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**The Potential Costs of High  
Cohesion in Sport Teams**

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## Declaration

I declare that I alone composed this thesis and that it embodies the results of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out by others included in the thesis.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

Cohesion is essential for team harmony and performance. It is universally sought in sport teams. The benefits have been extensively studied and are a requirement of team success. Counter to wide held belief, cohesion is not an intrinsically positive phenomenon. This thesis aimed to develop more understanding of the potential disadvantages or costs of high cohesion in sport teams to fill a significant gap in the literature. Study 1 examined the extent and nature of these costs. Athletes perceived similar costs. Fourteen categories of costs were identified with perceived pressures and communication issues demonstrated to be strongly significant. Study 2 was framed in narrative theory to explore costs experienced over the life-span career of a retired professional motor sport co-driver. The most significant costs experienced were pressure to perform and pressure to conform. The key influencing factors were a performance narrative along with what was identified as a new narrative type, the team performance narrative. Study 3 utilised the lens of narrative theory to explore when and where costs were not experienced by a current elite motorsport sport driver and his team. Buffers were indicated. Study 4 was a case study of a high performing team where across the entire season team cohesion was high but performance wasn't reciprocated accordingly. High cohesion produced costs of conformity and normative influence, rigid demands and methods with narrow goal focus, communication issues and pressure to perform. These costs are all inter-related and interacted to have a negative impact on performance. This thesis raises awareness of the potential costs of high cohesion in sport teams and, by offering a new model – the Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model - for identifying strategies to minimise these potential costs, aims to improve individual wellbeing in a team and improve team performance.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## **Introduction**

Cohesion is a highly important variable in group dynamics and, as such, continues to be examined extensively across disciplines. Cohesion in human beings fulfils an innate drive to belong which, when realised, can bring health, balance and wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This drive for belonging, however, co-exists with the basic human and social drive to be distinct and individual (Boucher & Maslach, 2009).

Cohesion is reported in the research literature as being beneficial and bringing countless positive outcomes to teams and the individuals within them. However, cohesion is a process which also works to produce negative outcomes or costs which are experienced by team members and the team itself. Cohesion benefits are vital to a team but by developing understanding of the potential costs that cohesion brings- along with its benefits- it means that these costs can then be minimised, and so team success further enhanced.

Research evidence has demonstrated how cohesion has a multitude of positive benefits such as increasing collective efficacy (Heuze & Raimbault, 2006), decreasing competitive state anxiety (Eys, Carron, Beauchamp, & Bray, 2003) and increasing amount of time in practise, effort and sticking to training schedules (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1988; Prapavessis & Carron, 1997). Cohesion is desirable and crucial for success in sport teams but some research has shown that high cohesion also brings disadvantages or costs.

Buys (1978) proposed that high group cohesion contributed to harmful group processes such as deindividuation and group think. Since then there have been few but notable research papers that have cited the potential costs of high team cohesion (Aspitch, 2008; Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Carron, Prapavessis, & Grove, 1994; Hoigaard, Safvenbom, & Tonneston, 2006; Hoigaard, Tofteland, & Ommundsen, 2006; Paskevich, Estabrooks, Brawley & Carron, 2001; Prapavessis & Carron, 1996; Rovio, Eskola, Kozub, Duda, & Lintunen, 2009). Research has also indicated that athletes

themselves perceive, along with the more obvious well-cited benefits, multiple various costs to being part of a highly cohesive team (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2005).

The relationship between cohesion and performance is complex. A meta-analysis in 2002 found a small to moderate positive relationship between cohesion and performance in sport: for both social and task cohesion, in co-acting and interactive sports, across competitive levels, age and gender levels (Carron, Coleman, Wheeler, & Stevens, 2002). Recently a meta-analysis, examining studies over the last ten years, showed a significant moderate relationship between cohesion and performance with the relationship stronger for task than social (Filho, Tenenbaum, & Yang, 2014).

High cohesion and performance are considered to have a reciprocal positive relationship with performance having a stronger influence on cohesion than that of cohesion on performance (Carron, Eys, & Burke, 2007; Carron et al., 2002; Martin, Carron, & Burke, 2009; Senecal, Loughhead, & Bloom, 2008; Williams & Widmeyer, 1991).

However, various specific studies have contradicted these general findings with an experimental study in 2000 demonstrating that cohesion had no impact on performance (Grieve, Whelan, & Meyers, 2000), a case-study in 2009 demonstrating social cohesion impacting negatively on performance (Rovio et al., 2009), and a very recent study in elite youth sport reporting that cohesion was not a predictor of performance (Benson, Siska, Eys, Priklerova, & Slepicka, 2016). A recent meta-analysis found that the task cohesion and performance relationship in sport had a much weaker relationship than in a business setting (Castano, Watts, & Tekleab, 2013). This meta-analysis supported earlier significant meta-analyses across group settings indicating both social and task cohesion *are* significantly related to performance (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Mullen & Copper, 1994). However, *importantly* social cohesion in sport had a weaker influence than task (Filho et al., 2014).

It is clear that there is a significant gap in the literature in knowledge and understanding of the potential costs of high team cohesion. The directionality of the relationship between cohesion and performance is unclear. Cohesion and performance are considered to have a reciprocated positive relationship but there is stronger evidence for the effect of performance on cohesion than cohesion on performance (Carron et al., 2002; Filho et al., 2014). It is unclear how cohesion operates to impact on performance, both positively and negatively. This thesis will address these gaps in the literature and attempt to resolve the conflicting research evidence by examining the potential costs of high team cohesion and the possible impact of these costs on performance. It sets out to answer the following broad questions:

- i. What is the extent and nature of the potential costs of high team cohesion in sport teams perceived as being experienced by an athlete(s) in their teams?
- ii. What are the influencing factors? How are the costs experienced and when where/who with do they manifest themselves?
- iii. When/where do these potential costs of high team cohesion not occur? Are there buffers against the costs?
- iv. When and how did the costs of high team cohesion experienced over the season in a high performing team impact on performance?
- v. Which of these potential costs of high team cohesion were experienced with the greatest impact and how significant were they to the athlete(s) and their team(s)?
- vi. What are the strategies to minimise these potential costs in order to create the most beneficial and productive team environment?

### **Structure of Thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 details a comprehensive review of the cohesion research literature. Chapter 3 presents Study 1. Study 1 aimed to develop better understanding of the extent and nature of the costs. It answered question i). 51 members of co-acting motor sport teams answered open-ended questions about the potential costs of high cohesion. The study utilised content analysis, specifically Interpretational Qualitative Analysis (I.Q.A.) to thematically identify categories of costs

and begin evaluation of their significance. Study 2 could then explore these categories in more depth. Chapter 4 presents both Study 2 and Study 3 which are both based in narrative theory. It answered questions ii), iii) and v). Study 2 explored the complexities of the potential costs of high team cohesion through a qualitative study of the story of the costs of high cohesion as related by a retired professional athlete. This study increased understanding of what costs are experienced over a career with a high performing team, what the influencing factors are and how significant the costs are. Over 7 hours of life history data were collected from the participant over the course of a year and a dual narrative analysis was conducted: a holistic content analysis and holistic analysis of structure and form. This enabled hindsight, deep reflection and information rich data based on one individual's lived experience. Study 3 explored the potential costs of high cohesion in sport teams by utilizing the lens of narrative theory to examine what costs of high team cohesion were not experienced by a current member of a high performing team. This study analysed the influencing factors and indicated buffers against the costs. Over 6 hours of life history data were collected from the participant over the course of 6 months through extended interviews. Then a dual narrative analysis was conducted. These were not comparative studies but both give examples of one individual athlete's personal experiences of the costs of high cohesion in teams. Thus offering a depth of understanding as to what costs are experienced or not experienced, when and how some of these costs are experienced or not experienced and how significant these potential costs are.

Chapter 5 presented Study 4. This mixed method case study examined the relationship between some of the potential costs of high team cohesion and performance. It answered questions iv) and v). Data was derived from interviews with a member of an elite sport team after every competition across the entire season, online data including his blog and interviews on various websites, and a semi-structured interview at the end of the season. Performance and cohesion were both measured by self-rating. Finally, Chapter 6 contains a general discussion of the thesis, including a summary of findings, theoretical implications, a practical guide to minimising costs (the Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model), strengths and limitations and future research recommendations. It answers question vi).

# **Chapter Two**

## **Literature Review**

Cohesion has been defined as “a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998, p.213). It is a multi-dimensional dynamic construct incorporating task and social cohesion occurring at both the group and personal levels (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985; Carron et al., 1998; Carron et al., 2002). This conceptual model is split into four distinct dimensions: *Group Integration-Task* (GI-T), *Individual Attractions to the Group-Task* (ATG-T), *Group Integration-Social* (GI-S) and *Individual Attractions to the Group-Social* (ATG-S). Task cohesion includes GI-T which is each individual’s perceptions of how the team remain united as a *group* in pursuit of the team goals and ATG-T which is each individual’s own full *personal* involvement as part of that unit in achieving team task goals (Carron et al., 1985; Eys, Loughhead, Bray, & Carron, 2009a). Social cohesion includes GI-S which is each individual’s feelings about the team’s social unity as a *group* and ATG-S which is each individual’s own *personal* involvement and fitting in with this group unity (Carron et al., 1985; Eys et al., 2009a).

Although each of these four dimensions is conceptually different, in real sport situations task and social cohesion are not clearly distinct entities (Rovio et al., 2009; Vincer & Loughhead, 2010). This is reflected in the literature, where there has often not been a differentiation between task and social cohesion due to, and accentuated by, this inter-relatedness of both aspects being compounded by measurement challenges. The very early cohesion research literature treated cohesion as unidimensional, most typically measuring only interpersonal attraction or some aspect relating to interpersonal attraction such as desire to return to group or value placed on the group (Arnold & Straub, 1972; Schachter, Ellerton, McBride, & Gregory, 1951).

Early research utilised a variety of psychometrically unsound instruments, such as the Sport Cohesiveness Questionnaire, which make findings unreliable and incomparable across studies (Ball & Carron, 1977; Carron et al., 1985; Salminen, 1987). These at times ambiguous findings, in both early cohesion research and sport-specific cohesion literature, have been considered and reported as being somewhat clearer due to

improved definitions, methods, and measurements (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005; Loughhead & Hardy, 2006).

Recent research has again reiterated the unreliability of findings of earlier research, particularly in studies examining the cohesion-performance relationship, because they fail to consider the nested nature of the data (Benson et al., 2016). Furthermore, despite the fact that many researchers agree that athletes have common perceptions of the psychological climate of their team, an aggregation of individual team members' cohesion scores will produce biased estimates of standard errors by lessening the variance within the sample (Benson et al., 2016). The standard measurement for team cohesion is the group environment questionnaire (The GEQ) which was developed in 1985 (Carron et al., 1985) This is an 18-item scale measuring cohesiveness in an athlete's team based on the four dimensions of the cohesion conceptual model: GI-T, ATG-T, GI-S and ATG-S. 4 factors and internal consistency was verified using over 200 athletes from 26 different teams (Carron et al., 1985).

The multidimensional dynamic nature of cohesion means that clear separation for measurement will always be challenging: each dimension is constantly fluctuating as it influences, and is simultaneously influenced, by the others. Focusing on increasing task cohesion has been shown to increase perceptions of social cohesion, social cohesion usually only begins to develop as the team come together to achieve a task, whilst high social cohesion can motivate team members to achieve tasks for the team (Senecal et al., 2008; Tziner, Nicola, & Rizac, 2003). Ultimately however a balance between task and social cohesion would seem to be optimal for a team (Hardy, Eys, & Carron., 2005). It is important to examine cohesion as a process (Dionne & Yammarino, 2003). This process includes locomotion and maintenance (Hardy et al., 2005).

The reported positive consequences of high cohesion, at both individual and group levels, are numerous and appear established to such an extent that it has been stated as fact that "... cohesion is associated with positive affect" (Paskevich et al., 2001, p.472). Much of the literature, particularly the earlier literature, does support the commonly



held belief- and assumption- that high team cohesion will universally improve satisfaction and have positive effects on performance.

Some research has indicated that task cohesion is related to reduction in competitive anxiety (Eys et al., 2003; Prapavessis & Carron, 1996) and increased self-efficacy (Kozub & McDonnell, 2000; Marcus et al., 2010; Prapavessis & Carron, 1997). Social and task cohesion have been shown to increase collective efficacy (Heuze & Raimbault, 2006; Heuze et al., 2006). Cohesion has been also associated with lessening the impact of negative events and an increase in the sharing of responsibility for team failures (Brawley et al., 1987; Carron, Widmeyer & Brawley, 1988); increased satisfaction (Widmeyer & Widmeyer, 1991); amount of time in practise, effort and sticking to training schedules (Carron et al., 1988; Prapavessis & Carron, 1997); sacrifice behaviour (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997; Shields, Bredmeiser, Gardner, & Boston, 1995); and conformity to group norms (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997).

Researchers have “inherently supported a cohesion-as -positive perspective in terms of both questions asked and results obtained” (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2005, p.167). So there is widely held acceptance, based on and because of this evidence, that cohesion in sports is positively affective at the individual and group levels, and that team performance levels will improve in line with a rise in team cohesion levels (Warner, Bowers, & Dixon, 2012). This results in an unequivocal desire and drive for higher team cohesion from coaches, sport psychologists and wider team members (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2005). Team building has been defined as a process that enhances unity and cohesion to allow the team to work together to achieve better results (Newman, 1984). The previous unequivocal acceptance, both in theory and practice, that cohesion is only beneficial has led to an increase in research into, and application of team-building interventions, to develop and increase cohesion: primarily in attempt to improve performance in sport teams (Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003; Carron, Spink, & Prapavessis, 2009; Collins & Durand-Bush, 2010; Newin, Bloom, & Loughhead, 2008; Senecal et al., 2008).

