had access to this information. The data was filed and archived upon completion of thesis and it will be destroyed after four years of time.

The reliability and credibility of this study are discussed next. First, it is important that the interview guide is well-prepared, thus feedback from supervisor was asked when deciding the final interview questions. In addition, it is important that the researcher is familiarized with both the topic and the method used. The researcher of current study has work experience as a life coach and personal trainer, and throughout the working years she is used to interviewing different people. Being natural and giving freedom and space to interviewee likewise to stay neutral and not to lead with questions, comes from that experience. These are also said to be qualities of a good interview. This gives the possibility to the interviewer to focus on what the person has to say. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 184-185).

Additionally, the researcher's personal background as a player and as a coach can be considered as a significant help in conducting the fieldwork. Because of the fact that researcher is familiar with the phenomenon she was able to talk about the topics the coaches brought up during the interviews. In other words, the experience was beneficial and made her 'insider', however, when interviewing and analysing the data the goal for a researcher is to be as neutral as possible to avoid internal bias. Regarding this, member checks were used to ensure the accuracy and improve the credibility of the work.

Furthermore, before each interview when I told the motivations and background for the theme of this study it was discussed that all the coaches actually "knew me" at least they knew my name and that I used to be a player because we had some mutual acquaintances - Finland is a small country, especially when it comes to sports. In my opinion, all this helped me to build rapport with the coaches and led them to share their experiences openly. In addition, the coaches said that they found the topic interesting and valuable. They wanted to share their experiences and develop Finnish coaching.

In qualitative approach, every researcher has their own attitude, and everyone comprehends the meanings of words from own perspective this naturally leaves space to possible misunderstanding, regarding dependability. In other words, even though two different individuals followed the same interview process it is not likely to receive the exact same responses from participants. In qualitative research a suitable way to measure dependability is to make sure another researcher would get the same result out from the data. This is why a second coder was used when making the themes. Both coders were unanimous with their views regarding themes and topics (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 186).

## 4 RESULTS

This chapter presents and explains the findings of the research. The aim of this study was to describe and understand the experiences of four team sport coaches relating to trust. Further, the objective was to describe how the coaches describe the establishment of trust within their teams and how they describe their coaching philosophies. Finally, this study targeted to describe the best practices used and how to develop coaching in team sports. These core concepts arose from the interviews from coaches of the study; background of each coach, coaching philosophy, feedback, trust, team environment, holistic approach and development of coaching. All these can be linked together under an umbrella of trustful environment. However, in this chapter I will focus on presenting all the major themes and their sub themes separately. A visual representation of the themes and the sub themes is presented in table 2. Throughout chapter all the expressions that are *italicised* are from coaches.

Table 2. Themes of the Study.

Major theme	Sub themes	Example quote presenting the main theme
Background		<i>"Since that phone call I have been coaching. I would not change a day"</i>
Coaching Philosophy	Elements needed when coaching Me as a coach Relationship - knowing the individuals	<i>"In team sports a coach has to be honest, consistent, and trustful person. Mutual trust is essential part of it. I trust you and you trust me. One of the slogans that we have had in our team was: Trust and be trusted."</i>
Feedback	Feedback in general Game versus training situations Positivity Non-verbal messages Involving players and making them to reflect themselves	<i>"Encouragements and feedback is important for everyone; not only for juniors but also for adults and elite players. It is just so essential."</i>
Trust (& Team environment)	Defining trust Respond to mistakes Team culture Roles and rules Being absent from trainings Coaching team atmosphere	<i>"Trust is fundamental part of coaching, it should be the starting point for everything."</i>
Holistic approach	Stressors and overall load Giving support outside of sporting life	<i>"It is not only focusing on the games and the trainings, the ball, the stick and the goals, it is about using all you senses when coaching, it is about seeing and noticing the personalities."</i>
Develop coaching	Involve players	<i>"Basically it is that what I have been talking about throughout this interview"</i>



#### 4.1 Background

Background of each coach is presented shortly coach by coach and visualized in table 3 so the reader would get a more profound understanding of each individual coach and their background and how they started coaching.

When remembering the starting points of her career Coach#1 said first that she started coaching over twenty years ago. *“My dad was a coach and I have followed his career since I can remember, basically I grew up with football,”* she explained. She remembered being “15- 16 years old” when she first started coaching, furthermore, she told that she was still playing herself while she started. *“I contacted one team and asked if I could start to coach”* she described the first connection with coaching. She said that she continued playing for a few years and then had a one year break for coaching, but she said that she continued coaching when she got asked to start again. *“Since that phone call I have been coaching. I would not change a day”* she formulated.

Coach#2 started coaching because he wanted to help others. He said: *“I have had some good and some not so good experiences with coaches while I was playing.”* He described these experiences as one of the motivations behind himself starting. Also, *“I realized that I will not get far as a player so I started to coach,”* he expressed. At first he had thought that he would start to coach goalies in ice hockey, because that was his sport. However, he ended up coaching ringette *“because my dad was a coach and my sister played and they were lacking a goalie coach”*.

Coach#3 started by saying that *“sports played a big role in my life in my childhood even though my parents were not involved with sports in any way”*. He said *“everything started from our summer cabin already when I was a little kid, I played every kind of sports but volleyball was my main sport”*. He continued by explaining that he started his coaching career also in volleyball as a player-coach *“when I noticed that I will not get far as a player”*. He added: *“actually it was my dad who encouraged me to start”*. So I started with volleyball and continued with Floorball after I got asked to start to coach. His relationship to coaching he described as following: *“I have quit coaching for a one day, I learned then that I will not quit anymore. I may take a break but I will not quit.”*

When describing how he started coaching Coach#4 said:

*“I was playing both football and ice hockey when I was younger. As a teenager when I was supposed to commit and train more, everything else was more interesting. So I quit playing. However I started coaching only few months after I quit when my coach asked if I wanted to join the coaching team as an assistant coach. I was analytical already as player, for example, I always wanted to know why we are playing the way we are playing.”*

Compared to the rest of the participants in the study, Coach #3 started as a player-coach in his own team while he was still playing. He said that it was fairly difficult. *“I could not focus on either properly.”* Coach#1 started coaching a junior team while she was still playing. The two other coaches started to coach right after they had finished their own playing careers. Coach#1 and Coach#4 have experience as players in the sport they are coaching, unlike Coach #2 who was playing ice hockey and is now coaching ringette. Also, Coach#3 was playing volleyball when he started as a volleyball coach. He kept coaching volleyball for 25 years, but for the past 17 years he have been coach in another discipline; floorball. Regarding education, two of the coaches are working in school; the other as a classroom teacher, also doing a PhD in Sport and Exercise Psychology, and the other as a principal and has a PhD of Philosophy. The two other coaches are working as a head coach of Finnish national team. The other has further qualification in coaching IV-level in Finland and the other has qualification in UEFA A and UEFA pro licenses.

Table 3 Coaches and How They Started Coaching.

	Coach #1	Coach#2	Coach#3	Coach#4
How did you start coaching?	<i>“When I started, I contact the team by myself, then I took a break of coaching for a while and kept playing. Later I got asked to start again by another coach.”</i>	<i>“I wanted to be a coach and help others. My dad was coaching my sister’s ringette team and they did not have a goalie coach, so I took the job.”</i>	<i>“I noticed that I am too short to be a volleyball player. My father encouraged to start coaching.”</i>	<i>“I quit playing because everything else interested me more. Then my former coach asked me to start as assistant coach.”</i>
At what age started coaching?	15-16 years old	17-18 years old	15 years old	17 years old
Was still playing, when started?	Yes.	No.	Yes. Started as player-coach.	No.