Research does report a moderately significant circular relationship between cohesion and performance in sport with performance highlights as markers of, and conducive to, high cohesion; task and social cohesion have both been positively related to performance and success (Carron et al., 2002; Carron et al., 2007; Filho et al. 2014; Martin et al., 2009; Senecal et al., 2008; Williams & Widmeyer, 1991). There was a significant meta-analysis in 2002. It examined 46 sport studies encompassing 9988 athletes and 1044 teams and found a small to moderate positive relationship between cohesion and performance: for both social and task cohesion, in co-acting and interactive sports, across competitive levels, age and gender levels (Carron et al., 2002). There was a significantly stronger relationship between cohesion and performance for female teams (Carron et al., 2002).

A study in 2005 examined the moderating influence of team norms on the cohesion-performance relationship using a multi-level approach (Patterson, Carron, & Loughhead, 2005). Team norms are the overall required group standard of behaviour for team members (Patterson et al., 2005). This study found that higher norms for social interactions in social situations influenced self-report performance the greatest while high task norms didn't increase self-report performance. This study also showed that when there was low social cohesion but high norms for social interactions there was a low performance self-report. This is further supported by an organizational research study that showed social cohesion had a greater influence on group productivity/performance than task and that cohesion predicted performance but was not a subsequent consequence (Chang, Duck, & Bordia, 2006).

Recently a meta-analysis was conducted focusing on sport research examining cohesion and performance in the last decade (Filho et al., 2014). In this meta-analysis 16 studies were included in the final analytical pool revealing a significant moderate relationship between cohesion and performance. Task cohesion was shown to have a greater relationship with performance than social cohesion- but both showed a positive relationship. This meta-analysis supported the previous meta-analysis in sport and wider settings in its report of a significant relationship but different was this was shown to be a moderate relationship not a moderate-strong relationship (Carron et al., 2002;

Mullen & Cooper, 1994). Perhaps most significant was that social cohesion was shown only to have a small significant relationship with performance in the recent meta-analysis whereas Carron and colleagues (2002) reported a strong relationship for social cohesion with performance slightly stronger than task which was still strong. The meta-analysis reported that cohesion and performance showed a reciprocated positive relationship with performance having a stronger influence on cohesion than cohesion on performance. Filho and colleagues (2014) in line with the earlier sport meta-analysis reported a stronger relationship for females than males with performance.

Most recently a qualitative study with sport coaches examined these gender differences in cohesion and performance (Eys et al., 2015). This qualitative study explored the cohesion-performance relationship through interviews with coaches who had led both all male and all female teams. It reiterated the common-held belief that cohesion can only be a good thing which is demonstrated through a typical comment of one of the coaches: "I strongly believe that the more cohesive the team is regardless of gender, the more successful the team is going to be." (Eys et al., 2015, p.101). This study reiterated the necessity of further examination of the cohesion-performance relationship due to its complex cyclical and dynamic nature (Eys et al., 2015).

To reiterate, there are multiple vital outcomes of cohesion which have been extensively studied. These studies have examined cohesion only as a positive phenomenon with no consideration to the interactive effect with the negative aspects or costs of cohesion. The significance of the costs is important to consider in relation to personal effect and to performance outcomes. The almost universally held perspective that high team cohesion is intrinsically and holistically positive, and that high cohesion should be sought unequivocally in sport, had in more recent research been somewhat cautioned (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2005; Rovio et al., 2009).

Hardy et al., (2005) was the first study to challenge the existing body of research and examine whether athletes themselves perceived there to be disadvantages to high cohesion. The results demonstrated that athletes themselves do in fact perceive both

benefits and costs to high cohesion: approximately 55% of athletes surveyed perceived potential disadvantages of high social cohesion and approximately 30% perceived there to be disadvantages for high task cohesion.

Important to consider is that cohesion is an affective process as well as an instrumental variable (Filho et al., 2014). This process produces costs. These costs by various mechanisms and processes, implicit and explicit, can thwart the cohesion-performance relationship. It is not necessarily, as was previously unquestioned, that as cohesion rises so automatically does performance. The relationships and moderating variables are much more complex. The limited research into the negative consequences, costs, of high team cohesion has begun to establish that there are potential costs- and these costs occur at both the personal and group levels. These costs, and their mechanisms, implicitly and explicitly interact with benefits interactively effecting the then fluctuating cohesion levels: so the movement in this the dynamic cohesion process impacts on the cohesion-performance relationship.

This thesis set out to examine these costs so there can be the beginning of understanding of what the potential costs are and how they have an impact on the cohesion-performance relationship. Once a cost comes into play the perceptions of cohesion may remain very similar- or be very different- at group and personal levels and the overall cohesion of the group will increase or decrease: therefore quantitative measurements are not fully adequate tools to monitor the effects of these disadvantages impacting on the cohesion process. Recent studies have utilised qualitative methods as a tool for measuring cohesion.

Initial earlier research generated negative potential costs of high cohesion were: pressure not to let team mates down, worry about living up to team mates expectations, expectations from team mates for performance to be reasonable and feeling demand to play well (Prapavessis & Carron, 1996). This was then expanded to 13 athlete generated disadvantages (Hardy et al., 2005). These encompassed all previously examined disadvantages: reduced social relations; communication problems, incorporating

decreased criticism of social loafing; negative affect; incompatible attitude; perceived pressures, incorporating self-handicapping behaviour; decreased member contribution; time wasting; goal related problems; balance; decreased focus; reduced task commitment; social isolation; and social attachment problems (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Carron et al., 1994; Coudevylle, Ginis & Famose, 2008; Hardy et al. 2005; Hausenblas & Carron, 1996; Hoigard et al, 2006; Maddison & Prapavessis, 2007; Paskevich et al., 2001). This research has clearly demonstrated the need to further explore these costs and the mediating influences and variables. In particular, in this body of research, the role of conformity and communication processes have been indicated as significant and so warrant further investigation.

Since Hardy's study, in 2005, there has been little research in this particular area of cohesion but one significant qualitative case study demonstrated that high social cohesion can increase pressure to conform- and be costly to team communication processes- ultimately negatively impacting on team performance and success (Rovio et al., 2009). This case study supported previous literature emphasizing the significance of conformity and communication within a cohesive unit or team and suggesting that negative aspects of these group processes are produced within a highly cohesive team.

Higher cohesion is associated with higher pressure to conform to group norms (Patterson et al., 2005). This is not necessarily a good thing. Conformity exists when there is not a specific request or instruction to conform but there is a perception of and a following submission to perceived group pressure (Rovio et al., 2009). Groups exhibit immense pressure to conform, explicit and implicit, on the members of the group and this is the basis of most negative group processes and behaviours: deindividuation, normative influence, group think, panic and collective collapse (Aspith, 2008; Buys, 1978; Carron et al., 2005; Paskevich et al., 2001).

Deindividuation is a psychological state that occurs in a team when there is a loss of individuality and identity and so a loss of inhibitions (Silk, 2003). This results in individuals being more likely to act in selfish or antisocial behaviour (Silk, 2003). In

sport teams if individual identity is blurred then hidden norms may surface and compromise task performance and accomplishment (Rovio et al., 2009). Group think is a phenomenon where the team acts accordingly to normative influences: its likelihood of occurring increases in teams with high social cohesion (Apitzsch, 2009; Rovio et al., 2009). Group think can lead to a lowered “mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgement” (Janis, 1972, p.9). This has a negative impact on the group’s decision making processes.

In their study of a Finish ice-hockey team, Rovio and colleagues (2009) examined how high social cohesion resulted in the coaches having lower, and truer, perceptions of the team’s performance, in practice and performance. However, the players themselves- who were a high socially cohesive unit- did not accept or approach problems, and did not communicate effectively. There was evidence of normative and informational influence. This is an example where group polarization and desire to maintain and sustain cohesion within the team resulted in a non-acceptance (and/or a non-realisation) of training and performance level: thus the communication and decision-making processes within the team were damaged to the detriment of team success.

Athletic identity is the extent to which the individual identifies with the athlete role (Lally, 2007). It has been proposed that an athlete’s identity is strongly related to the team objective part of task cohesion and in particular to role identity (Kamphoff et al., 2005, Stetts & Burke, 2002). Research has demonstrated that if athletes have narrowed identity, because the dominant dimension is concentrated in athletic identity, this may negatively affect their sense of self (Lally, 2007).

This can be particularly problematic during transitions out of the team and the sport either through injury or failure to be successful at the required competition level or at the end of a career into retirement (Carless & Douglas, 2012, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2006). Existing career transition models explain transition as a process with both prior conditions and long term consequences. It is a process that is impacted by coping

mechanisms and other personal and situational factors (Stambulova, Stephan, & Jäphag, 2007).

A highly cohesive team, particularly at the high competitive levels, would require and drive for a dominant athletic identity. This would potentially prevent a broad identity and the work-life balance necessary for long-term optimal physical and psychological wellbeing across a career and lifespan (Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2012, 2013; Douglas, 2009; Therberge, 2008).

It has been suggested in organizational research literature that one of the mechanisms by which high cohesion may be costly is through team members being locked into certain patterns of behaviour which hamper effective communication, and so team coordination processes, decreasing team performance (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Berman, Down, & Hill, 2002; Hansen, 1999; Katz, 1982). Communication, whether it is verbal, non-verbal, intentional or non-intentional, is a three stage process: encoding and sending, receiving, decoding and interpreting; communication is susceptible to disruption at any point (Eccles & Tennenbaum, 2004). Communication pre and post-performance, as well as within performance itself, is a complex process involving planning, goals, analysis and feedback: quantity and quality will be highly variable.

In Hardy's study (2005) communication problems were reported as a cost of both social and task cohesion. It has been shown in some more recent studies that high team cohesion can lead to over familiarity and complacency which can have a negative impact on decision making and communication processes (Montanari, Silvestri, & Gallo, 2008; Rovio et al., 2009).

Furthermore, high cohesion can leave teams susceptible to the process of collective collapse or negative psychological momentum (Apitzsch, 2009). This team chaos which is the direct antithesis of cohesion involves a breakdown in communication and particularly an increase in negative emotion: the role system no longer works

effectively within the team (Apitzsch, 2009). Rovio et al., (2009) demonstrated how high social cohesion may produce normative influence negatively affecting team communication in pre and post process communication.

From this literature review, it is clear that high team cohesion potentially produces costs. It is unclear the extent of these costs, which of these costs are significant, how significant these cost are and to what extent and how they impact upon performance. This thesis addressed these gaps in the literature knowledge.

Study 1 set out to clarify the extent and nature of the potential costs. Study 2 was exploratory and examined the significance of the costs, particularly at the personal level, and their influencing factors. Study 3 was exploratory and examined a case where the costs were perceived as not being experienced, influencing factors were analysed and buffers against the costs were indicated. Study 4 examined the relationship between costs and performance.

Further to this, a significant gap in the literature is the representation of elite athletes, athletes competing at the very top age-appropriate level in their sport (Benson et al., 2016). In attempt to develop knowledge this thesis has focused on elite teams and this thesis has defined elite athletes as national and international competitors and professional team members (Swann, Moran, & Piggot, 2015).

This thesis will focus on co-acting motor sports. Motorsport is significantly under-researched compared to other traditional sports (Filho et al., 2015). The few existing studies mainly focus on the influence of psychosocial states on performance (Fuller, 2005; Edmonds, Tenenbaum, Mann, Johnson, & Kamata, 2008; Mullen, Faull, Jones, & Kingston, 2012; Yamakoshi, Matsumura, Yamakoshi, Hirose, & Rolfe, 2010). High performance motor sport requires maximum exercise output similar to athletes competing in sports such as football, basketball, and baseball (Yamakoshi et al., 2010). Motor sport like any sport is unique but similarly some aspects are related to all other



sports. Motor sport study is particularly relevant to high performance group settings (Jenkins, Pasternak, & West, 2005).

In a recent meta-analysis examining the relationship between cohesion and performance in published studies in the last ten years, there was only one study which examined a co-acting sport (Filho et al., 2014) and this supports the choice of co-acting motor sports for consideration in this study. Co-acting sports such as athletics, swimming and hockey are popular in the UK where elite athletes have attained great success and as many as 40% of Canadian collegiate sports are defined as co-acting (Cormier, Bloom, & Harvey, 2015).

# **Chapter Three**

## **Study 1**

## **Introduction**

The overall purpose of the study was to develop better understanding of the extent and nature of the costs of high team cohesion. The specific objective of the study was to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How prevalent are the costs of high cohesion?
- 2) a) What are the nature of the perceived costs of high task cohesion, in co-active sports, at individual and group level, and b) what are the nature of the perceived costs of high social cohesion in co-active sports at individual and group level?
- 3) What are the disadvantages to being part of a team that is both highly task cohesive and highly socially cohesive at individual and group level?
- 4) Are any of these costs more important than others at individual and/or group level?

As previously discussed in this thesis, there is very limited research investigation and evidence in this specific area; the researcher sought to uncover athlete's perceptions of these potential costs and answer these 4 research questions through open questions.

Although the researcher was aware of categorisations used in the parallel study in co-active sports, the aim was to allow the participants to have a voice by giving them the opportunity to cite and describe as many of the costs of high team cohesion as they had experienced (O'Caithain & Thomas, 2004).

Therefore, the data organisation and categorisation processes aimed to interpret participants perceptions based wholly on their own perceptions. Categories would be created inductively and then be inductively and deductively presented and theorized accordingly (Vincent & Crossman, 2012).

## **Methodology**

The specific criteria for initial recruitment for the study were that participants be current members of a co-acting motor sport team and focused on 4-wheel motor racing sports. Sports are described as "interactive" when they require a high degree of interdependence and coordination where those requiring little are described as "co-active" (Crafty, 1983). Evans, Eys, and Brunner (2012) developed a typology that helps distinguish interdependent sport teams based on group task, and outcome. Most sports

vary on a high to low continuum and most involve some elements of both (Eccles & Tennenbaum, 2004). In co-acting motor sport teams, both the actions of each driver or rider alone and their interactions with the other team members- involving high communicative and cognitive demand- are vitally important. The study aimed to seek a heterogeneous sample of gender and competitive level to enable generalizability of results.

The governing body for 4 wheeled motor sport in the UK, Motor Sport Association (M.S.A), was approached and contacts were developed with a broad section of motor sport organisations across the UK: Scottish Motor Sports, British Rally Championship, Scottish Rally Championship, Scottish Association of Car Clubs. Various strategies were used to positively publicise the research in order to recruit suitable participants: attending meetings of local motor sport clubs, going into the paddock at race events to speak to team members and liaising with press officers from various sports and teams. The researcher was actively involved in various worldwide motor sport forums as part of the general background to the research and made contact with the organisers of the Canadian National Rally and various U.S.A. motor sport organisations. Confidentiality was assured to encourage trust and to increase the strength of the research (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010).

Teams were approached and invited to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was clearly outlined and informed consent obtained from all the drivers and riders. Participants either completed the questionnaire in word document format and returned by email, or complete via online link, and a few were completed by hand and returned to researcher at race weekends, or completed and posted through a team press officer. Responses were provided individually. The researcher gave opportunity for participants to ask questions and clarify anything about the questionnaire or the research. No questions or clarifications were asked for.

### **Participants**

Recruited for the study were 51 motor sport drivers and riders from co-active motor sports: the most frequently cited sports were rallying (n=29) and karting (n=9) with other sports including various categories of Touring Cars, and different Motor Cycle

Sports such as Superbikes. There were 44 participants from 4-wheeled motor sport and 7 participants from 2 wheeled motor sport. There was a wide range of competitive level with a high number of participants competing at elite level: International (15), National (22), Provincial (1), University (5), Club (6) and Recreational (3). 1 participant did not cite their competitive level. All participants- except 3- were currently members of their respective teams with the average length of service being 64 months. Age ranged from 18 years to 68 years and the mean age was 36.12 years. Despite the attempt to directly recruit female drivers and riders, due mainly to the nature and demographic of motor sport, there were 47 male participants and 4 female participants.

### **Measures**

The study replicated and extended the open questionnaire designed by Hardy et al., (2005) to use with athletes from coactive sports by a) splitting of the 2 original questions into 4 in order to examine personal and group level costs separately and with b) 2 additional questions asking if athletes perceive there to be costs, at either- or both- of group and personal levels, in a sport situation incorporating high social and task cohesion. Hardy et al., (2005) were able to identify some of the disadvantages of the potential costs with their two questions on task and social cohesion. The splitting of the questions in this study, giving opportunity to answer on both the personal and group level costs separately, widened the scope for possible further different costs to be identified. Hardy et al., (2005) cited as a limitation of their study that task and social cohesion were only examined separately and recommended that a future study should consider the potential costs of team that was both highly task and highly socially cohesive. This study does this and therefore will give a more detailed and realistic understanding of the costs particularly considering, as has been discussed previously in this thesis, that that task and social cohesion are interactive in practical situations.

Section 1 of the questionnaire covered demographic information about the participants. Section 2 gave a concise definition of cohesion, with clear distinction between task and social cohesion, to participants:

*“Cohesion means to stay together, to be united, to be unified. It represents the strength of the bond among team members.” Scientists usually draw a distinction between*

*social cohesion and task cohesion. Social cohesion is thought to exist when team members get along personally, like each other, and consider one another to be friends. Task cohesion is thought to exist when team members work well together, and are in agreement on what and how to achieve team success.*

Section 3 was made up of 6 questions with each pair corresponding to the research questions for this Study:

*“Do you see any disadvantages to you personally in being a member of a highly task cohesive team? If so, please indicate those below.” and “Do you see any disadvantages to the team itself in being a highly task cohesive team? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.”* This corresponded to Research Question 2a.

*“Do you see any disadvantages to you personally in being a member of a highly socially cohesive team? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.” and “Do you see any disadvantages to the team itself in being a highly socially cohesive team? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.”* This corresponded to Research Question 2b.

*“Do you see any disadvantages to you personally in being a member of a team that is both highly socially cohesive and highly task cohesive? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.” and “Do you see any disadvantages to the team itself in being a team that is both highly socially cohesive and highly task cohesive? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.”* This corresponded to Research Question 3.

These six questions corresponded directly to the 6 deductive beginning categories within which the meaning units would be inductively categorised:

1. Group Level Disadvantages of High Task Cohesion (High Group Integration-Task disadvantages)
2. Individual Level Disadvantages of High Task Cohesion (High Individual Attractions to the Group-Task disadvantages)

3. Group Level Disadvantages of High Social Cohesion (High Group Integration-Social disadvantages)
4. Individual Level Disadvantages of High Social Cohesion (High Individual Attractions to the Group- Social disadvantages)
5. Group Level Disadvantages of High Task and Social Cohesion (High Group Integration- Task and Social disadvantages)
6. Individual Level Disadvantages of High Task and High Social Cohesion (High Individual Attractions to the Group- Task and Social disadvantages)

### **Procedure**

This study deployed the qualitative approach of content analysis to organise and categorise the total data set of 160 meaning units into a clear thematic framework (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001; Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Patton, 2002). This process has been presented successfully in cohesion research findings (Hardy et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2009).

This approach was directed by theoretical sampling and comparative analysis methodology until theoretical saturation was achieved. The researcher initially used deductive analysis to establish the 6 beginning categories (Biddle et al., 2001; Eys, Loughhead, Bray, & Carron, 2009b). However, the main process utilised the same interpretational qualitative analysis (IQA) approach- fundamentally an inductive analysis with no pre-decided categories for the data- as has been successfully established in the research literature (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Cote et al., 1993, 1995; Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989a,b, 1991).

Patterns were categorised and classified, by seeking refinement of data through similarities of properties within that specific category and differences to those categories without, as they emerged from the data. This created a thematic framework from which further analysis examined the relationships and meanings (Galli & Vealy, 2008; Patton, 2002). This explicitly detailed process of content analysis is designed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Lally, 2007).

### **Data Organisation**

Firstly the data was systematically organised. Each questionnaire had been read and initially analysed, when it was submitted, so that the researcher had a feel for the data and was able to note emerging trends and themes as the data built until theoretical saturation was reached (Kirstiansen & Roberts, 2010; Lally, 2007).

At this point, all of the questionnaires were printed off onto paper hard copy and read and re-read individually in order that the researcher was thoroughly familiar with the perceptions of disadvantages from that individual driver perspective and also had a holistic sense of the entire data set (Scanlan et al., 1989a,b).

On each individual questionnaire meaningful units or segments of texts were highlighted within each of the six questions so that within every questionnaire every significant segment of information was separated (Cote et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989a,b,1991). The basic unit of analysis (the raw data theme) was defined as the text unit consisting of a quote comprised of a phrase, sentence or paragraph which represents one single disadvantage of high team cohesion (Miles & Huberman, 1984, 1990; Patton, 2002; Scanlan et al., 1989b.).

From this division of the data on hard copy, there was checking and re-checking and then the participant's responses were typed verbatim into a word document under the three headings: 'Task', 'Social' and 'Task and Social' and coded P. for 'Personal' or I. for 'Individual' so that the data was held within the 6 deductive categories.

There was now a comprehensive list of a set of divided text units representing all the information in the data but such that each individual text unit made sense on its own and contained one idea/item of information (Cote et al., 1993; Tesch, 1990). Beside each of these text units was typed in a general description describing its topic: a tag.



Creation of tags were 'in vivo' where possible so that the text unit was coded by a term used by and familiar with the drivers/riders themselves (Tesch, 1990).

At this stage the creation of a tag was an interpretative description of the information given in the data and involved the researcher summarising or concisely defining that information given in the data. Some tags were exactly the same so natural divisions were immediately identified from the data. Some were similar and then condensed as further relationships and patterns emerged in the second stage of data analysis (Patton, 2002). The second stage now that the data had been examined in-depth and organised into divided tag units was the data interpretation.

### **Data Interpretation and Categorisation Task**

Firstly the text units under 'task' were read and re-read and each in vivo tag was re-confirmed beside the text by highlighting. There were initially 68 units of text meaning for task. In the data organisation process, two text units were moved to the social category, resulting in 66 meaning units for task at this point in the data categorisation process. Those text units with same or very similar tags were grouped naturally together resulting in a beginning of categorisation within the data on the computer into first order, or sub, themes which are first categories or groups with similar properties (Cote et al., 1993; Lally, 2007; Scanlan et al., 1989a,b).

The text units were now de-contextualised but, because the researcher was familiar with each meaning unit as part of a whole contextualised response from an individual, the researcher was able to interpret subtleties in language such as tone or inflection to interpret meaning in order to establish implicitly or less obviously connections and relations between text units- use of textual analysis (Crossman & Vincent, 2012). Part of the process of analysis was to look not only for relations and patterns but also for contraindications and "vagaries, uncertainties, and ambiguities" (Patton, 2002, p.437). The list of 66 tagged meaning units was now printed as hard copy and each tagged meaning unit was cut out so the researcher could visually examine all the tagged meaning units and they could be moved around and analysed as part of a potential

category by asking whether it was similar to the other text units within this category and dissimilar to those out with (Cote et al., 1993; Cote, Salmela, & Russell, 1995).

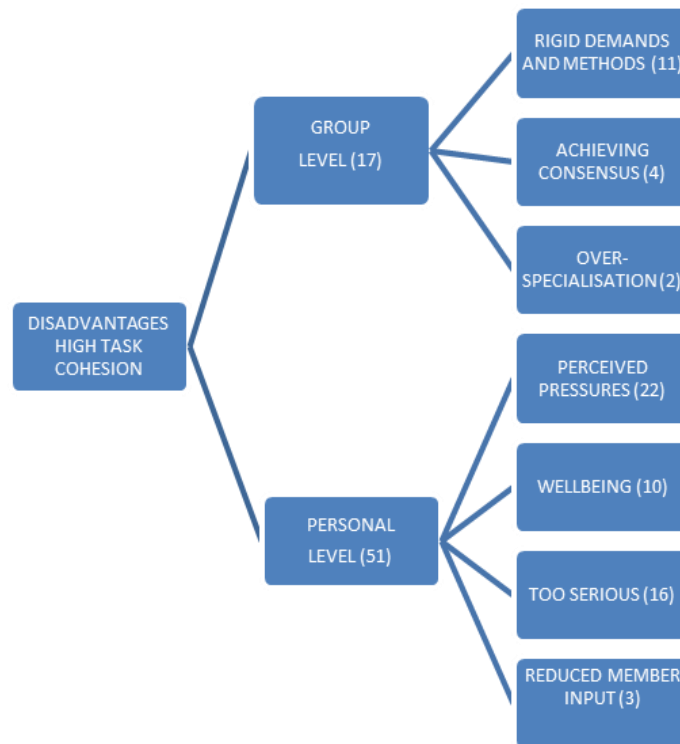
The first analysis resulted in 11 first order categories for the personal level: reduced member input; work-life balance; identity; wellbeing; pressure put on other team members; pressure not to let other team members down; pressure to conform; task pressure; demands to follow rigid structures straining relationships; demands to task at any cost; reduced personal enjoyment. Unclustered categories were omitted or retained if significant (Eys et al., 2009a,b; Scanlan et al., 1989b).

Continued clustering by the constant comparison method condensed all uniformities into the same category to produce higher order themes each of which was inclusive, accurately capturing all the sub themes within, while demonstrating exclusivity to all the sub-themes out with (Patton, 2002; Scanlan et al., 1989a,b).

There were 4 higher order themes at the personal level: pressure (21 units); lack of personal enjoyment (15 units); wellbeing (10 units); and reduced member input (3). The importance of a category is not necessarily indicated by the number of text units but e.g. longer in-depth comments with examples indicate strong feelings and emotional response show significance (O’Caithain & Thomas, 2004)

For group level disadvantages there were 3 final higher order categories: rigid demands and methods (11), required consensus (4), and over specialisation (2). These categorisations were finalised after using the same analytical processes for the social units and the social & task units where by two additional units were added, one from each, both to personal level- one to pressure and one to lack of personal enjoyment. This resulted in a total of 68 meaning units, 50 for personal and 18 for group. See figure below.