## 4.2 Coaching philosophy

Main dimension philosophy consists of three sub themes which are; elements needed when coaching a team, me as a coach and relationship with players

### 4.2.1 Elements needed when coaching a team

When asked what elements are needed for a good coach in team sports, knowledge in up-to-date methods as well as strategies and tactics of the game, along with the knowledge in physical training methods were mentioned as vital factors. Yet, the following emerged as the most imperative elements; trust, personality, passion for coaching and knowledge in various subjects. When describing a good coach in team sports Coach#3 said:

*“In team sports a coach has to be honest, consistent, and trustful person.” Mutual trust is essential part of it. I trust you and you trust me. One of the slogans that we have had in our team was: Trust and be trusted.”*

Coach#1 indicated that a coach in team sports needs to know the individuals:

*“You can be the best coach in the world to know everything about the game, but if you do not understand that a team consist of individuals who think, react and wants to be treated in unique ways, that knowledge of the game is worth nothing.”*

Like Coach#1, Coach#2 also shared a similar view when he brought up team dynamics:

*“Knowing the game is naturally essential. But in team sport you need to know about cohesion and understand the dynamics in the team in order to make the individuals to play together and get the best out of them.”*

Like the rest of participants in this study, Coach#4 talked about knowing the players as persons but he also brought up safety, team culture and winning:

*“A good coach is someone who realize that team contain individuals and their wellbeing. A good coach understands that the feeling of safety in team sports comes from the common rules and team culture; collective goals that are set high enough. A good coach is spreading positivity plus comprehends that we all make mistakes. Not to forget, when the coach is good - team takes wins too.”*

### 4.2.2. Me as a coach

First of all the coaches describe themselves as experienced, as they all had been coaching for over twenty years. All of the coaches thought they had changed during their coaching careers. They felt that it is natural that one changes as a person and as a coach during their coaching years, especially when they have been young when they first started. Nevertheless, many of them said that they had an interest in getting to know the individuals already at the start of their careers. Coach#4 explained what he meant by this:

*“I used a lot of time to get to know the players already when I started to coach (at the age of 18-19 years). Now when I have met those players later they have said that they could see that I was passionate, and I work hard to help the player already then. I remember that I had long one-to-one meetings with the players. I could spend hours on watching VHS clips from the game. Without doubt I have changed as a coach during the years, but I have always wanted to know the players entirely.”*

In contrast, one coach described the early stages and the first years of her coaching career the opposite way than coach#4; *‘I was coaching the game, not the people’*. She explained that she had learned her way to coach through different coaching experiences. This is what she said:

*“I have changed a lot as a coach. When I first started I did not meet the players as I do now. I put all my focus on tactics and game systems. My leadership style was pretty authoritarian, that was something that I was used to because I had been following coaching since I was a small kid. But when I was coaching in Sweden I learned a lot. I realized that to make the players commit I need to know them better. I had to learn to meet them as individuals and spend time them. In time, I found out that this is actually the style that I like to coach.” –Coach#1*

Also, another coach told that he tried to be an authoritarian coach right in the beginning of his coaching career:

*“When I first started as a coach, I tried – for a short while - to be a tough guy and be authoritarian. I was yelling to players who were older and bigger than me. I felt ridiculous. It was not my thing at all. So I changed pretty fast.”-Coach#3*

Regards to their leadership style and personality, majority of the coaches brought up that during those years they have been coaches they have made “some good and some less good” coaching decisions. They explained how these past coaching experiences have helped them to make the right decisions currently. For example, one coach explained that through experience he has learned to know how to react in different kinds of situations as well as how to regulate player’s emotions and energy during the games, he explained this further by saying:

*“Coach has to be smart and alert to sense what is happening inside the team. It comes along with experience that you learn to how to react in different situations, for example if we are losing big or if someone is playing under his/her level. Sometimes it is better to say nothing at all, or just use humour as an ice breaker to wake them up. Yelling and shouting never helps.” –Coach#2*

As mentioned, all the coaches viewed themselves as professionals and experts regarding their knowledge of their own sport. Moreover, they emphasized good interaction with their players. They all gave nearly word to word similar explanations when they described themselves, as the following three quotes exposes:

*“I would say that I am human, compassionate and that I treat my players equally. I am open and honest. If I do something unexpected, I want to explain why I do so.”-Coach#1*

*“I want to be remembered as an honest and trustful team guy. A bit of idealist too.”-Coach#3*

*“I would call myself professional, human and as a person who gets along with everyone.”-Coach#4*

As the latter quote show it was also discussed that these coaches felt they got along with everyone. All the coaches brought it up in the interviews. Furthermore, it was clear that they had a lot of passion towards coaching and they were willing to put their hearts into the game. Correspondingly, they required the same from their colleagues and their players, like quote from coach#2 demonstrates:

*“As a coach I am pedantic. I am genuinely interested them as individuals and try to get to know them outside of the field too. Also, I am willing to put a lot of time and effort to help the players to reach their goals. I am ready to do a lot for my players, but it is a two way street. I am waiting that if they want to succeed they have to be willing to work for it. But I will help in every way that I can.”*

#### 4.2.3 Relationship – knowing the individuals

One of the major features that arose within the philosophy domain was the passion not only for the game but also for the team and the players. Overall, it was mentioned by all these coaches how they have a genuine will to get know their players as individuals. Everyone underlined that they have a lot formal and non-formal one-on-one talks with their players on regular basis. Coach#2 said:

*“I spend lots of time helping my players to achieve their goals. A lot of time. For example, every time we have an away game, I talk in the bus with every player. That way I know what is going on in their lives and in their minds.”*

Coach #3 had parallel views with Coach#2:

*“I talk very much with my players. I want to know them as persons, what else do they do then sports. I want to know where they go to school or where they work at, I want to know if they have boyfriends or girlfriends, I want to know their parents etc. It is important to me.”*

Additionally, majority of the coaches discussed how they were interested in knowing their players strengths and how those strengths could be used in their teams on and off the field. Coach#1 gave an example what she meant by this:

*“When we start a camp, in the first gathering everyone tells about their strengths. In that way they I believe it is possible to boost their confidence, but also, I want others in team to hear these strengths. Sometimes, when needed, I remind the player about those strengths: This is where you are good at, remember? You told it yourself. I want to see more that. Or that I give feedback when the players was actually using her strong abilities. I believe that I build trust between us when I want them to know that I listen (to them) but also that I try to find ways to use those individual strengths in our system, and that our team success is based on the strengths of individuals.”*

Further, it was clear that these coaches invested time and effort into getting to know their players. However, in agreement, they admitted that it is not an easy job. According to Coach#2, a coach has to be ready to invest time and effort;

*“Sometimes people say that I spend way too much time talking with the players, they say that it could be easier for me to put less time on it. But then again, there is no easy way to success. It takes time and effort.”*

Regarding time management and getting to know the players Coach#3 emphasized the importance of prioritizing and having spontaneous, non-organized meetings on a daily basis:

*“I would say there is never enough time for talking with players, but if you want to find time – you will find time. It is all about prioritizing. Also, those little meetings every day, that you change a few words with the player, those short meetings can be as important as fixed and organized meetings.”*

Coach#4 highlighted that it does not need to be a long discussion, a shorter meeting can be important as well:

*“When the national team gathers there is limited time sometimes. But even if I would have only five minutes to spend with each player I want to meet them personally. I tell them what I am expecting from them and encourage them to play using their strengths.”*

Some of the coaches brought up how they communicate messages through certain players in the team, mostly with team captain or team captains. Coach#4 said:

*“With my former there were 5-6 players who I met once or twice a week to get to know what is going on in the team, on the other hand I had one-on-one talks with the captain when I needed to do some changes that would rock the boat (so the captain could communicate with the team).”*

Additionally, it was discussed that sometimes coaches engage with their players off the field situations, for example, Coach#3 told that occasionally the team gathers in his house to go to sauna together.

### 4.3 Feedback

In order to gain a deeper insight into the coaching philosophy of the participants, I asked questions which aimed to explore coaches' thoughts about feedback and the ways they are giving it. In addition to their feedback habits I asked them to elaborate their feedback in game situations and in trainings. The major theme feedback revealed four sub-themes, which are Feedback in general, Positivity, Non-verbalism and Involving players. To begin with, there were similar answers with all the coaches seeing feedback as an indispensable part of coaching. Coach#3 said *“Encouragements and feedback is important for everyone; not only for juniors but also for adults and elite players. It is just so essential.”*

#### 4.3.1. Feedback in general

Coaches listed several means how they are giving feedback. Coach#1 stated that *“I give feedback all the time anywhere”*. She went through the ways and channels that she uses; *“over the phone, through the club coaches, through our academia coaches in high schools, via e-mails, by using video clips, face to face.”* Additionally, she said that she rather talks face to face or on the phone than sends short written messages; *“even though it could be easiest way for youths to use what's app, sms or similar. But it is so easy to misunderstand texts, when talking I can make sure we both understand each other.”* In contrast, Coach#2 told that he finds text messages valuable method of feedback when he is using them in the following way: *“Often when someone has played well I send a text message with some positive points of the game. This way I make sure they notice they were good too.”*

When talking about the theme of feedback “when making team cuts” situations were mentioned by two coaches; Coach#4 explained how he sees that it is highly important to give feedback for those who are not in the final team roster:

*“When cutting off the player from the team (for example before world championships) I always talk to those players who did not make the team this time. I think it is humane, even though they are elite athletes and they*