## Results Research Question 2a



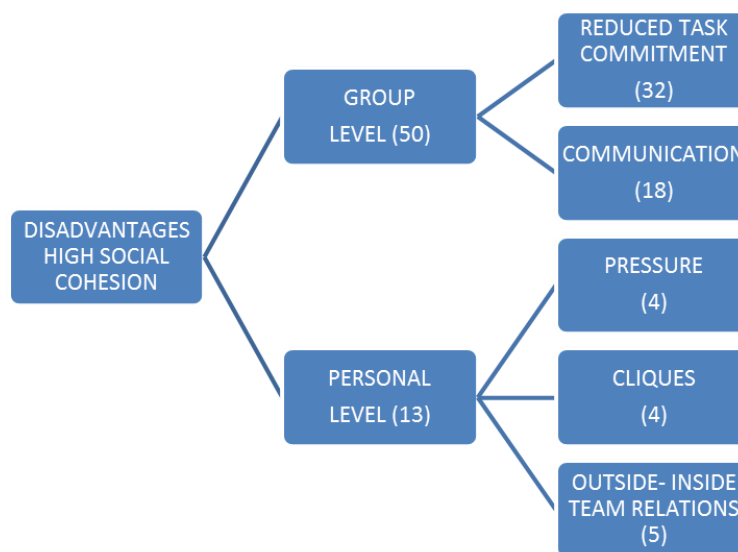
### Data Interpretation and Categorisation Social

The same analytical process was used to categorise the text units for social. There were 63 meaning units after the one was removed and added to Task, and one was omitted because it referred to social cohesion across teams rather than within teams. The 63 meaning text units were classified into 50 for group level disadvantages and 13 for personal level disadvantages.

At the personal level there were 3 higher order categories: pressures (4), cliques(4) and outside-inside team relationships(5). At the group level there were 2 higher order categories: reduced task commitment and communication. Reduced task commitment was the largest category for the disadvantages of high social cohesion with a total of 32

meaning units. This higher order category was created through the constant comparative method which clustered reduced task commitment (16), goals (2), lack of professionalism (5), reduced focus (8) and time wasting (1) to result in this higher order category. The other higher order category established at the group level for social cohesion was communication which had a total of 18 meaning units from the clustering of sub-categories communication, compromising hierarchy (3), judgement and decision making (5) and personal tension (3).

### Results Research Question 2b

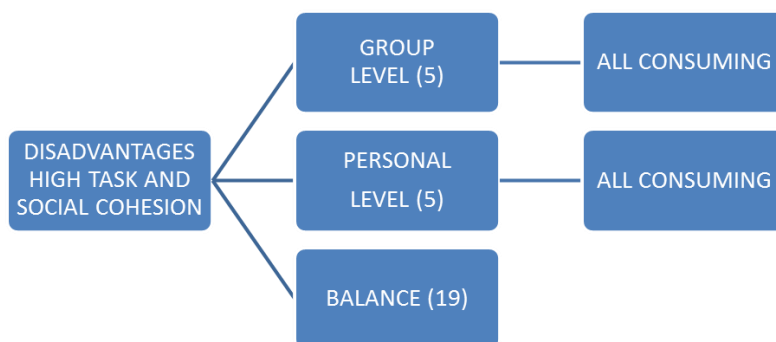


### Data Interpretation and Categorisation Task and Social

There were 29 text units related to disadvantages of having both high task and high social cohesion. Participants' perceptions of the disadvantages of having both were mainly focused around the idea of the ensuing problems of maintaining balance and this category had 19 text units. 7 text units referred directly to this and an additional 6 text units articulated that if there was high task and social cohesion, the high social cohesion might be a disadvantage, i.e. some participants felt then that having both meant that social cohesion would be too high and there wouldn't be a good balance because the correct balance would be less social than task. The main concern was that the incorrect balance would lead to communication problems or reduced task commitment- group

level disadvantages. An additional 3 text units cited a worry that it was impossible to get both high task and social cohesion with the other text units relating to this idea saying that both would cause conflict or competition for balance. The data analysis resulted in 1 higher order category at the personal level: all consuming, with 5 text units, and 1 higher order category at the group level, also with 5 text units, all consuming.

### Results Research Question 3



### Analysis and Discussion

Approximately 63% of co-acting motor sport athletes considered there to be disadvantages to high social cohesion. 59% considered there to be disadvantages to high task cohesion. 29% considered there to be disadvantages to a team that was highly task and socially cohesive; in particular the idea of achieving a balance between social and task was considered important.

A majority of drivers and riders reported disadvantages not only to social cohesion but also to task cohesion. In the parallel study by Hardy et al.'s (2005) a similar amount of interactive sport athletes indicated disadvantages to high social cohesion (56%) while this study had a higher percentage of participants perceiving disadvantages to high task cohesion compared to the 31% in interactive sports.

This could be explained, to some extent at least, by the high percentage of more competitive athletes in this study with 72% competing at national or international level compared with less than 1% in Hardy's study. Because in this study the majority of participants were competing at such a high level, and most likely experiencing very high task cohesion, then it seems plausible they could then identify more easily the disadvantages this high performance environment would create or exacerbate.

It has been suggested that individuals will have different perceptions of cohesion according to their personal make-up e.g. goal orientation, participation motivation or task type (Dion, 2000; Eys et al., 2009a). At very high competition level athletes may be more concerned with their own and team performance, and competition results, rather than the social and friendship element of the team (Kamphoff, Gill, & Huddleston, 2005). Performance pressures will increase: as the performance demand grows the demand to sacrifice yourself for the team and achieve group goals is greater. The results of Study 1 reflect that athletes are more likely to experience- and so perceive- the disadvantages of this environment and group process that are involved in it.

Importantly, both this study and Hardy et al.'s (2005) study evidenced that a high number of athletes perceive and experience costs being part of a highly cohesive team. Athletes perceived similar costs.

### **Disadvantages of High Task Cohesion at the Group Level**

#### **Rigid Demands and Methods.**

A high percentage of the respondents compete at national and/or international level motor sport where the team structure and organization is very hierarchical, more so than many other sports. Rigid demands and methods are usually evident – and some would argue necessary for success- in this type of sporting environment. However, with this being the most cited group level disadvantage of high task cohesion, motor sport co-acting team members also perceive such an environment with high task cohesion to produce disadvantages. A concern was that in a highly task cohesive team *“People only focus on the goal”* and *“... it is very demanding at times and rules and regulations have to be followed exactly otherwise the team does not work smoothly.”*

The category also reflects demands to achieve the task for the team at any cost: “*You then look for other ways to get round problems, i.e. illegal servicing, co driver tactics etc.*” This is a cause for concern particularly for a team that is both highly task cohesive and highly social cohesive where a tendency toward deindividuated behaviour would be increased.

Furthermore it was felt high task cohesion reduced creative input by team members which meant that there was “*Potential for missing something that may be found by somebody thinking ‘outside the box’ that is not integral to the team*” so that “*Often the team can be narrow minded in situations where there is multiple causes to a problem or multiple solutions.*” As one driver explained:

*“I have raced for a team that did not work well together, but problem solving was sometimes achieved through arguments, team members were challenging each other to find the problem rather than working on it together. As odd as it sounds, this often worked better than if they were to work together on the issue.”*

This participant is emphasizing how high cohesion results in team members potentially glossing over challenges in attempt to maintain cohesion and avoid conflict. In avoiding conflict there can be a failure to address problematic issues. Conflict avoidance is not necessarily a good thing. Conflict is under researched in sport groups (Martin, Bruner, Eys, & Spink, 2014).

The theory of transformational leadership has gained increasing attention and support in the recent sports research. Transformational leadership is a model of how leaders inspire followers towards team goals through inspirational motivation, role modelling, high expectations, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration and fostering of group goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Research on transformational leadership has established that conflict is not always detrimental. Conflict can stimulate team members to consider differing opinions. This can encourage new problem solving strategies and

creative thinking in decision making processes which can be beneficial and lead to better team performance (Dionne et al., 2003).

The system of rigid demands and methods in a highly task cohesive team encourages uniformity and conflict avoidance. It is a system which curbs creative thinking and is a strong disadvantage at the group level with all respondents who cited this disadvantage seeing it as being damaging to the team because it means that the team don't always get the "*better solution*." This also relates to the personal level disadvantage of reduced member input.

This study highlighted that high task cohesion discouraged individual creativity particularly in problem solving processes which would possibly negatively impact on performance long term. Some other research on transformational leadership has indicated that individual consideration predicts high task cohesion particularly in a high performance environment (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009; Holt & Dunn, 2006). If a highly task cohesive team then neglects individuality and individual values within the team the resulting costs will have varied consequences including with collaborative problem solving, particularly in the maintenance stage of the cohesion process. Furthermore, if members of a team become too accustomed and comfortable with specific rigid ways of working they may be unmotivated –and indeed feel unable- to embrace change (Katz, 1982).

In one qualitative study with football players, examining the role episode, one player intimated that being part of a cohesive team meant an "automatic acceptance of the coaches' ideas" but that when the coach changed he was immediately unreceptive, "a bit hard-headed, and one-track minded, thinking that the other system worked for us last year. . . . I didn't think something else might work." (Mellalieu & Juniper, 2010, p.409) Individuals in a highly cohesive team may then not be open to change such as within the wider organisation, system changes or new members joining, and may also not question current ways of working which prevents forward thinking and forward movement in a team. This category is strongly related to pressure to conform.



### **Achieving Consensus**

This category might seem on the surface contradictory to the above but is in fact a reflection of the conflict which arises in a highly task cohesive team focused only on achieving the team goal, requiring that very rigidity of demands and methods, and trying to maintain input and therefore unity from all team members: *“The need to create consensus before proceeding with any major decision can require time and effort”* and *“The need to come to an agreement on a team direction when the team direction is either not an area of expertise or is subjective can cause delays.”* High task cohesion requires that everyone have- or at least feel they have- input and are unified around the goals but within such hierarchical team structure at the high competitive level *“when Each member has its own ideas and they intend to discuss what they intend doing together before actually putting into action...discuss pros and cons of each different method.”* This is viewed a disadvantage delaying the drive to the overall performance objective.

### **Over-Specialisation**

A highly task cohesive team will recruit highly specialised team members, desirably the best in their field, but the cost of this is that *“If a specialised member of the team is absent, the others may struggle to complete the task normally done by the specialist”* which will hamper the team. Also it may take new team members longer to integrate and fit in to such a highly task cohesive specialised team. The co-acting team members also saw a disadvantage that although each team member was highly unified in pursuit of the task, because each has an individualised specialized roles and expertise only in that area it means that *“You can be equated to the lowest member of the group- i.e. the least competent”* so that your weakest member in any area is the bench mark for performance. This relates to reduced member input which is a personal level cost but then can also have a detrimental impact at the group level.

## **Disadvantages of High Task Cohesion at the Individual Level**

### **Perceived Pressures**

This, the most frequently cited disadvantage, incorporated an array of general pressures felt personally from being part of a highly task cohesive team as well as the pressure not to let valued team mates down. General pressures ranged from *“Pressure of task*

*deadline*” -illustrated by this participant’s view: “*Sometimes it is useful to have your own space as a driver/individual to take everything in. At times when working in a team, you need to gather your thought and then approach the time when you are ready- sometimes I find myself hassled into decisions as the team need to press on*”; to “*Financial pressure- failure or mistake will have a big impact on the season*” and even “*Pressure to pursue the team activity (i.e. to spend money, time or effort that may be in relatively limited supply) as opposed to other (non-sport related) competing interests in order to not feel like one is letting down the team.*” This perceived pressure is described by one motor sport driver who said a disadvantage was the “*Excess of responsibility which I get in my day job (MD of international engineering company).*”

The importance of this category is demonstrated in the strength of, and the emotional tone evident in, some of the comments made by the team members who feel that “*The pressure to perform is omnipresent*”, “*If you screw up the task, you have let the others down*” and “*If someone is seen to have let the team down, that person is not going to feel very good.*” This category also represents the contradiction of how in a highly task cohesive team individuals perceive the pressure on themselves a great disadvantage, yet are aware of simultaneously being the ones creating that very same pressure for other members of the team: “*Once you have lived the performance levels that can only be reached through task cohesive, you tend to want to excel in that way elsewhere, but, alas, task cohesive can only be achieved with a few people and so sometimes I end up “putting the bar too high” for others or newly formed teams.*”

Pressure to perform was similarly the most frequently cited disadvantage to high cohesion in the study of interactive sports even though the participants in that study were less competitive level athletes than in this study (Hardy et al., 2005). “*Performing at the highest level puts great demands on the individual. The ability to be mentally and physically prepared to perform in an important competition is an additional pressure the individual has to cope with alongside his or her own expectations and desires.*” (Pensgaard & Duda, 2002, p.219)

Pressure to perform would most likely increase at higher competitive levels but would depend on a multitude of internal and external factors and is evident across all levels and across all sporting disciplines: “Motor racing is one of the most physically and mentally challenging of all sports, not only for racing drivers themselves, but also for the teams that play an integral role in the eventual performance of the car. ... Drivers and teams are faced with continuous pressure to perform ...” (Klarica, 2001, p.290).

Earlier research established that negative mood states can be caused by failing to meet performance goals (Lane & Terry, 2000). A body of work has demonstrated that when athletes live their lives around, and gain value and meaning from, only performance outcomes there can be serious negative repercussions for long term psychological wellbeing (Carless, 2013). Cohesion may reduce negative mood states such as tension and anger (Lowther & Lane, 2002; Terry et al., 2000). However pressure to perform is a significant costs felt by athletes in a highly cohesive team.

As well as pressure to perform, pressure appears within a highly task cohesive team in the guise of pressure to conform. Cohesion implies by its very definition of “sticking together” a conformity. This may be pressure to conform to group norms:

*“I enjoy talking about cars and sport, and how to make the team better, but sometimes I want to talk politics and that can be dangerous when you realize you have no idea whether the guy you have been working with for four years on the team is a raging Commie or a hardcore conservative, And in a professional environment, it’s worth being mindful that the consequences of an argument over that sort of thing can be damaging to team operations.”*

Group norms may be formal or informal, and pressure may be implicit or explicit - or both- on team members. “... the greater the cohesiveness of the group, the greater the amount of pressure that can be brought to bear on the individual to conform to group norms...” (Patterson et al., 2005). Similarly normative influence and group think may result from implicit and/or explicit processes and pressures: *“You may feel under pressure from others. I personally think as part of the committee for this team I sometimes feel it’s better to overlook things rather than get involved and perhaps interfere with a task which is already seen to be done.”*

In one recent case study of a Finish ice-hockey team over a season pressure to conform and group think resulted as a cost of high cohesion and had a detrimental impact upon performance (Rovio et al., 2009). Both normative (individual team members changing their attitudes to that of the majority to gain or maintain acceptance) and informational (individual accepting majority of team attitude as valid information) influence- resulted in group think. These processes of conformity impacted on communication processes within the team so that although the team appeared cohesive and close there was no longer honest or open communication (the captain of the team struggled to give required negative feedback and members of the team did not share opinions but agreed and repeated each other's view points).

The group pressure, which was highly subtle and implicit, within this highly cohesive team resulted in deindividuation and even if there were individual's within the group who were high individuators they would be unlikely to disagree with the opinions of other group members, especially when the others agreed on their opinion when the team was under negative circumstances, i.e. not performing well (Boucher & Maslach, 2009). This study shows how the cost of high team cohesion, pressure to conform and implicit and subtle negative group processes, can be very costly in terms of personal and group consequences.

Similarly a study examining the role episode model with football players shows how team members in a highly cohesive team can be subtly influenced by others in the decision making process: "Really knowledgeable, good players seem to be really into this . . . so I thought yeah, I should definitely be into this." Another commented: "People I really respected seemed to enjoy it and buy into it . . . their opinions are valuable to me and when they have thought it has worked in the past so did we as well. So if they think this new system is going to work, it's going to work." (Mellalieu & Juniper, 2010, p.409).

Athletes in this study cited these pressures to conform as personal costs of being part of a highly cohesive team. These pressures through impacting on group processes such as communication and decision making can have a negative impact on performance.

Pressure to conform is strongly related to the group level cost of rigid demands and methods.

### **Compromised Wellbeing**

The cost of compromised wellbeing can result from the perceived pressures discussed in the previous category: that is pressure, explicit and implicit, to put the team first at the cost of individual health, welfare and wellbeing. However, its importance, demonstrated through the number and vehemence of comments by participants, warrants it being a separate higher order category. High task cohesion and commitment to task can be seen as taken to the extreme in motor sport when over a race weekend members of the team literally work through the night to make adjustments to the car so that it is optimally race ready for the start of the main race. Competitors travel long distances to tracks, and there is an expectation of working- and racing- to and through exhaustion:

*“Our main problem is that my driver doesn’t have enough time to prepare all himself. The logistic behind rally point is very complex. The rally days are also very demanding mentally. As we do not live in the same city (1000km distance in between). It means that when the rally begins, we are usually tired.”*

A disadvantage is this compromised wellbeing on a day to day level but this can also be a cost at a life-scale level: *“I wouldn’t say that relationships that form in a task-cohesive team are superficial. Because they can be incredibly deep and important relationships, but they are different from your other relationships! and it is important to maintain those as well or you risk burn-out in the motor sport!”* This category reflected the idea that a highly task cohesive team considers the team members *“as a cog”* which can be costly in sacrificing *“personal need”* and one participant felt that a highly task cohesive team *“Seem to care less than if I was a mere number on the chart”*.

Individuality is lost and personal identity is lost *“You can end up with what is perhaps a false sense of connection and closeness with your team members. You’ve come together because of the task and, in the heat of the moment, who you are outside of that hardly matters. But if you do motor sport all the time, you can lose yourself a little- the parts of you outside the sport, anyway.”* This work-life balance in a highly task

cohesive team is skewed as *“The team becomes your life: you travel together, experience high and low emotions together and work at a high-level of intensity on your task. You eat, sleep and breathe your motor sport. There is no time left for anything else.”* and *“the time spent on team activities grow continuously. The equilibrium between professional, social and the racing life can be hard to find.”*

There is the risk of burn out and this loss of personal identity and an over-emphasis on athletic identity means that transitions out of the team and into athletic retirement may be hard and painful: *“You aren’t a person who likes things b, c, and d, considers the politics of e interesting and enjoys f. You are all people that do thing a. Nothing else matters to the team because you came together over your shared passion for thing A. That means that if you tire of thing A, and want a break from it, you may have to take a break from your team. That can be an alienating experience when the team has become your life.”*

Drivers, and riders, identified identity and transition issues as a disadvantage of high team cohesion described above in this category and in the category of *inside-outside team relations* as well as in *all consuming* category. Participants perceived that a cost of high team cohesion was the challenge of transitioning out of that team. A successful transition, and prevention of psychological and psychosocial difficulties, including identity issues, is most likely where the athlete has maintained a strong sense of multidimensional self and holistic sense of wellbeing- and particularly active diminishing of athletic identity prior to transition if possible, and so confidence and wellbeing in all areas of life- a healthy balance in order that they can continue their life in a happy and healthy way (Lally, 2007).

If this is not approached then career termination can be totally shattering for athlete at any stage (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004). It would seem that a highly cohesive team, especially at top performance level, would expect and demand a team and athletic identity and a commitment to the team which are not in line with this. This relates to pressure to perform and living a life solely around competition and desire for

success, what is termed in sport research as a performance narrative. Recent qualitative studies with professional golfers, a co-active sport, demonstrated the psychological trauma and mal-adjustment that could result during career transitions for individuals with a strong athletic identity, at the detriment of the multidimensional self, and alignment with the sport performance narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006) which is much more likely in a highly cohesive team.

Furthermore, one qualitative study with elite athletes from interactive and coactive sports found they were aware of and articulated clearly the long term consequences to their physical health of the training and lifestyle required for performance and it was something they were- at the time- willing to sacrifice or at least subordinate (Therberge, 2008). High team cohesion can require obsessive task focus at the cost to both physical and psychological health, short and long term.

#### **Reduced Member Input**

This relates to the category over specialisation at the group level. However, at the personal level team members may *“become frustrated at not getting the opportunity to try something different/learn new skills.”* This is reflected by the comment: *“I do not get the chance to learn new skills as the most able member in that particular task is asked to complete it to save time and ensure accuracy and safety.”*

#### **Too Serious**

This parallels the idea of the disadvantage of a highly task cohesive team resulting in negative affect (Hardy et al., 2005) and losing the enjoyment and the fun of sport. Similarly to in interactive sports this was the second highest cited disadvantage to high task cohesion from co-active competitors. This disadvantage is summed up by one co-acting team member: *“The main downfall, I see, to a highly task cohesive team is in its inability to enjoy what they are doing... motivated by a goal only approach leaves little time to actually enjoy the work you are doing if total success is not achieved .”*

Our sample had a high number of co-active sports competitors from the top levels but for many of them intrinsic motivation is as important as extrinsic motivation and team members who want to win also want to *“have fun competing against each other.”* This is reflected by this comment:

*“Our team is very small and we have to travel huge distances to get to an event ( the closest to me is a 12 hour tow in one direction) so we spend a ton of time together going to and coming home from events jammed in a service rig. That kind of relationship would be a “powder keg” if a team member was not well liked and accepted within the group. His ability to do the tasks asked of him become second to his ability to ‘fit in’ with the group dynamic. Over the years we have had a few team members who were very good at the assigned jobs but did not work with the group and those folks were not asked to come back based on that.”*

Although the fun element may appear contradictory to the demands of elite sport, the participants in this study and Hardy’s (2005) study felt it was a cost of a highly cohesive team that it became too serious. In a recent case study of the All Blacks rugby team examining motivational climate in elite team sport, fun was identified as a key issue in creating and sustaining both pride and motivation- and it was something the coaches intentionally worked to produce (Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2011).

### **Disadvantages of High Social Cohesion at the Group Level**

#### **Reduced Task Commitment**

This category represents the cost at the group level where by *“becoming highly social with other (team) members can also take the ‘competitive edge’ away from our team. Feelings become involved and the eagerness to beat other teams becomes less of a priority.”* Because *“team members lose sight of the task”* there are *“reduced outputs.”* Participants indicated high social cohesion could be a *“Huge problem”* in terms of its potential to *“seriously disrupt the task”* and decrease performance. One of the channels for this reduced task commitment were that socially cohesive team mates became less professional and that friendships could *“contradict the goals defined for the team”* with team members making allowances for friends in a way that would *“get in the way of accomplishing the task at hand.”* High social cohesion was indicated particularly to



*“interfere with optimized task focus and execution”* which would have a negative impact in terms of mistakes made, e.g. mechanical tasks, *“loss of time(irrelevant discussions)”* as well as being *“less focused on task goal”*, not taking *“the tasks at hand seriously”* and damaging work ethic.

### **Communication**

The relationship between cohesion and communication is complex. Communication is a key part of any team-building process to increase cohesion and effective communication has been identified as both an antecedent to and consequence of high cohesion within a team (Dunn & Holt, 2004; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Williams & Widmeyer, 1991; Yukelson, 1997). However, despite the evidence for this reciprocated positive relationship, athletes themselves perceive that high cohesion can disrupt communication (Hardy et al., 2005). One participant in Study 1 indicated that communication was easier in a highly socially cohesive team compared to a highly task cohesive team- which they felt was a disadvantage of a highly task cohesive team. The results of Study 1 strongly indicated that this ease of communication, or over-familiarity, in a highly socially cohesive team is not always a positive thing:

*“My sister and I have probably never had as much communication as we have had in our rallying over the last few years. This does help to grow our personal relationship as well, but we still continue to have a 'bickering' sibling relationship even with the team. I tend to listen to Kelly very well while in the car, but outside of the car in the service area I think I know the answers! when perhaps I should be listening to her there as well. In any normal rally environment, the co-driver would have final say on prep times, rule challenges, etc. In our team, it is much more of a shared activity because we are doing it as a family and I feel I have the upper hand on my sister with planning and execution of strategy. This is one area where our social cohesion challenges the ability for us to complete our tasks effectively.”*

A team may have high volume communication but it is not necessarily positive constructive communication. Also it was felt that a highly socially cohesive team may avoid conflict and so prevent conflict resolution: *“When mistakes are made team mates can be too close to deliver important messages in a sufficient firm manner to the person responsible for the mistake- we’re not honest enough with each other.”* Other pertinent

representative comments were that it is “*difficult to criticize a team mate*” who is a close friend or “*to tell someone they aren’t pulling their weight if you are socially involved*”. If cohesion determines a consensus and lack of conflict it may become detrimental because “constructive conflict and constructive conflict management are associated with higher cohesion and performance” (Sullivan & Feltz, 2001).

It would appear that high cohesion can result in avoidance of constructive and creative problem solving communication within a team which will have repercussions then for the cohesion process itself and for the team. A study with a top level European football team supports the idea that cohesion reaches a point when it may become detrimental (Montari, Silvestri, & Gallo, 2008). Perceived pressures and particularly the implicit mechanism of pressure to conform impact on group communication through processes of group think and group polarisation. One participant admitted that high team social cohesion could also result in explicit pressure being put on others in the team that would compromise communication: “*If you are not keen on a certain idea you may try and influence the team which could effect how the team work together.*”

High social cohesion was further viewed potentially as disadvantageous because of its effect on the decision making processes in the team, particularly within a hierarchical team structure, where often drivers/riders are also team managers or owners, disrupting effective communication: “*Personal feelings can cloud your judgements*” and “*prevent a team member making a sound decision based on the success of the team.*”

It had previously been hypothesised that cohesion might affect performance through its effects on communication- but there is still limited research exploring this relationship (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). Several studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have used Kahn’s Role Episode Model of the processes of communication and in particular the influence of interpersonal relations, formal and informal structures and interactions within the team perspective, to show the relationship between cohesion, particularly task, and roles: with high task cohesion being related to high clarity in roles (as well as role acceptance and performance) and low task cohesion being related to increased role

ambiguity (Bosselut, Heuze & Sarrazin, 2010; Bosselut, McLaren, Eys, & Heuzé, 2012; Eys & Carron, 2001; Eys et al., 2003; Mellalieu & Juniper, 2010).

A role is the individual's expected behaviour pattern within that specific context and roles develop through the behaviours of the role player in this given context and the communication between the role player and their team members as well as the role sender. Formal roles are prescribed roles within the team to achieve task performance and success; informal roles are not explicitly prescribed and develop as a result of the individual and inter-related personalities within the team as they are involved in group processes (Cope et al., 2011).

The direction of the relationship between roles and cohesion is not clear and although not directly examining the communication-cohesion relationship, research supports the idea that high task cohesion would be a result and consequence of effective communication and would increase performance but that high social cohesion might negatively influence this relationship through the mediating influence of the variable of communication. There has been limited research with elite sport teams (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). It is yet unclear how informal roles influence, and are influenced by, cohesion (Cope et al., 2011).