*say that it is part of the game - but still. I think it is very important to go it through with them."*

Coach#2 supported this view when he told about his experience from national team:

*"When we need to leave out some players from the team just before the World Championships my goal is, first of all, to make them (those players) understand that this is not the end of the world. I want to make them realize what they have learned and how to improve themselves as players in the future."*

#### 4.3.2. Game versus training situations

There was a slight difference between the feedbacks in the training session versus the feedback in a game situation. The game situations were seen more intense. It was discussed that there is no time to negotiate or exchange thoughts with the players during the games, nor involve them by making them reflect their own performance as much as in the training sessions. According to these coaches the feedback during the games is mostly based on short, instructional pieces of advice, yet always given in a positive manner. *"So if I want to give feedback to someone during the game I call them by their name in order to get a better contact with them, and give a positive instructional feedback what to do,"* explained Coach#1. Equally, coaches described how they feel, that it is important to stay calm and emotionally stable when playing "the big games" or being under pressure. The quotation of Coach#3 is an example of this: *"In the game you live in the moments, however, the vibe that you are sending should still be positive. The more important the game is the more important it is for the coach to be 'normal', calm, consistent."*

Correspondingly, Coach #4 gave a detailed description of his behaviour during game situations:

*"During the regular season games I live the game more and I may be passionate but when we start the play off season or the big games I am calm and put a game-face on. Often I am super relaxed in these situations because I enjoy these games so much, it feels that our work has paid off and now the fun begins."*

#### 4.3.3. Positivity

Moreover, being positive whenever giving feedback was regarded integral by all the participants. Coach#1 said that she tries to avoid "all the possible negative impressions and negative phrases", and she thinks that the tone of the voice is similarly important; "the last time I was rude was in 1997" she laughed when she said that, but she continued with the following quotation:

*"The Finnish language is a bit harsh sometimes. I have actually changed the way I speak after I have been coaching in English and in Swedish. This means that when*



*giving feedback, I involve the player by asking their opinions, 'like what do you think about this'? So it is not just me saying my opinions or telling them what to do."*

Coach#2 similarly affirmed the idea of positivity, when he said; *"I try to give as much feedback as possible. My personal goal for this season was to give even more positive feedback. I try to give them ideas how to not make the same mistake again, but in positive way"*. Correspondingly, Coach#3 explained his philosophy regarding positivity and feedback: *"When I have to say something negative I take it in person with the player but when I have something positive to say I say it aloud in front of everyone."*

The ratio between positive versus constructive feedback was mentioned separately by two of the coaches. Coach#4 started by saying that he gives "more positive than negative feedback", he continued by clarifying:

*"If I show eight (video) clips six of them are positive. I mean they (the players) have seen their games already on iPads before we have the meeting (on the following morning after the game). It is about what kind of message you want them to get. However, I have no tolerance for my players for being indifferent during games, so in those cases we spend a lot more time on going through those clips, often they (players) notice quite fast what to do and how to improve the game."*

Similarly, Coach#1 talked about the ratio and focusing on the positive in situations:

*"When we are watching the video clips (from the game) together with the team the first question that I always start with is: What was good? I want to teach them to see those good things. Another thing, if I feel we do not have time to fix those "mistakes" before the next game, I leave them out and focus on what is good. Overall, I give more positive feedback, I could say the ratio is 5:1, where four are positive to build on what is good already and the one is something to improve. I believe I can boost their motivation and make them believe in themselves this way."*

Furthermore, three of the four coaches talked about different ways to approach different individuals. Knowing the individuals, their unique habits and treating them as individuals also when giving feedback was considered essential. *"Some need more encouragement than some other, you may need to talk to them in a different way,"* formulated Coach#2.

As regard to individual habits Coach#1 mentioned that different players require different approaches from their coaches:

*"As a coach I need to understand that not everyone wants to be treated in the same way. Some people need more time than the others. I have to sense that and give time and support that those players need, make them understand that they are not left alone. If I push too hard on a player who is not ready for it, it may cause distrust."*

#### 4.3.4. Non-verbal messages

An additional important aspect of feedback was non-verbal messages. Gestures and non-verbalism were seen crucial by the participants. Several coaches explained that “even without saying anything we are delivering some kind of message anyway”. Thus, majority of the coaches emphasized that they have thought about their non-verbalism. Coach#1 clarified this by saying: *“I have noticed that if I stand I yell more, and I live the game, sometimes even too much. So when I feel that I should calm down I sit down. I have analysed myself pretty much, as you see.”*

Additionally, she wanted to share one of the past coaching experiences she had:

*“Let me give you an example, which is actually related to trust. We were in Portugal playing an important game and before the game in the warm up I noticed that I was excited, nervous and everything you can imagine. I knew that I have to fake it away to make my players feel that I am calm and that I trust them. So I was standing like a statue, smiling a bit and trying to look cool as ever. It worked! Later the players gave feedback that the coaching team was so calm and at ease before the game that it helped them. So even though I would be insecure I never show that.”*

#### 4.3.5. Involving players and making them to reflect on themselves

Further, feedback was seen as a part of the learning process. Like the quote earlier from Coach#1 displayed that coaches were involving players during training sessions. In addition to that, coaches wanted to involve players in feedback process by making players to reflect and analyse the games. Coach#1 described that *“I do that (involve them) so they could learn more about it (their performance).”* There were various methods how coaches make their players to reflect on their performance. Often after games the players were asked to give verbal feedback about the game, but also different written formulas for reflections were used by a majority of these coaches. The following quote presents an example how one coach sees that written information helps both coaches and players:

*“I make them reflect on their game a lot. During the regular season games we have used a period of ten games when they are reflecting on themselves after each game. So after the game they rate themselves in various mental, tactical and physical aspects of the game on a scale of 1-4. From here we calculate the means for different aspects and we get valuable information for coaching - plus in fact they set new goals for themselves and for the team at the same time.” –Coach#4*

Another coach explained that in their team they are using seasonal reports (twice per season) when everyone in the team reflects on themselves and gives feedback not only to themselves but also to the

team and coaches. *“In addition to the theme of feedback we have used much time on going through collective and personal goals”*, he explained. He thinks that the players appreciate the knowledge they get from the feedback and therefore they have created a feedback system for themselves:

*“Players started that system by themselves. They pair upped, explained and familiarised their personal goals to each other and gave feedback to one another after a certain period had gone by. I think this was kind of cool, I would say it is a result of that we have talked a lot about collective and personal goals and feedback and the players see the value in these.” –Coach#2*

Finally, giving feedback was seen challenging. Quote from Coach#3 emphasis this:

*“The need for an individual to get feedback is endless. It is impossible to notice them (the players) as much as they would like to be noticed. But I believe that when we are several coaches in the team (4) and we can split and circle the tasks and roles we increase the possibility to give more personal feedback,” explained Coach#3.*

Similarly, Coach#2 supported the importance of teamwork in coaching team when he told how they are giving feedback during trainings: *“On the ice we are four coaches which makes it more easy to use iPads and notice the individuals more.”*

#### 4.4. Trust

The major dimension of trust is encompassed to eight sub themes which are: defining trust, the team environment, the response to mistakes, the team culture of excellence, the roles and the rules, being absent from trainings, team enrolling and the holistic approach.

##### 4.4.1 Defining trust

To begin with, trust was seen as a central part of the whole coaching process by all of the coaches; *“Trust is fundamental part of coaching, it should be the starting point for everything,”* stated Coach#2. It was slightly difficult for participants to describe what trust is. However, all of them could find various elements from their coaching they could attach to the concept of trust. Also, it was found easy to find examples how to build and maintain trust.

First, when defining trust and the methods to establish it, mutual respect between the parties was seen as a core value. Mutual respect was seen central not only in coach-athlete relationships but also in the relationships between the players and in the relationships regarding the whole organization. Second, confidentiality was mentioned as vital issue. If players share something they do not want others to know the coaches would keep that confidential. Correspondingly, coach#3 said that he also advices players to *“keep things within the team”*. Likewise, being accountable and meeting someone or

calling to someone when promised was mentioned as obvious by everyone. Additionally, two of the coaches brought up timetables related to trainings, it was mentioned that they want to teach their players that trainings start sharp when it says in the calendar. Coach#4 explained how he thinks it is important that the coach is *“the first to arrive and last to leave”* in order to give an example of commitment. In general, all the coaches said that keeping your promises is crucial to the team environment. Nonetheless, establishing trust was mostly related to the daily actions, moreover, it was clear that it requires much more than just keeping promises, like the following quotes display:

*“It is not only about the fact that you can trust me and that I keep my promise. That is a minor part of the whole concept of trust. More than anything trust is based on those small actions in the everyday life.” Coach#1*

*Coach #3 described trust with the following way: “Little by little it grows. Talking. Doing things together. Giving help. Asking for help. It consists of multiple small things.”*

*Coach#4 gave the following definition to trust: “When we think about a team, the essence of a team is the shared commitment. The feeling of trust comes from the fact that we have the same rules for everyone, we are honest and open. I believe that it builds the feeling of fairness and trust”*

In addition, setting an example was seen as important issue, Coach#1 stated: *“What I say to my players means nothing if it does not match my behaviour. Simply put, I have to be an example of a trustful person myself, otherwise it is just words”*. Consistently, Coach#4 highlighted the power of an example when he said: *“A coach who is professional and passionate, prepares the same way for each game builds trust, for sure.”*

Overall coaches could easily find several ways to build and maintain trust;

*“There are millions of ways to build trust! But here is one: Sometimes when I am being interviewed for the media, I think I am pointing my words to my team, like I would be talking directly to them. They follow the media before the big games anyway. It is one more channel to show them that I trust them and I believe in our possibilities to win the next game.”-Coach#1*

Open communication and talking with players was described as an important element in establishment of trust according these coaches. Coach#2 pointed out ‘the importance on knowing what is going on in the team’ multiple times during the interview. While we talked about trust he said that he has regular talks with the captain of his team *“It is a good way to sense what is going on in our team.”* Respectively, Coach #4 said:

*“I encourage them (players) to talk, when I see that they have something in their minds. It is good to get those negative thoughts out of head. Sometimes we talk about some heavy stuff too, but my players know that they can trust me. “*

#### 4.4.2. Team environment

Furthermore, the interviews revealed how these coaches thought it is essential to promote psychologically safe environment when aiming to build and maintain trust. They felt that it is important to appreciate that a team consists of different individuals. Coaches felt that it is important to take everyone as they are and encourage everyone to be themselves. Hence, according to the interviews these coaches nurtured a positive and open atmosphere where speaking up and sharing thoughts or raise concerns would be acceptable. They described how they wanted everyone to feel safe and be honest about their opinions, the next quote from Coach#2 is an example of his thoughts about the environment;

*“It is important to create an open and trustful atmosphere where everyone dares to speak honestly about their thoughts and opinions. No one is doomed from having an opposite opinion, on contrary everyone is encourage to bring out those opinions in order to create a better understanding between team members. Personally I believe the more we encourage the conflicting opinions to appear, the better. For example, it is important to find out if there are different opinions about the collective outcome goals between the team members in order to set a goal that everyone is sincerely aiming to achieve.”*

Regarding safety and trust Coach#1 emphasised consistency and fairness in coaching:

*“If I treat someone differently, if, let’s say that I give more freedom to someone, for some particular reason, I have to be able to tell the rest of the team why I am doing so with this player. Or if I make a mistake, pick a wrong tactic or something I have to be able to take the blame too. I believe it builds trust when you are honest and humane.”*

In addition, coaches explained that they give a great deal responsibility to their athletes on and off the field. They described how they often say to their athletes that they respect them and believe that they are wise enough to know how to live the athlete’s life when it comes to nutrition, recovery, rest, or doing trainings on their own, quote from Coach#2 is a sample of this:

*“I trust that they (players) do what they are supposed to do when they are training during summertime or when doing warm ups. I believe that they respect that I do not go after them asking about it. Of course I follow their training logs and all but I give a lot of freedom to them.”*

Majority of the coaches felt that “the more responsibility the players will get, the more they feel trusted”. Coach#4 explained:

*“With my last team, for example, we were on the road for three months altogether so I do not have to know what they are doing off the ice, sometimes they ask if they can go for a dinner together or something. Of course! GO! I trust they are wise enough to make decision that are good for athletes. Besides, I believe it pays off, when I trust them - they trust me.”*

#### 4.4.3 Respond to mistakes

According to these coaches, responding to mistakes is related to trust. This arose as an important aspect in the interviews. All of the coaches explained how they see mistakes and how they want to respond to them as a coach. They avoid using punishments or criticisms because they see that mistakes happen to everyone. Coach #3 stated: *“All coaches should cultivate a culture where is acceptable to make mistakes. Mistakes are nothing to be afraid of. We all make mistakes. When we learn to be more open-minded, we establish trust.”* Additionally, throughout the interviews the coaches underlined that it was important not to get upset or yell when someone makes a mistake on or off the field. For instance Coach#2 said; *“As a coach I never yell to my players if they do something wrong, they know that already. My job is to teach them not to make the same mistake again, by giving instructions what to do differently.”*

Coach#1 shared similar thoughts with Coach#2, she explained her philosophy regarding mistakes the following way:

*Sometimes I see already from the start that this is not going to end up well...for example, if I see that someone is not eating ‘the optimal menu’ before the game, but I let them make mistakes too, I see that as a way to learn what is optimal choice for someone. When I let athletes to take responsibility it is also a way to show that I trust them. Likewise, on the field I let them try different things and take risks. It is not that I always trust them completely in those situations but I never show it to them. It is more important that they have the feeling that I trust them. That boosts their confidence.”*

However, there was no tolerance or patience for players not paying attention or being lazy in the games, *“I do not accept that, not at all”*, said Coach#4. The participants described that this happened seldom but in these occasions *“disciplinary actions”* would be used, they said. *“However, never with the intention to humiliate the players or the team in public, only with the intention to highlight the fact that the rules are the same for everyone”*, underlined Coach#3 and explained further:

*“Sometimes I do raise my voice, when an individual or the team breaks the rules, that we have made together, but when I do so (raise the voice) I never embarrass anyone, neither make fun of anyone or my team”.*

In addition to the athletes' mistakes, the coaches' mistakes were discussed; majority of the coaches felt that it is pointless to blame others after a loss, on the contrary they were ready to take the responsibility in these situations. The participants brought up that a coach can set an example and admit mistakes or share failures. *"By doing so, the coach has a possibility to encourage players do the same"*, explained Coach#1 and stated: *"You establish trust when you can take the blame when the team loses, there is no point to blame the players."* Coach #4 talked about mistakes in a wider scope. He would like to encourage coaches to be compassionate towards themselves by saying: *"Coaches make mistakes too. In sports everything happens fast, sometimes coaches get fired and that is actually not the end of the world."*

Additionally, the coaches mentioned that they are ready to be challenged and admit that they do not know everything and they do not have all the answers. However, they felt that coaches should have the motivation to find the information needed, Coach#4 clarified:

*"In order to motivate the players you should know what the best teams and the best players in the world are doing. Then you can help your player to improve etc. I mean a coach does not need to know everything, but it is central that you have the passion to search the information."*

Coach#1 shared her experiences regarding this topic:

*"I feel that I been involved with countless different situations during my coaching career and that I have learned a lot from them. Opposite to a younger me, today I am capable to admit that if I do not have the answer to all the questions right away, besides I think that coaches do not need to know everything about everything. I think that the players today are cool with that."*

#### 4.4.4. Team culture

The establishment of trust was highlighted to be important by all the participants not only generally in coaching but also when it comes to game performance and success, *"It has a positive effect on the actual performance when I take them (the players) as they are and meet them as individuals"* said Coach#3.