### **Disadvantages of High Social Cohesion at the Individual Level**

#### **Perceived Pressure**

Some participants felt that pressure exerted upon team members within a highly task cohesive team would be increased in a highly socially cohesive team: *"You are not only letting the team down if you mess up but letting friends down. It adds to the pressure!"*

Perceived pressure was the most frequently cited cost. This is a cost of high task cohesion and a cost of high social cohesion.

#### **Social Isolation**

Is it possible to have a 100% socially cohesive team? If not, within any team there will be some level of exclusion- and it would seem logical that the higher level of social

cohesion within a team would result in a stronger sense of detachment for those members of the team who do not feel that they are part of this. The research into clique formation in sport is virtually non-existent but cliques are considered to be “groups of more than two, three or four members ... entities that are very tight-knit and consist of reciprocating friendships.” (Eys et al., 2015, p.105). This category social exclusion represents the idea of cliques emerging within highly socially cohesive teams: *“People tend to get along very well initially and should things go wrong they may form into little groups causing tension within the team”* and that this causes resentments: *“If specific members are more socially cohesive than others, possible leading towards favouritism.”*

An older study, but the only study examining clique formation and sport performance found clique formation to be detrimental to performance (Eitzen, 1976). Of particular note in this study was a comment by one of the few female co-acting motor sport team members who participated in the study: *“as a woman, I sometimes felt my suggestions were overlooked. I sometimes felt excluded from cohesion.”*

Research shows that cohesion predicts intention to return to team but there is mixed evidence regarding type of cohesion and gender- with social cohesion predicting higher intention with some female samples but task cohesion with mixed samples (Carron et al., 1988; Spink, 1995, 1999). There is evidence to suggest that team members who leave a team view the team to be highly cohesive but do not feel themselves to be part of that exclusivity which is why they do not actually return (Martin et al., 2011; Spink, Wilson, & Odnokon, 2011).

#### **Outside-Inside Team Relations**

This category reflects the disadvantage of a highly socially cohesive being so close that there could be negative consequences for their relationships with each other, and with others, outside of the team environment: *“When there is a disagreement on the task this could adversely affect the relationship between friends leading to more difficulties”* and *“This will only work if the competitive level of the team is equal. I would experience a lot of turbulence/resentment etc if a fellow team member did not have the same commitment as I or if my commitment level was not equal.”*

Furthermore, it was illustrated that high social cohesion could be a disadvantage when both entering and leaving such a team:

*“If I was to exit the team it could be difficult or awkward to continue to interact socially with the other team members even if the reason for leaving was not due to a disagreement but simply to conflicting time or money constraints” and “Joining a socially cohesive team can be tough. Personally, because the task is secondary to the relationships and you are new to the relationships so you don’t mesh right away.”*

This relates back to the earlier discussion of the category of cost that is compromised wellbeing and relates particularly to the potential cost of challenging transitions in and out of a highly cohesive team. This emphasizes again the importance of the cost of compromised wellbeing.

### **Disadvantages of High Task and Social Cohesion**

Most team building interventions aim to increase both task and social cohesion and an increase in one is hoped to increase the other. This is the first study which has sought to generate athlete response to potential disadvantages that result from being part of a highly social and task cohesive team. As discussed earlier this will give a more rounded and realistic picture of the costs due to the interactive nature of social and task cohesion in real life situations (Hardy et al., 2005). When asked about disadvantages of high social and task cohesion within a team by far the greatest response- and 19 text units- referred to balance and the idea that *“A good balance of task and social cohesion is important in any team.”* Although some respondents felt that high task and social cohesion would be the *“ideal balance”*, many felt there was *“a constant conflict”* and that *“it is hard to achieve both in a team.”* Six of these meaning units indicated specifically that this desired balance would be less social cohesion than task cohesion. They reiterated the disadvantages that would result if there wasn’t balance but social cohesion was higher than task cohesion. These were all group level disadvantages with 3 being communication and 3 being reduced task commitment.

## **Disadvantages of High Task and Social Cohesion at the Group Level**

### **All Consuming**

This category reflects the idea that a team which is both highly task and socially cohesive can turn in on itself because it becomes *“too insular and potentially self-destruct as a result; small things become big things.”* In the case study of an ice-hockey team over a season, high social cohesion was shown to produce normative and informational influence to such an extent that task communication was not effective or productive and team members did not have a realistic or true perception of their actual performance: they had become locked in and insular (Rovio et al., 2009). Particularly noteworthy in Study 1 was one co-acting team member’s comment that high social and task cohesion had potential to *“lead to an over-confidence in the team’s abilities.”* In Rovio et al.’s (2009) study an over-confidence was part of this insular locked-in thinking and behaviour pattern which was a result of high cohesion. Cohesion has been proposed as both an antecedent and consequence of collective efficacy (Zaccaro, Blair, Peterson, & Zazanis, 1995). Perceptions of cohesion have been shown to increase collective efficacy (Heuze & Raimbault, 2006; Heuze et al., 2006). It could be that a team that has very high social and task cohesion may be susceptible to an increase in collective efficacy to such an extent that this leads to an over-confidence which could then be detrimental to team processes and performance.

This all consuming category also reflects that at the group level high social and task cohesion can result in pressure of trying to please everyone which is not only impossible but also detrimental to the task and performance: *“It is important to come across professional and sociable but at the same point to get on with the task in hand. For example when a sponsor comes along to the service area, you feel obliged to be polite and talk to them, -however, a lot of the time there is work to do with engineers on the car set up and you find that you are rushing and don’t feel as prepared.”*

Furthermore, the team performance may also suffer because *“when a team member is having problems outside of the team, as it may be difficult to keep these separate from the work environment.”*

## **Disadvantages of High Task and Social Cohesion at the Individual Level**

### **All Consuming**

This category is an extension of the compromised wellbeing category in disadvantages of high task cohesion in that a team which is highly task cohesive and also highly socially cohesive will be taking up even more of a team members time and encroach more of their personal identity: *“People need their personal space”* but in a highly task and socially cohesive team there isn't any, there is *“The linking of sport with persona”* and so health and wellbeing may suffer. Research has indicated that individual team members usually evaluate fellow group members more positively than members out with the group (Lewis & Sherman, 2010). The all-consuming nature of a highly task and socially cohesive team, which is often sought as the ideal team scenario, must be further examined to consider impact at group as well as personal level. This study has made clear that it is not a “perfect” scenario and there are costs of being a team that is both highly task and highly socially cohesive.

## **Conclusion and Thesis Progression**

This study recruited participants from co-acting motor sports and the sample was mainly male of high competitive level. The study gives in-depth examination of these participants' perceptions of the potential costs of high cohesion in sport teams in order to significantly develop understanding of the nature of these potential costs. This study revealed that similar to in interactive sports athletes in co-active sports perceive multiple various disadvantages to being part of a highly cohesive team. These disadvantages occur at both the personal and group level and across task and social cohesion. Athletes perceive similar disadvantages and importantly this study extended and added insight into recognised disadvantages as well as indicating further additional significant disadvantages than those identified in previous research: rigid demands and methods, achieving consensus, over-specialisation, compromised wellbeing, and particularly, for a team that is both highly socially and task cohesive, all consumingness.

The category of perceived pressures was the most frequently cited cost. Our results showed that although it is useful to categorise and separately analyse the different disadvantages of high team cohesion, some of the most important costs overlap and

interact producing multiple negative consequences at the individual and group level. Pressure effects both communication and compromised wellbeing. Rigid demands and methods is reported by participants as a personal cost, which it is, but this category is strongly related to pressure to conform and research has demonstrated that this will result in group processes which effect the wider team operations and performance. Furthermore the category of rigid demands and methods negatively affects team members at the personal level but it also describes the group level processes and structure and hierarchy that operate within a highly cohesive team. Compromised wellbeing is related to and can be the result of some of the processes of pressures but due to the nature of the participants' responses it was also defined as a category distinct in itself and warrants further exploration as such.

It is salient now for this thesis to explore more fully some of these important costs from Study 1. It is key for this thesis to examine which of these costs are most significant and in this process some of the less significant categories of costs may be eliminated. Study 2 and 3 will consider which costs are most significant, what conditions the costs occur in and what the influencing factors are. Study 4 will examine the impact of some of these important costs and performance. By being aware that along with the vital positive outcomes of cohesion, there are potential negative consequences of high cohesion, and that there are interactive effects, team members, coaches and sport psychologists can begin to pro-actively create the best team environment to ensure individual athlete wellbeing and team performance and success.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Study 2 and Study 3**

## **Introduction**

Cohesion, a unity or bond, is vital for harmony and success within a team. Cohesion is a multidimensional dynamic process. Recent sport research reiterates how complex the processes of cohesion are and the limited understanding of how exactly cohesion works, or doesn't work, within a team, and how this impacts on performance; recent research emphasizes the importance of continued research into cohesion processes in practise (Eys et al., 2015; Gioldasis, Stavrou, Mitrotasios, & Psychountaki, 2016). In a parallel study to Hardy et al.'s (2005) study on the disadvantages, discussed in depth earlier in this thesis, 100% of athletes cited advantages to high cohesion (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2002).

The evidence demonstrated so far in this thesis is that athletes themselves perceive, as well as the more obvious and well cited benefits, multiple various costs to being part of a highly cohesive team. These costs occur at both the personal- individual's perception of their own attraction to and involvement in the team- and the group level- perceptions of the team as a unit. There are a variety of costs for both high task cohesion and high social cohesion. Athletes perceive similar costs. Many of the costs are inter-related.

However, particularly unclear is the level and direction of impacts of the costs: again this demonstrates the complexity of cohesion phenomena. Some of the costs are themselves further complex processes such as communication issues. The number and variety of costs reported from Study 1 and previous research is high. Salient to be explored now is how significant each of these costs are and which are the most significant. Strategies can then be offered to eliminate or minimise these potential costs.

This chapter presents both Study 2 and Study 3. Both these studies will build on the results of Study 1 and answer the key questions from the following that are applicable to each participant's experiences of the potential costs of high team cohesion in sport teams:

- What costs of high cohesion are experienced by an athlete in their team(s)?

- What are the influencing factors? How are the costs experienced and when/where/who with do they manifest themselves?
- Which of these costs are significant and how significant are they?
- Are there buffers against the costs?
- What strategies can be developed to minimise the most significant costs and create the most beneficial and productive team environment?

Study 1 identified that there was a high number and variety of potential costs experienced by athletes as is evidenced in the small body of research literature on the disadvantages of high cohesion in sport and other teams. Study 1, and previous research literature, demonstrated that the personal level cost of being part of a highly task cohesive team perceived pressures (pressure to perform *and* pressure to conform) was a very strong disadvantage or cost. This category has tangents with the group level category of cost, rigid demands and methods. Interestingly, participants reported perceived pressures as a personal level cost and rigid demands and methods as a group level cost. Compromised wellbeing, incorporating identity issues, challenging transitions and maintaining balance, was a new category of cost established in Study 1 which is strongly related to both these former categories. This category is perceived as a personal level cost but will also impact at the group level. Study 1 has shown that while different disadvantages of high team cohesion can be categorised and separately analysed, some of the most important costs interact producing potential for multiple negative consequences.

Narrative theory will provide a framework for Study 2 and Study 3. It will give a lens through which two different personal stories of the costs of high team cohesion can be examined. This will allow exploration and interactive analysis of the identified costs as experienced by athletes themselves. Life history interviews with one different particular participant for each study will develop understanding of which of the costs from Study 1 are most significant and what the influencing factors are in their occurrence

Study 2 and Study 3 are not comparative but seek to provide an in-depth approach covering a variety of factors. The aim is that each study separately, as well as any significant similarities and differences between the studies, will draw out important new knowledge.

The participant for Study 2 is a retired professional motor sport co-driver who worked with large teams. The participant for Study 3 is a current high performing driver who works in a small team. The framework of narrative theory allows each athlete to relate the costs they have experienced within the context of their sporting career and the wider sporting and social circumstances. The story form facilitates an evaluative response from each athlete enabling understanding of which costs have the greatest significance particularly at the personal level, which obviously also has repercussions at the group level.

### **Perceived Pressures**

The category of perceived pressures incorporates an array of general pressures felt personally from being part of a highly cohesive team including the pressure not to let valued team mates down. Pressure perceived as exerted, implicitly and explicitly, upon team members within a highly task cohesive team would most likely be increased in a highly socially cohesive team. The closer the friendship ties are, then the increased burden of pressure not to disappoint team mates. The importance of this category is demonstrated in the strength of, and the emotional tone evident in, the comments made by the team members in their responses for Study 1. Pressure to perform was similarly the most frequently cited disadvantage to high cohesion in the study of interactive sports even though the participants in that study were less competitive level athletes than in this study (Hardy et al., 2005).

Pressure to perform would most likely increase at higher competitive levels but would depend on a multitude of internal and external factors. Pressure to perform in sport is evident across all levels and across all sporting disciplines. Athletes at the highest competitive levels are required to show ability to manage performance under pressure,

to develop resilience or mental toughness, but an increasing research base presents the elite sport environment as a risky place for many high performing athletes (MacIntyre, Barr & Butler, 2015).

**Pressure to Perform and the Performance Narrative**

*“If we don’t win a race there’s a problem. We haven’t done our job properly. Somebody, somewhere down the line hasn’t done something and we have failed.”*  
*Dickie Stanford, Team Manager, Williams F1*

The work of Frank (1995) focused attention on narrative types. These are the general types of stories which particular stories can be seen to follow. Narrative types can be used as a framework to begin interpreting particular stories. The research shows that here is one recurrently dominant and influential narrative for athletes within high performance sport: a performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009).