The interviews pointed out that these coaches were ambitious and had an interest in cultivating a culture of excellence. According to these coaches cultivating the culture of excellence in daily routines goes hand in hand with success, Coach#4 said: *"We had three pretty successful years with my last team. Later my assistant coach said that the most important word to describe those three years was trust."* He explained further:

*”You have to create a habit of excellence. You have to make players understand that when they have an attitude to do their best in every task - regardless of whether it is eating, sleeping or training - to the best of their ability, that excellence comes from things mastered on a daily basis. As a result of fostering that kind of culture, we can be confident, and relaxed on a game day. Success is simply the result of good preparation.”*

All in all, these coaches described how they set the bar high for themselves and for their athletes. Everything these coaches do seem to be highly structured and have a purpose to get better in the future. In their interviews they brought up frequently that they are ready to invest time and effort for the game but simultaneously they are expecting the same from their players and from their colleagues. A winner’s attitude and the atmosphere of aiming high every day is promoted in their teams. Coach#1 links and relates the culture with trust, moreover she highlights the importance of discussing it with players especially when starting with a new team, and she clarifies this by saying:

*“When I start with a new team I tell the players that I will give 100% effort and that I do everything for them, but at the same time I tell them that I expect them to do the same, to go all out for the team and commit. I believe that I can build trust by emphasizing that I am really here for them.*

On the other hand, Coach#4 links ambitious culture with confidence and wanted to give an example what he is using with his team: *“Sometimes when a player comes to talk to me about that he have lost confidence, I often ask which came first – the loss of confidence or a lazy performance and bad preparation?”* He clarified what he meant by explaining further: *“It is not that complicated, we have rules and goals that players have created together. We keep those in mind every day and eventually they become part of our habits.”* Similarly Coach#3 concluded that *“when we stick to our rules and routines we play well, and when we forget them – we lose.”*

#### 4.4.5. Roles and rules

The rules and roles were seen crucial for wellbeing and the feeling of safety in the team environment by all the participants. It was discussed that a team is a combination of individuals who work for the team with different roles and responsibilities. The coaches wanted to teach to their players that the contributions of all the team members are valued and only then the team will function efficiently towards a shared goal. Also, it was seen important that everyone in a team knows that the rules are same for everyone. The next quote provides an example of a discussion about the importance of shared rules in a team:



*“The rules are same for everyone. In our team and organisation, we are 30 people therefore it is highly important that everyone takes care of their own roles and duties. Sports team is not a one man’s show, it is about trusting each other. As a head coach I am responsible of numerous things but I want to share that too.” –Coach#3*

Majority of the coaches explained that the rules are created in the beginning of each season together with the players and the coaches. It varied slightly from team to team how the process evolved. For example, Coach#3 told that in their team captains are responsible for making the rules, which then will be presented to the rest of the team. The following quote is from Coach#2 who connects the rules and goals in the same discussion:

*“In team sports the team goals must be understood and shared by everyone. Therefore, the atmosphere in the team should encourage everyone to bring up ideas and concerns that are relevant to the team's goals or its members. The process of creating the rules and the goals in our team starts by giving some preliminary questions related to a topic as a homework for the players. Then when we meet, the team is first divided in smaller groups I think this is important for supporting open communication and the feeling of safety. After that we have an open discussion and create the rules and the goals for the season by going through all of the groups. From there we break collective goals into individual goals; think of two personal goals that could make you as a player and our team to go further for the next following weeks.”*

#### 4.4.6. Being absent from training

Being absent from training was related to rules as well as discussed as an issue which may cause distrust either in the coach-athlete relationship or between the players of the team. Topic was discussed by a majority of the coaches. The coaches explained that the issue is discussed “every now and then” either in one-on-one talks between a coach and a player, and when needed it would be talked openly with the whole team present. Overall, an open discussion regarding this too was seen to establish trust, however a quote from Coach#3 indicates that it is not necessary that a coach tells the team why someone is away from a training: *“Being able to read the game is critical. When a player is away from trainings I do not usually tell the reason for the others, unless it has to do with injuries.”* In general the coaches wanted to foster an open atmosphere where everyone would trust each other’s abilities and would to be loyal towards the others when it comes to situations where someone is away from trainings. It was discussed that there should be clear reasons why one can be absent from trainings. One coach had a solution for this:

*“One value for me as a coach is that I trust and believe that players are doing the best they can. If they say that they are not able to join the trainings - I believe them, it is not my - nor any players’ job to question that.” –Coach#2*

Throughout the interviews all the coaches brought up multiple times that it is essential that every player knows their roles and what is expected of them, “*everyone should know how I can help the team the best way that I can,*” stated Coach#2. Additionally, it was seen important that the coaches treated everyone equally whether it had to do with being absent from trainings or the players’ positions in the team, “*otherwise it may easily escalate to distrustful situations,*” highlighted Coach#2. He continued emphasising the importance of the substitute players’ role and gave an example:

*“When we think about the national team and the championship games, there are often three goalies in the team...and actually “the goalie #3” is the one who have the most influence in the situations. I mean if “the goalie #1” has an injury, the second one can cover, but if “the goalie#3” is not supportive, maybe spreading rumours and stuff like that it is actually worse than if “the best” goalie would get injured.”*

Respectively, Coach#1 wanted to highlight the fact that players should have the feeling that everyone is an important part of the team and that the coach is there for them, first she said:

*“When I started as a coach I wanted to make sure that I talk with everyone every day, so I marked down in a list that I had talked with everyone. That way I learned to notice them in various ways and nowadays I am really good at it.”*

And she continued by saying:

*“All of the roles in the field are not as big or visible, but no player in team is more important than the other. Everyone is important, whether you score three goals or you are a substitute and you play the last 15 minutes (of the game). Everyone is equally important and everyone has an important role in the team.”*

#### 4.4.7. Coaching team atmosphere

It was not only the respect between the coaches and the players as these coaches pointed out when discussing the team culture, but also the respect between colleagues was seen as significant. Moreover, the importance of teamwork and positive atmosphere between colleagues in the coaching team was seen as an important factor in the establishment of trust. Correspondingly, it was discussed that in the whole organisation everyone have their own responsibilities and mutual respect should be the starting point. Regarding this, all the four coaches agreed that they want to be in charge of creating their team, instead of joining into an existing team. Three of the coaches mentioned that during their coaching careers they have been coaching in a team where they were not responsible in enrolling the team members; “*in comparison to the situation where you have recruited your members, the situation is utterly different,*” said Coach #2:

*‘For example, it is possible that you do not share the same values. If our values do not match, that may cause a lot of trouble and has not only to do with trust but also with coaching decisions. The coach needs to be able to trust his/her team members and to communicate reliably about any issues that affect the team. However, in a team you do not have to have the same opinion in all the things, it is only a good thing that we have different views and have a variety of opinions, it only makes the team richer in knowledge.’-Coach#2*

The coaches felt that enrolling a team has a lot to do with trust and respect between colleagues as well the head coaches’ confidence to enrol a coaching team where the team members possess harmonising abilities. Coach#3 said: *“The ideal situation when forming a team is to balance the skills of one team member with the complementary abilities of the others.”* Furthermore, it was discussed that when forming a team, the coaches need to make tough decisions sometimes. *‘If I do not have a good feeling from the first meeting (with a potential colleague), and my intuition is not good, it is not worth it,* said Coach#4. In addition, Coach#3 explained that coaches and players go through the same recruiting process; he clarified this by saying *“when I meet a potential team member I ask myself whether this piece match our team or not?”* Besides skills, the personality types were mentioned as well. Coach #1 said: *“In my team we have different personalities, because I need people who are a bit calmer than I am, then the combo is perfect.”* The following quote summarize the discussion that a head coach must have enough confidence to build a team so that the other coaches in the team know more of some areas:

*“I trust my colleagues. In the past few years I have seen physical training session only once or twice. When I go there everyone is always amazed that what I am doing there. It is not that I do not care, it is simply that I trust my colleagues. I know that they are the experts in their field.” –Coach#4*

Along with the willingness to form a team by themselves openness and positive atmosphere rose up in this dimension. The next quote is from Coach #1 who concludes that openness is an important theme:

*“All the team members should be open and honest. Prevention of a bad connection is to create a team where everyone trusts each other 100%. Players feel when everything works smoothly and there are no ongoing conflicts between the coaches and the management and vice versa. Our players have said that it shows that the management and the coaching team respect each other, they are having fun and they are committed to their work. It makes us to do the same.”*

As regards to the team unit, Coach#3 discussed about the importance of “*words and their meanings*” when he said:

*“In my coaching team everyone is being called a coach. I do not want to call them assistant coaches. Also, the player lines are named after the center players, not by ranked by numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. Maybe naive but I want to emphasize that it is about team work; everyone has their own responsibilities.”* –

#### 4.5. Holistic approach

The holistic approach and “*seeing the big picture in the athlete’s life*” was cited by all of the coaches as an important dimension of the coach-athlete relationship in the team environment. As said, the coaches discussed that by talking often with their players and being close with them, they have a better sense of what is happening in their lives. Coach#2 underlined that this information is important especially when implementing the training schedules on the individual level because “*it is never only an athlete we are talking about,*” he said. Coaches #1 and #4 discussed about nutrition and the part that it plays in the performance, “*eating properly can and will affect the performance*”, they highlighted. Coach#3 brought up the holistic approach when he said: “*It is not only focusing on the games and the trainings, the ball, the stick and the goals, it is about using all you senses when coaching, it is about seeing and noticing the personalities.*” The holistic approach comprised of two themes: stressors and overall load along with giving support within the non-sport related issues.

##### 4.5.1. Stressors and overall load

Balancing the overall load was mentioned by two of the coaches. Another one of them brought up the fact that players face multiple stressors - not only sports related - which may vary from day to day and across the season. This coach discussed that when an athlete has to focus on work and sports, at some point of the season the overall load may get too high, and therefore, in order to enable the optimal level of performance in games, the loads should be individually managed. The following quote is an example what coach#2 gave:

*“If we have a speed training or a tough physical hill training before an ice training there is no point for you to join in if you are not fit to fight in that kind of a training for some reason; maybe a tough week at work, no time for a dinner after work, or something. Then skip the first part, (eat), do the warm ups by yourself and meet the team on the ice.”*

The same coach explained how this becomes an important factor especially in women’s sports. After coaching various female teams over twenty years he feels that especially in women’s sports the athletes should have more self-compassion. Sometimes the players want to play or train when they

simply are not ‘*fit to fight*’, he explains. “*The decision to miss a practice is difficult even for adults*”, he continues. To support these claims he stated:

*“In my team we have some players who play sports, go to work plus they are moms as well. Being a mom is of course a priority number one. Sometimes I have to remind the players that when there is a lot going on in your life (outside of the field) you do not have to do the best training EVER at today’s practice - give the best that you have today. That is enough. Another thing that I am facing sometimes is that a player comes to me and wonders if she should skip a training (for some particular reason)...In these situations I say to the player that, if today’s practice will make you feel better today – moreover, if it makes you feel great tomorrow, jump into the box - if not, stay at home and try to get some rest. So I let themselves make the decision. And I think it has to do with trust. I show them that I trust them; they are the experts in their bodies, not me” – Coach#2*

#### 4.5.2. Giving support outside of the sporting life

Another theme that emerged in this dimension was support. All of these coaches discussed about the importance of providing support to the players not only within the sport-specific issues but also with the non-sport related concerns. Coach#1 pointed out that the players support each other also: “*as a coach I need to learn to know the players and their ways to deal with responsibility. My job as a coach is to find the leaders from the team that they can count on, because I am not in the field. And that has a positive effect on the team spirit too.*” One of the coaches, who is a principal at a school, talked about how he had been coaching the players a lot outside of the field too; by helping some players to finish their studies or applying to study for a higher level education. The following quotes are examples of the holistic approach as discussed:

*“Simply put, if you feel good, you play well. It is about balance and holistic wellbeing. I have seen that if an athlete has problems at school there are some problems in other components in life too, including sports. But when you start spending more time with the athlete and you try to help them with the other problems, little by little things work out and suddenly these guys flourish – they are showing the best they can on the field too.” -Coach#3*

*“I see that true success comes to those who understand what it means to be a great player on and off the ice, every day. Therefore, I try to help the players to see the point of nutrition and sleep in the bigger picture. There are the players who have had problems with nutrition and when we have fixed these, they have started to perform better on the ice as well. They sleep better, they have more energy, and they get slightly leaner, besides often the result is that they skate faster too.”-Coach#4*

Finally, related to this dimension coach#4 also discussed the *“importance of making the athletes understand what it takes to be an elite athlete,”* he explained this by saying:

*“When I meet a new athlete “I try to make them understand WHY they are playing. We have a talk about what it takes to be a top elite athlete. I want to make sure that they know what it takes, on and off the field, mentally and physically. Moreover, what I do is that I try to get the players to understand that a career of an elite athlete is short. If you put all in for the next two years, trying to be the best you can, you can be so much more satisfied with yourself than without that decision.”*

Regarding the starting process with a new player, another coach pointed out a contrasting way to start the coaching:

*“When a new player comes to the team I do not actually have any systematic dialogue or paper forms to go through with them, I talk with them naturally about anything. That is how it starts and from there onwards grow slowly by slowly.” –Coach#3*

#### 4.6 Developing coaching

When asked *“how would you like to develop Finnish coaching?”* the coaches gave mostly similar answers. *“Basically it is that what I have been talking about throughout this interview”*, stated both Coaches #1 and #4. *“I think we need more resources regarding mental coaching and sport psychology”*, said Coach#2. He mentioned about a book he lately read about Pele and said: *“I think team Brazil had a sport psychologist with them already in the 1952 Olympics”*. This made him explain further:

*“I mean it is good that we have had one (sport psychologist) in the games lately too. But then again, in Norway I think they have a number of sports psychologists, everyone specializing in different areas. We are not there yet, but I hope we could get more resources in the future.”*

One of the fundamental characteristics that emerged in this dimension was the co-operation between the disciplines. *“Finland is such a small country, we should share more knowledge between the coaches”*, said Coach#3, and highlighted that *“it could be useful to share both experiences and methods that are proved to be effective but also those which are less effective. Open and trustful atmosphere is central once again.”* Coach#4 and Coach#1 called meetings with coaches who coach another sport as *“refreshing”*. Coach#4 said that he occasionally talks long talks on the phone with coaches who represents another sport, while Coach#1 said that she meets two coaching colleagues from another sport on regular basis, *“You have a possibility to talk about the actual coaching not just the game itself”*, said Coach#1. This pointed out another issue that was widely discussed; the

education of coaches. The coaches suggested that overall coaches should educate themselves and *“it could be useful for any coach to spend some time and get to know themselves as a coach”* as Coach#4 formulated. He assumed that a role of a coach will be bigger in the future, *“a coach is not just a coach who coaches but often he is actually a person who spends more time with kids than they spend with their parents.”* Similarly, Coach#3 said that *“education is needed”*, he continued with the following quote: *“Especially in people skills training and in leadership. In sports the teams are often big so there are many different personalities and a coach needs to be expert in all kind of areas.”* Coach#2 wanted to *“expand the discussion in sports”*. He clarified this by saying: *“Too often we are talking about the result and some silly minor tactical issues. We should focus more on the process of meeting the individual players. That is coaching. And that I want us to talk more about.”* Also Coach#1 restated that coaching should be *“athlete-centered not just about the game itself.”* She declared this by saying:

*“We should create possibilities for players to take responsibility and encourage them to talk. We should use various teaching methods, in sports and in schools, as today’s youths are used with that. For example, they do not have that much patience, if I talk longer than fifteen minutes I have lost them. But when you involve them somehow they are more motivated. So I hope this could be a trend in the future, on and off the field.”*

#### 4.6.1 Involve players

In connection to coaching education and developing coaching all of the coaches brought up that the coaches should involve the players in various ways in order to create optimal environment for the players. The concept of involving was prevalent throughout the interviews. Involving was not discussed only when talking about how to develop coaching but also when discussing about the rules, the goals and the feedback. Furthermore, it rose up various times during the interviews that these coaches are involving their players in numerous ways in their coaching and that they described involving as an essential part of coaching. The following quotes describes the ways in which the coaches experienced coaching individuals in a team and coaching an entire team.

Coach#4 linked involving with motivation not only in the level of an individual player but the whole team when he was talking about developing coaching:

*“Like how we can get the players to understand... I mean to make them understand why they are playing sports and why they train, to make them connect with their motivation. We should involve the players in the decision making, the goal setting and in the feedback process. I believe this opens up a whole new world for the coaches too. Basically this is what I have been talking about here.”*

Coach#1 talked about the learning process when she was discussing about involving the players:

*‘My job as a coach is to teach the players to think and trust themselves on the field. For example if we are playing in a stadium that holds 16 500 spectators it does not matter what I try to yell to them from the bench, they will not hear a word. It is all about preparation.’*

Most importantly, when thinking of how to develop coaching the participants of this study described how they wanted the coaches to spend more time on getting to know their athletes and spending more time with them. *‘I think it (getting to know the players) would give so much more to the coach himself if he could do that,’* considered Coach#4.

#### 4.7. Summary

To finish with, establishing and building trust was seen as complex, multivariate, and a long term process that requires careful attention and daily actions. Trust was described as fragile and dynamic element which grows slowly: *‘Process of building trust takes time.’* stated Coach#3. Another coach supported this view by saying:

*‘When you meet new players they know what you have accomplished earlier, I mean they know that you know how to coach and they know at least part of your story. It may ease the start for them to starting to trust you. But I never leave it there. I will do the work to build a trustful relationship with everyone.’* –Coach#1

In summary, establishing trust and creating a strong coach-athlete relationship by using various methods was described as essential by all of these coaches. According to findings of these interviews the establishment of trust is created on the level of the individuals, by getting to know the players and talking with them on a daily basis. According to these coaches the relationships in the team environment should be based on mutual respect, understanding the roles and open communication. Also, it was discussed that being consistent in the coaching actions establishes trust. Focusing on the positive was mentioned as central as well. Themes presented in the results section were discussed throughout the interviews. In conclusion, these themes interact on several ways which directly and indirectly influence the individual player, the entire team and the whole organisation. Like the quote from Coach#2 displays that in team environment everything effects on everything: *‘Everything that you do or you do not do matters. We should understand that whether you say something or you keep quiet, it effects the situation and the others.’*



## 5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to describe and understand the experiences relating to trust of four team sport coaches. The main goal was to describe how the coaches describe the establishment of trust within their teams, and how they describe their coaching philosophies. In addition, this study targeted to describe the practices and methods used to establish trust by these coaches, since this might be beneficial in the light of coaching development in team sports. The data was collected by using semi-structure interviews. The main findings of the study are discussed in the light of previous research. Limitations and suggestions for future research are provided in the end of this chapter.