Douglas and Carless (2013) consider there to be three signature characteristics to the performance narrative: there is a single-minded drive to win; there is a resistance of other areas of life out with sporting performance; relationships are subordinated in order to fulfil this desire to succeed in sport. The performance narrative views being competitive as a natural and an intrinsically positive phenomenon.

This aligns itself with the culture of elite sport where performance is about winning no matter what: performance failure brings shame (Carless & Douglas, 2009). This narrative is ingrained in sporting culture and is “widely circulated and amplified by the sport media” (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p.702). Winning is the sole criteria for success (Douglas & Carless, 2012). The performance narrative is considered to be aligned to strong athletic identity as examined in the earlier research literature (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Sparkes, 1998). Trying to sustain a strong athletic identity or a singular narrative centred on performance outcomes across career and life span has shown to be potentially damaging to athletes (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009). The absence of a holistic sense of self in a balanced life can be viewed as detrimental when

athletic achievement and results are not sustained due to uncontrollable circumstances; injury or lack of performance or transitions into retirement from sport can create psychological and psychosocial difficulties (Alfermann et al., 2004; Brewer et al., 1993; Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Lally, 2007).

Fundamental to the performance narrative is that it is given presidency, and becomes monological, to the extent that it excludes all other possible narratives and motivations for sport participation (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Douglas & Jamieson, 2006). Douglas and Carless (2009) cite Frank's desire that other narrative types should be offered for consideration and examination. Due to the dominance of the performance narrative there is limited accounts of other types of narrative in elite sport but two which have been identified in the research literature are a Discovery/Flow narrative and a Relational narrative. The dominant performance narrative demands such dedication and sacrifice for the sport at any and all costs that this is at the detriment of these other possible narratives (Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2012). These two narrative types are most often discouraged and silenced within sporting circles and sporting culture because they go against the fundamental elements of the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2012).

A relational narrative is considered to show an emphasis on interpersonal relationships instead of the individual self (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber 1998). The relational narrative is based "on care and connectedness over and above the masculine values of separation, individuation, hierarchy, and competition" (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p.24). The key characteristic of a relational narrative is a focus on others, or another, rather than pursuit of sport purely for own self-interest (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009). Athletes' living a relational narrative have been shown to reject the glory of winning and high level rewards in favour of the valuing relationships, or a particular relationship (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009).

A discovery narrative can be considered in direct contrast to the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006). For those following a discovery narrative, sport is not about

winning and achievement but sport is a means for discovering and living a full life (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Athletes were intent on finding, living and exploring a full and multifaceted life rather than only driving to improve performance (Douglas & Carless, 2006).

While a performance narrative over-rides other possible threads or strands of existence, both these narratives have more complex layers and multiple facets (Douglas & Carless, 2006). The discovery narrative can be related to flow experiences in sport, to the joy of embodied sporting movement and love of the challenge of peak performance (Sparkes & Partington, 2003). The most recent research has demonstrated that although this performance narrative and sacrifice for sporting victory is the over-riding narrative in elite sport, some athletes- a minority- do resist the immense pressure within their cultural environment to adhere to valuing only performance outcomes (Carless & Douglas, 2013). For most this would be covert resistance but a small few may sustain an overtly multidimensional narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2013).

Similarly, athletes have demonstrated they have themselves multidimensional conceptions of success in their sport and their motivations and drive for competing include not only winning, but along with this working and pushing themselves to the best of their ability regardless of performance outcomes, increasing the value of their relationships, and the joy of the physical peak performance experiences in sport (Carless & Douglas, 2012). The research into the narrative ‘types’ experienced and lived in the sporting world is in its early stages. Developing greater understanding of how these three narrative types operate is clearly important as is identifying possible additional and alternative types.

### **Pressure to Conform**

As well as pressure to perform, pressure appears within a highly cohesive team in the guise of pressure to conform. Cohesion implies, by its very definition of “sticking together”, conformity. The more cohesive the team is, the higher the intensity of the pressure on a team member to conform to group norms (Patterson et al., 2005).

Similarly to sacrifice behaviour, conformity to group norms has previously been cited in the literature as a positive consequence of high cohesion. It is not that simple: direct and indirect pressure to conform has been shown to lead to damaging group processes such as normative and informational influence, and group think (Mellalieu & Juniper, 2010; Rovio et al., 2009).

The results of Study 1 reported rigid demands and methods as a significant cost experienced by athletes and they perceived this to be a personal level cost. However high group identity and high cohesion produces processes which have been shown to have negative repercussions at the group level and hamper team performance. Furthermore pressure to conform would impact on other group processes such as communication with further negative consequence.

### **Compromised Wellbeing**

Identity has been defined in the sport literature as “a multidimensional view of oneself that is both enduring and dynamic” (Lally, 2007, p.86). It is clear that a strong athletic identity is encouraged in sporting culture and when it is considered how this is linked to the performance narrative, and developed in and sustained through sport performance winning and results, there is potential for identity problems and compromised wellbeing both through failure to achieve in sporting context and in sporting transitions (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

It has been suggested that this is even more so for male athletes who are more likely to sustain one narrative as their sole focus throughout their career, and possibly life, omitting any other (Lieblich et al., 1998). Male athletes are expected to show strength and power, confidence and competence, in success as prescribed by the “master narrative of masculinity” (Vincent & Crossman, 2007, p.80). Motor sport is a notoriously exaggerated masculine culture and it would be considered most likely that



the values of a strong athletic identity and of a performance narrative would pressure the necessity of the construction and adoption of a performance life story.

Women too however in the elite sporting culture are subjected to the performance narrative as the primary cultural context in which to form their storied identities. Therefore they are similarly vulnerable to identity issues and inability to form alternative acceptable narratives within sporting context, such as that of “mother” (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

There is little research on elite athlete mothers but a recent exploratory study with ten elite athlete mothers found that the formation of a new story and identity through motherhood contrasted the performance narrative so starkly that women were forced to choose one or the other- and often suffered distress and narrative wreckage. However if the two could be reconciled there is potential for a “melded identity” (McGannon, Gonslaves, Schinke, & Busanich, 2015). This melded identity would involve renegotiating the performance narrative and living a multidimensional narrative: resisting the performance narrative and then reconciling both strands. It could be a positive way of countering the performance narrative with a multidimensional identity and story. A multidimensional identity and story offers long term benefits to all athletes particularly in the area of wellbeing.

Compromised wellbeing can occur in a highly cohesive team as sport-life balance becomes skewed and the team and sport takes precedence over personal life and wellbeing. There is the risk of burn out from the sporting, and other, demands in the life of a high performing athlete (Jouper & Gustafsson, 2013). This is never more clearly demonstrated in the top levels of motor sport where the travel, distances, climates and media circus are accepted as ‘just part of the sport’. Unique to motor sport is also the danger element and despite continual increase of safety awareness and safety precautions the fact is that death and injury are clear risk factors.

Furthermore high team cohesion, especially in a high performance environment, can have harmful effects on identity. It could be that an athlete's identity corresponds to team objectives, task cohesion, and specifically to role identity (Kamphoff et al., 2005; Stetts & Burke, 2002). Some research has indicated that external motivators, important components of the performance narrative, such as prizes and status are related to burnout in sport (Cresswell & Eklund, 2005).

Sacrifice behaviour is reported in the cohesion literature as a positive consequence of high team cohesion but it is clear that the issues are more complex and need to be further explored. It would seem that a highly cohesive team, especially at top performance level, would expect and demand a strong team identity and athletic identity with strict adherence to the performance narrative- thus compromising optimal balanced wellbeing both at physical and psychological levels in both the short and long term (Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2012; Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Therberge, 2008).

Narrative theory holds that mental wellbeing depends upon an individual's capacity to successfully form and articulate their life story (Frank, 1995; McLeod, 1997). In particular coherent life story articulation seems related to positive identity and therefore wellbeing (Carless & Douglas, 2008). Because "culturally available narrative types structure, locate, and underpin personal stories, acting as a guide for the way life should be lived and providing a framework within which accounts of personal experience are created and shared" (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p.215), Study 2 and Study 3 will be able to consider if and how high cohesion negatively impacts on wellbeing and how the processes of story and identity formation relate to this

### **Narrative Theory**

Narrative theory has been developed and deployed across disciplines as an important method of research to understand many given human experiences and is now widely

used in mainstream Psychology research. Narrative theory particularly lends itself to the growing body of research in Sport and Exercise Psychology where athletes give personal accounts of sporting incidents and experiences (Smith, 2010; Sparkes & Partington, 2003). Fundamentally these accounts are stories- and analysis of stories is particularly apt for understanding the human group processes and phenomenon within a team as experienced by its team members.

There has been calls for us sport and exercise psychology researchers “to expand our *use* of narrative methods, show them in action. And get on with *doing* innovative, creative, and useful narrative inquiry” (Smith, 2010, p.103-104). This signals a shift from the more ‘limited’ use of narrative methodology within Sport and Exercise Psychology research, for understanding primarily experiences of suffering and taboo subjects to deployment of it as a wider tool to increase breadth and depth of understanding of a multitude sporting lives and active experiences within their cultural and psycho-social context (Carless & Douglas, 2008; Erickson, Backhouse & Carless, 2016; Perrier, Smith, & Latimer-Cheung, 2015; Smith, 2010; Sparkes, 2005; Sparkes & Partington, 2003).

Narrative is “a complex genre that routinely contains a *point* and *characters* along with a *plot* connecting events that unfold *sequentially over time* and *in space* to provide an overarching *explanation* or consequence.” (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p.2) It is the form we use to tell stories. Put simply: narrative analysis is the study of peoples stories (Frank, 2005). This methodology is based on the theory that fundamental to human existence is meaning and that human beings lead storied lives through and in which they actively seek meaning (Smith, 2007, 2010).

The stories people tell both relate *and* create meaning: key to narrative theory is that “Stories do not simply describe the self; they are the self’s medium of being.” (Frank, 1995, p.53) Narrative theory holds that people need to tell stories in order to initiate and sustain the process of identity development- to create and recreate our identities. Identity is something we do, not something we have: it is fluid and not fixed. Our

stories are articulated from and through our individual physical body, and this too is a social body and part of a social world (Frank, 1995). We create the multiple layers of selves that make up our identity from how our inner-self, which we feel emanating from within our very body being, interacts with the available narratives in the outside socio-cultural world in order to plot and make meaning of our existence (McLeod, 1997; Smith, 2010).

Thus, identity development and our stories -who we are, who we have been, and who we are yet to become- are a result of our personal embodied experience within the particular cultural context in which we exist (McLeod, 1997). Narrative theory places as the forefront “the ‘constitutive’ role played by language in the course of our everyday lives and worlds.” (Crossley, 2003, p.288). How these experiences are organised in story form.

It is important that each individual story told is dependent on the wider available cultural narratives the individual is able to access: the sociological and cultural influences on our identity are as important as the psychological ones (Sparkes & Partington, 2003). Through living and articulating our story we create and recreate ourselves and our meaning of life: as we tell the story, in both what we say and what we do, so the story is who we are and who we are becoming (Smith, 2010). It is through story that experiences are given meaning both on a personal level and within, simultaneously being influenced by, the social sphere of these very personal experiences (McLeod, 1997). This means that narrative analysis allows us “to investigate questions of self and identity from a perspective that retains a sense of both psychological and sociological complexity and integrity” (Crossley, 2003, p.288).

As life is perpetually moving so too do stories: “Stories are true to the flux of experience, and the story affects the direction of that flux.” (Frank, 1995, p.22) Humans “routinely experience and orient towards time. ...we orient towards the world with an implicit sense of temporal coherence, connection, order and experiential unity during the course of everyday practical life.” (Crossley, 2003, p.292). Life stories are told not

as a random series of events or experiences but in the process of telling the tellers seeks to connect, order and make them make sense to themselves and the listener (Crossley, 2003). Part of this is the “implicit projection into the future, (as this) frames our whole understanding and conception of ourselves and the world around us.” (Crossley, 2003, p.294). Through these our story, our personal narratives, we understand our past and present and through articulation of them we create our future, they are an integration of past, present and future selves (Braveman, Helfrich, Kielhofner, & Albrecht, 2003).

Because narrative theory has at its heart human relations and how these relations, in the individual and social spheres of each person’s life, influence the creation of each person’s life story, their wellbeing and their identity, it is the most appropriate method to develop our understanding of the potential costs of high team cohesion and related group processes as interpreted by team members within their wider group situation. Fundamentally, narrative theory is based on human relations; similarly relations are core to the very concept of cohesion and integral to sport teams.

Central to narrative theory is that both mental wellbeing and identity are related to creating and articulating a coherent life story; utilising a narrative methodology to explore the personal level costs of high team cohesion including Compromised Wellbeing, which encompasses identity, will enable significant insight into these aspects (Crossley, 2000; McLeod, 1997). “Narrative seems to provide an appropriate space in which to examine identity, as it allows for ambiguities to surface and for contradictions to coexist.” (Tsang, 2000, p.45).

The study by Tsang (2000) explored the personal experience of being part of a highly cohesive “single homogenized unit...” team in the co-acting sport of rowing and demonstrated the impact of narrative at personal and group levels within the team: “In a similar way, the negotiation of my identity and those of the characters in my story are bound together ... intertwined...” (Tsang, 2000, p.50). Articulation of the story of the disadvantages/costs of high team cohesion for particular athletes will offer the

opportunity for expression and identification of particular narratives- and analysis of these.