### 5.1. Building trust within teams

This study provides several noteworthy findings. Establishing and building trust was seen as a complex, multivariate, and a long-term process by all of the four coaches. Most previous studies have often highlighted the importance of group cohesion and atmosphere in team, while the coaches of this current study put more focus on individual level. Although atmosphere was underlined too, these coaches believe that it starts from the action of making everyone feel important. I believe that most people who become coaches are highly motivated and genuinely passionate about their coaching. However, it seemed that these coaches that I interviewed were not only passionate about their discipline but also about their players, about helping them to achieve their personal goals and helping them to get better every day. The coaches described how they are ready to invest time and effort in coaching and that they are always aiming to do what is best for the team. However, they highlighted several times that everything starts from the individuals, they described that the environment in their team was athlete centered and they were engaging with their players both on and off the field situations. They had genuine interest to get to know their player better. The latter, importance in knowing the individuals of the team, is named central principles for coaches in many research findings (e.g. Aarresola, 2016). Consequently, clear roles and positions were linked with trust by the coaches; when an individual is aware what is waited from them, the feeling of safety and trust grows, also stated by Vilkmán, (2016).

Despite the vast conversation about the focus on individual level, one of the fundamental element related to trust according the current study is team environment. and its various sub levels related to trust. In line with Carron (et.al, 2005), Kaski (2006, 182) and Rovio et al. (2009, 304-306), the coaches of the current study highlighted that successful team is built on a foundation of an open, trustful and cohesive team unit. Importance of mutual trust in all the relationship dimensions; coach-

athlete relationship or in team environment, player to player, or in coaching was seen pivotal by these coaches. They agreed that in team environments, even the minor things may influence several ways which then directly and indirectly may have an effect on the individual player, the entire team, or the whole organisation. In addition, coaches shared similar views about developmental process of trust as Lewicki et al. (2006); it develops during time and it requires continuous communication and close interaction between the coaches in team and the players to grow. Correspondingly, establishing trust and creating a strong coach-athlete relationship by using various diverse methods to reach the individuals was described as essential by these coaches.

Unlike in the previous studies, the chemistry in coaching team was emphasized by all coaches as extremely important element of trust within the whole organisation. When enrolling new colleagues these coaches aim to recruit not only a good coach but also a person who would share the same values and philosophy with them. Also, it was seen important that personalities balance one another to make a harmonising coaching team. This represented trust in deeper level; harmony in coaching team helps to establish harmony between coaches and players.

Further, stressed importance of responding to mistakes in this study may be beneficial in the light of coaching education. These coaches described themselves fair and supportive and they base their relationships with their players on mutual trust. This became significantly clear when coaches described their respond to mistakes. To the best of my knowledge, the coaching education teaches about the ways to give feedback but not how to respond to mistakes, not at least in this scope as it was discussed by these coaches, therefore the latter is something the coaches have adapted somewhere else. Even though respond to mistakes was not an interview question every coach brought it up. They emphasized that mistakes happen to everyone and they said that they never punish their players on mistakes, on contrary, they encourage their players to make them, so that players could learn from their mistakes. Neither were these coaches afraid to make mistakes themselves or to admit they do not have all the answers if they did not have the answer. Packalen (2015, 41) speaks for the same issue; she has stated that it takes courage for a coach not to say anything when someone has made a mistake. These kind of personality characteristics and considering reactions and words carefully, might help coaches to encourage athletes to be more confident to try new and challenging things without being afraid of making mistakes, which eventually will lead athletes to create a strong trustful bond with their coaches. Overall the culture that these coaches fostered in their teams seems to be organized and disciplined, but fair and equal. They hold high standards for themselves, for their players and for their colleagues. These philosophies and methods described are similar to the Becker's

study (2009) *“It’s not what they do, It’s how they do it”*, where 18 athletes from various disciplines described what great coaches are alike.

Similar with views of athlete centeredness by Kidman (2005) and importance in involving athletes when supporting continuous development of athletes written by Hämäläinen Blomqvist (2016), this study described how the coaches want to involve players in decision-making process (e.g. rules, goals, individual training programs, warm up trainings and nutrition) and within feedback situations, mostly in practice situations and video meetings after the games. Also, the coaches wanted to know their players and their strengths well to create a good relationship with the players and to encourage them in the best possible way. To do so, they told that they make themselves accessible in various ways. For example, talking with their athletes in daily basis, during the bus trips, leaving the office door open, sending sms-messages and e-mail to players. Correspondingly, research exploring the factors leading to achieving personal best or even to achieving Olympic medal (Werthner, 2009) supported the importance of good and functional coach-athlete relationship. Getting to know the athletes in personal level helps a coach to know the individual needs of the players and treat the players as individuals. In turn, this helps coach and player strengthen the trust and bond between them. Thus, in line with Becker (2009), getting to know athletes in personal level and establishing a close relationship with them is central for athlete’s motivation, and well-being (Jowett, & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2002). However, often coaches in general are facing a challenge of when and where to find time to do this. In this study this was seemed to be a question of culture and habits. Knowing the individuals and establishing trust according to these coaches does not require continuous fixed meetings, moreover it was more important that there was close interaction between the coaches and players in daily basis.

Overall, holistic approaches and treating players as individuals has enormous importance. It is far more than just being able to set individual and effective goals. When talking with athletes often, the coach can recognize those players whose motivation has reduced somehow, so the coach is able to do something about it before it may grow into a bigger issue, for instance to drop out.

This study also described about the relationship of trust and regular, mainly positive, feedback. Feedback is a process that requires constant attention, “all the time everywhere, as coach#1 said. In line with Liukkonen and Jaakkola (2012, 56) the coaches highlighted the timing when giving feedback. The closer to the game, the more positive the feedback they are given. For instance, coach#1 and coach#4 said that feedback is mainly positive during video meetings or trainings on game days. Correspondingly, knowing what kind of feedback or instructions is the most effective, especially

during the game situations was linked with trust. Naturally it takes experience to know what to say, when to say and how to say things the most optimal way to the recipient, still the message may be interpreted wrong by the other party since also athlete's cognitions, behaviours and feelings are involved in coaching situation. The coaches tried to tackle possible misunderstandings for example by getting to know their players well, by reflecting themselves regularly and by preparing and planning. For instance, coach#3 said that in their team it is decided in advance who of the coaches speaks during time outs. This is important since time-outs are a perfect situation for coaches to light the team on fire – or the opposite. Equally, Packalen writes about this in her book about coaching communication (2015, 32-32). She says that coaches should not only think what to say, but also how to say it and in which connection to say it, in order to support the player. As, with the words chosen, the coach has a possibility to strengthen athlete's identity and the capability to play at his or her optimal level. Feedback and the words are part of the process that creates athlete's identity (Packalen, 2015, 33).

Especially when playing under pressure or when playing important games coaches should stay calm. Furthermore, to show trust and confidence towards their team in pressure situations they should know what to say, when to say it and how to say it. According to the interviews of this study, these coaches are consistent in who they are whether it is practice or game situation. Displaying a calm and confident coaching style in pressure situations or crucial moments is highlighted as an important ability in literature and previous research, (e.g. Becker, 2009), further, it has been said that consistency increases the feelings of safety (Packalen, 2015, 40) and trust inside the group (Mäkipeska & Niemelä 2005, 33-46). The current study described how it is important to maintain calm and stable especially when the team is playing bigger games. For instance, Coach#1 describe a story from Portugal that the players of her team had given feedback that the coaching team was calm and showed confidence under pressure and that this had helped the team to stay confident and perform better under pressure. According to previous studies, these kinds of coaching attributes allows the athletes to focus on their own development and performance.

Trust and interpersonal relationships were seen as essential areas for coaching education in the current study. The coaches encouraged all coaches to educate themselves *especially in people skills training and in leadership*, as Coach#3 said. Also, it was seen beneficial to share both experiences and methods that are proved to be effective and less effective between the coaches. Finally, more resources regarding mental coaching and sport psychology were seen to be important, since no coach is expert in all areas.

## 5.2. Limitations and future research

This study has limitations that provide opportunities for future research. The data was collected in coaches' native language (Finnish) and the quotes used in method section are translated in English, which leaves a possibility that some information can be interpreted differently than it was meant to be. However, to avoid this, I asked coaches to check the text for possible misunderstandings. None of the coaches wanted to change the information. Also, this study solely focused on the perspective of coaches' side, therefore it would be significant to study the interpersonal dynamics and the experiences of the teams and the athletes' who play for these coaches. In addition, it would be valuable to know how the athletes of these coaches' describe what is trust and how it is established in their teams as well as to compare how these descriptions match with the descriptions of the coaches of this study. Correspondingly, it would be interesting to examine what is the true impact on establishment of trust on athletes' motivation and performance - and to get a more solid picture of that, it should be measured several times not only at one point of time.

In addition, as there is speculation that communication with each athlete may be more important in women's team games, (Liukkonen et.al, 2006, 16-17; Rovio, 2009, 164), in the future studies could explore wheatear gender has any impact on trust; do male and female athletes describe and perceive trust in similar ways. Furthermore, since it is evident that trusts consist of multiple factors (Lewicki et al. 2006) and due the fact that these coaches highlighted the importance of trustful atmosphere in the whole sport organisation, I suggest that the concept of trust should be studied not only at the level of individuals, but also by focusing on subgroups and whole sport organisations, including coaching teams and management. Regarding this, in business world, when Google researchers explored "What makes a team effective at Google?" (n=180 teams) they found that psychological safety and trust matters the most (Duhigg, 2016). Therefore, it would be interesting to replicate this "Project Aristotle" in sport context and see wheatear it is completely same in sport and business.

In addition, cohesion is described as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes both social and task components at the individual and team level. As in cohesion, also in trust according these coaches, the leadership, personal and team factors are essential, so from this perspective, cohesion and trust have much common elements. So, is trust synonymous with team cohesion? Or is trust just one ingredient in the group cohesion recipe? That is also an idea for future research. Additionally, as most studies and literature are focusing on the methods of "how to be a good coach?" or "how to create a winning team?" in the future studies that are focusing on samples that have successfully managed to overcome conflict situations by focusing on the re-establishment of trust would expand the knowledge of this phenomena, because in sports conflicts are not researched much (Wachsmuth,

Jowett, Harwood, 2017) except by only few (e.g. Paradis, Carron & Martin, 2014). In addition, although Rovio & Salmi (2009) have proposed a revised list “what to do with a new group or when a group is in crisis” (p.308) more studies on this area are certainly welcome and the information gained would most likely be highly applicable material to many coaches, since these are the issues that many teams face at some level. In sum, longitudinal studies conducted with a whole team organisation samples, encompassing multiple methods would give valuable insight into this fruitful subject, trust, that has the potential to influence positively on coach’s and athletes’ well-being, motivation and performance.

Albeit mentioned limitations exist, I still believe there are several strong aspects that speaks for the importance of this study. First, only a few studies have been conducted that discuss about trust in team sports. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that describes the methods of trust establishment in elite team level in the Finnish sport community. Secondly, this subject is highly topical since the quality of coaching is one of the current themes in the Finnish coaching development program for the near future (Hämäläinen & Blomqvist, 2016). Third, the present study is particularly relevant because it uncovers the methods used by highly experienced coaches who are willing to share their information. Fourth, this study focused on coach experiences in various aspects of coaching - rather than on any single part or method of coaching, therefore the data found from the interviews brings diverse information about the establishment of trust and about the methods on creating a strong coach-athlete relationship in team sports.

### 5.3. What explain the common views of the coaches?

It is at the same time surprising and interesting how the coaches had such a similar thoughts and philosophies on coaching although a) they are coaching different sports, b) they are from different parts of Finland, c) they are not same gender and d) in addition they are coaching different genders. What explains these common views? First, most likely these coaches enjoy and value coaching, which may be one of the reasons why they gave such a similar answer. This does not explain much yet. Similarity in opinions may be due the sample after all – in fact, they are homogeneous in many ways. First, they have similar sport backgrounds, all of them had been in the player’s role, and this two-sided first-hand experience has most likely helped them to understand the importance of a working relationship between the coach and an athlete. In addition, they have started coaching at young age and all the coaches were highly experienced having over 20 years of experience. Also, Côté et. al (2007) agrees that excellent coaches have become excellent partly due context-specific education and partly due coaching experiences. Therefore, the fact that all the coaches are Finnish and that they

have Finnish coaching education background may be one factor behind the similar thoughts. However, when two people go through the same education it does not automatically mean that they share the same philosophy after that. Still, the Finnish coaching education might play a role. Nonetheless, my personal impression is that these coaches had been reflecting their own coaching and they have high emotional intelligence. They are aware of their weakness and strong sides and “they are not afraid to be themselves”. Also, Hämäläinen (2008, 163) says that reflection is key to quality coaching. Furthermore, to me it appears that these coaches possess strong interpersonal and communication skills when it comes to coaching context. They understood their roles as an example and they want to lead by example.

#### 5.4. Conclusions

One of the most important findings of this study was the interaction between different themes presented in the result section - most of the elements goes under the same umbrella called trustful environment. The results revealed a comprehensive picture of the factors that according to these coaches can be used to establish trust in team environment. Another central note is that the coaches were unanimous with their views. Primarily, the coaches in this study experienced trust to be fundamental part of coaching. They note that trust is based on mutual respect and they also described that trust is a dynamic and slow process, as it is established, used, maintained broken and repaired over time, as outlined also by Lewicki et al. (2006) and Mäkipeska & Niemelä, (2005, 33-46). This emphasizes the notion that in team environments it is essential to put constant effort on building and maintaining trust in order to translate that into a positive motivational climate that fosters athletes’ holistic development. In the present study, the true core of trust establishment was captured in every day coaching actions by supporting individuals on and off the field and getting to know them as individuals. Especially, this study might be beneficial by offering a different approach to responding to mistakes. Finally, these coaches described trust not only to be an important, but critical part of succeeding.

In conclusion, this study provided new information regarding practical methods and principles about how to establish trust in coach-athlete relationship and within teams. The knowledge gained about the elements these coaches emphasized in their coaching philosophies may be beneficial in coaching education, in teams and on a broader perspective also within individual level of sports. As tough as it is to build and maintain trust, it is crucial since interpersonal relationships depend on trust.

*“Finding good players is easy. Getting them to play as a team is another story.” (Casey Stengel)*

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## APPENDIX 1

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH SUBJECTS AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### HOW COACHES ESTABLISH TRUST IN TEAM SPORTS? A qualitative research of coaching leadership

**Contact information of researcher:**

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**INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS**

**Brief Description of what will be required from You:**

You are required to participate in a semi-structured interview in an effort to access coaches' unique perceptions of trust in team sports.

**Schedule & additional information of the interview:**

If you show willingness to participate to the study a suitable time and location for the interview (November 2016 – February 2016) with the researcher will be agreed. The interview will take on average 45 minutes in length. If needed, the interview can be conducted with Skype. The interview will be recorded digitally. The record will be stored and used only for this particular master's thesis study.

After the research is final (Spring 2017) the participants will be informed of the research results. The master's thesis will be published in a webpage presenting completed theses at Jyväskylä University. (<https://kirjasto.jyu.fi/kokoelmat/opinnaytehaku>). The results will also be presented in master's thesis seminars.

**CONCENT FORM****Rights of research subjects:**

**Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in it, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.**

The organization and conduct of the ways in which the interview and the reporting of its findings will be done so that your identity is treated as confidential information. No personal information that is collected during the interview will be disclosed to anyone else besides you and the research group. When the results of the research will be published, no information will be included that would reveal your identity unless you give a permission to do that. If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation in this study or any other queries please do not hesitate to raise this with the researcher. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Project Supervisor Taru Lintunen.

**Consent to participate in research**

**I have read the above form, and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time, and for whatever reason, I hereby agree to participate in the qualitative study of coaching leadership. I give my consent to the use of my data collection (interview) in such a way that it is impossible to identify me as a person**

agree / do not  agree that researcher can present my story and background, as told, with knowledge that it is possible to be identified

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 Date

Signature of the research subject

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 Date

Signature of the researcher