Central to narrative theory is the influence of the personal individual sphere *and* the social sphere of the story teller's perceived world, there are personal and social aspects to cohesion. Using narrative theory as a frame through which to examine the costs of high team cohesion will allow the researcher to view both the individual's perception of their attraction to and involvement in the group as well as their perception of the unity of the group as a whole- and how these aspects interact and influence each other. Narrative methodology will facilitate illumination of both personal costs of high team cohesion at both individual and group levels (Jowett, 2008; Smith, 2010). Narrative Inquiry is particularly apt for this study because it allows for exploration of both the personal emotional context of the individual costs and impact whilst situating this within the specific experience of the group process and team sporting experience (Denison & Winslade, 2006; Smith, 2010).

Further to this, narrative analysis is about understanding experience and action, and cohesion is experienced as a process. The most recent research has shown cohesion is a much more complex process than had been previously recognised and narrative methodologies allow for a much more complex account of the experiences of cohesion and the costs of high cohesion. This will add to the understanding of how the complexities of the cohesion process works in sport. The exploratory nature of this aspect (costs) of cohesion research so far means focus on individuals' lived experiences is vital as an investigatory point for developing understanding of these specific personal costs.

The work of Frank (1995) focused attention on general types of story, particular personal stories can be viewed as following general types of narrative. These narrative types can be used as a framework to begin interpreting particular stories. The research shows that there is one recurrently dominant and influential narrative for athletes within high performance sport: a performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009). As

pressure to perform is one of the most important costs to be examined through this thesis, the role of the culturally dominant sporting narrative and indeed possible other narratives and their influence is vital to consider.

Narrative theory allows a study of the stories of athletes' experience of potential costs to be analysed in relation to narrative types. This study is a search for meaning in order to question the assumption that cohesion is universally and only positive in order "to sustain conversation and debate, rather than attempt to act as a 'mirror to nature', as a source of foundational, universal truth." (McLeod, 1997, p.142). Through narrative analysis insight to a particular individual's lived experience and personal story of the costs of high team cohesion is a way of understanding possible common experiences of the costs: "Any person's story is the site of struggles permeated by multiple voices." (Frank, 2005, p.972). Experiential knowledge and story-telling allow 'truth' to be interpreted as shared knowledge (Denzin, 2002). This approach personalizes and humanises as "It stresses the value of human life, truth telling" (Dupuis, 1999, p.48).

Every story is important and adds something to our understanding of the wider cultural influences that help create or sustain it. The narrative methodology allows us to select two specific athletes and from life history interviews create a complex detailed story of each of their experiences of the costs of high team cohesion. From this rich data there is insight and illumination of the wider experiences and costs of high team cohesion.

### **Narrative Analysis**

Fundamental to narrative theory is the standpoint that identity is dynamic and fluid and that stories, and so identities, are situated within the context they are created. Similarly, as there are multiple ways of knowing, there are multiple ways of interpreting: there is no one correct or formulated approach or system of analysis in narrative research (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). Ultimately, "... we have faith in the ability of stories—in various forms—to serve as a means to both access another's experience and to portray aspects of that experience to others." (Carless & Douglas, 2016, p.48).

A dual narrative analysis was conducted to analyse both the themes and structure of the life story. Of singular importance is that the story produced is a whole entity and the parts can only be understood, and therefore analysed, within the context of this whole. Therefore the analysis involved two key stages. Firstly, there was a holistic content analysis and secondly there was a holistic analysis of structure and form. Stage 1, a holistic content analysis, focused on the important themes and issues recurring, resolved and unresolved, across the story and examines their significance. This analysis of content focused on themes, types, commonalities, patterns, as well as omissions or inconsistencies to them, within the data (Lieblich et al., 1998). The holistic content or thematic analysis meant focusing purely on content and the “whats” of the story- key is that this was a within case study “By theorizing from the case rather than the component themes (categories) across cases.” (Riessman, 2008, p.53). Themes are identified but not disconnected from each other or the account itself; they are analysed as core meaning themes within the frame of and with keeping a clear sense of the entire story as related by the participant (Lieblich et al.,1998).

Stage 2, a holistic analysis of structure and form, focused on the structure of the story and its over-arching “type” and any sub-plots or counter-plots within this. Equally important to the themes in a life story are how these issues are structured and ordered in story form and how problems are solved- where narrative tensions exists and how this is resolved (Crossley, 2003). This is an analysis of how the story is put together and how key plot structure and stance shapes the content (Sparkes, 2005). Structural analysis “... is useful because the formal aspects of structure express the identities, moral dilemmas, perceptions and values of the storyteller.” (Phoenix & Smith, 2011, p.631)

The two clear separate stages of analysis were conducted simultaneously: content and structure in practicality cannot always be distinctly separated, each is dependent on the other to make a coherent story. Key to this analysis is that the holistic sense of the story, and overall meaning and significance, is kept intact by examining the core themes



raised only within the wider narrative focus and emphasizing this complete narrative. Here the researcher is a story analyst (Smith & Sparkes, 2006).

A story analyst thinks about stories and how themes situate the stories (Frank, 1995). A story analyst makes links from themes to theory (Douglas & Carless, 2009). The holistic content analysis enabled development of understanding of the themes, the whats of the costs and also an evaluation of them; the holistic form analysis enabled a deeper delving into the layers of the story to develop an understanding and evaluation of the influencing factors through identifying what narrative types framed the story and how this particular storyline is constructed (Carless & Douglas, 2008, 2013; Phoenix & Smith, 2011; Sparkes & Partington, 2003). Fundamentally, “the hows and whats of interpretive practice are two-sided. They are equally important in understanding how meaningful interaction takes place in sports settings.” (Sparkes & Partington, 2003, p.314).

This follows the system of analytical bracketing: “Analytic bracketing amounts to an orientating procedure for alternately focusing on the *whats* and then the *hows* of interpretive practice (or vice versa) in order to assemble both a contextually scenic and a contextually constructive picture of everyday language-in-use. The objective is to move back and forth between discursive practice and discourses in practice, documenting each in turn and making informative references to the other in the process. Either discursive machinery or available discourses becomes the provisional phenomenon, while interest in the other is temporarily deferred, but not forgotten.” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 500). Throughout the process the principal supervisor continued to act as a “critical friend” – he would regularly examine and discuss findings, often questioning or asking for development or clarification of ideas and issues presented. This added further rigor to the method of research (Phoenix & Smith, 2011).

## **Study 2**

This life history study has been designed to explore the potential costs of high team cohesion, primarily at the personal level. Narrative theory created the lens through which to analyse one particular story of a career and life in a top performing motor sport team. The aim was to develop greater understanding of those specific costs experienced, the influencing factors in operation around these costs and how significant these costs were and are. The aim of this research was not to generalize but to interpret the content and structure, and so the meaning, of one particular story (Riessman, 2008).

This one particular story offers a depth and complexity of understanding of the costs experienced by this particular athlete, this illuminates some of the key issues around the wider understanding of potential costs of high team cohesion in sport teams. There were key questions: what are the significant costs experienced over this career? What were the influencing factors? (How were costs experienced and when/where/who with did they manifest themselves) and how significant are they (impact and consequences)? Were there any buffers against the potential costs? These questions are answered within the overarching story as created and told by the participant, Stephen (pseudonym).

## **Participant**

Purposeful Sampling was deployed after full ethical approval was granted from the university (Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). The selection criteria for Study 2 was to recruit one retired motor sport competitor, driver or co-driver, who had experienced the costs of high team cohesion over his career. This would enable hindsight and a deeper understanding of the costs and their impact across an entire career and lifespan.

Recruitment was via various channels opened through contacts established in Study 1 such as Veterans of Motor Sport (Scotland), A.T.C.U.A.E. (United Arab Emirates) and Red Bull Racing (Europe). Due to the nature of the study and the sport this was a lengthy process and one participant was recruited.

The participant was given detailed information about the research, the interview procedure and, in order to prepare him with likely areas to be discussed, he was given

an information sheet (Holt and Dunn, 2004) (see Appendix A). He signed an informed consent and agreed that although a pseudonym would be used, and one researcher would conduct and transcribe all the interviews, it may still be possible to identify him due to the nature of the sport and his position, so that complete confidentiality could not be ensured.

The participant was a retired professional rally co-driver. In rallying, as in wider motor sport, due to the great expense of running a vehicle most teams are sponsored/financed by a business; a factory team is sponsored by vehicle manufacturer such as Ford or Subaru. The participant had had a very successful sixteen year career with various factory teams in the UK and abroad winning 10 national FIA MERC Co-drivers titles. He competed for several years in rounds of the world rally championship (WRC), and also won many events and titles in the Irish Rally championships. He had retired from professional co-driving aged 41 and in his final rally co-incidentally he was involved in a bad accident where he suffered serious burning. He continues to work and have great success in the motor sport industry abroad, in motor sport management. At his instigation, an interview was also conducted with his daughter Katie (pseudonym), 29, who lives with him and his wife abroad and also works in motor sport management. This interview adds contextual detail and depth to Stephen's story.

## **Method**

Life history interviews were conducted with Stephen over the course of one year. Due to the geographical location of the participant and the time pressures he was under, initial interviews were conducted via skype. These interviews outlined the study in more detail, and were designed to develop trust and rapport between the participant and interviewer, and consistent with the narrative life history approach, situated the biographical, historical and cultural context for the participant's current life situation and experience (Carless & Douglas, 2013a).

Due to the restricting circumstances, rather than extended interviews, *short life story interviews* were conducted (Plummer, 2001). Four one-to one interviews were conducted with Stephen in his office abroad over the course of 3 days followed by 2 skype interviews over the next 6 months. Then a final semi-structured interview. Interviews varied in length, interviewee dependent, varying from 35minutes to 60 minutes with over 7 hours of data collected. This compares very favourably to other studies which have used this approach (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). This informal conversational participant focused approach has been used successfully in recent research (Busanich et al., 2012; Carless & Douglas, 2013b; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014).

The interview process was initiated with the opening question, which is an edit of the Grand Tour question commonly used in Narrative Inquiry research, “Tell me about your life when you first became involved in motor sport till where you are now?” This very loosely structured invitation enabled the participant to lead the conversation as an expert on themselves and their experiences in order to give a ‘true’ or authentic account (Lieblich et al., 1998; Plummer, 2001). This true account importantly reflects “the temporal, physical, social, and emotional context of the narrator” (Braveman et al., 2003, p.144). It is Stephen’s story of the costs of high team cohesion as told at this specific time in interaction with the researcher.

The narrative flowed easily from Stephen and questions from the interviewer sought a deepening or development of understanding or a clarification of the issues raised: how did you feel/think/react to this or what did/does this mean to you? This type and style of interview returned rich descriptive data (Patton, 2002). During the interview the researcher created mind maps of themes, events, settings and features of language as they arose. After each interview the researcher developed hand written notes and highlighted key points of interest raised in the conversation to be further explored. The interview was listened to repeatedly with close attention paid to emerging themes, plot structure, turning points and times of narrative tension. A plot line was drawn up. Mind maps were created for themes and features of language. The interview was then transcribed verbatim. Tentative links were now made to research: notes, questions and

key areas for clarification and expansion were developed. These were discussed with the principal doctoral supervisor who acted as a 'critical friend' to challenge or offer direction on initial interpretations and their theoretical implications (Sparkes & Partington, 2003).

There was one interview with Stephen's daughter Katie primarily to develop and explore the issue of family sacrifice which was raised by Stephen as a potential cost of being a member of a highly cohesive team. This interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. This interview adds further contextual detail to the study. There was one final semi-structured interview with Stephen. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Before final data analysis Stephen was sent a copy of the transcript of all the interview data to confirm it was an accurate account of the interview process and to add or amend anything if he desired- he did not want to change anything. Similarly Katie didn't wish to make any alterations to her narrative account. The fact that Stephen is now retired from his career as a motor sport team competitor offered hindsight and a deepening of understanding in retrospective of the issues experienced. Stephen was able to tell his story looking back on change throughout the process over time and through narrative analysis an evaluation of the significance of the costs is able to be offered.

Each interview was listened to and read repeatedly with preliminary analysis shortly after it was conducted. The researcher had a feel for the data and had developed tentative ideas around emerging trends, core themes and story types. Once the final semi-structured interview had been completed, all of the interviews were printed off onto paper as a hard copy, systematically organised again, read and re-read, in order that the researcher now became thoroughly familiar with the life story and had a holistic sense of the narrative, the overall significantly recurring themes and the structure and internal plots of the wider story (Lieblich et al., 1998 ).

The data was then coded. Interpretive codes were written in the left hand margin (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). These were codes representing conceptual insights

based on narrative, psychological and/or sporting theories e.g. identity foreclosure, discovery narrative, flow, pressure to perform. Meaning units (segments of text usually a phrase, sentence or paragraph) which represented a particular narrative type such as performance or discovery were further highlighted on the left hand margin (Carless & Douglas, 2012). Direct codes were marked in right hand margin and represented a summary of the participant's actual words, e.g. regret over lost family time, acceptance of danger element. Key language features were highlighted and labelled such as tone, response length, verb structure and use of imagery (Perrier, Smith, Latimer-Cheung, 2015). These language features are analysed in relation to both the themes and structure of the story.

Consideration of how the structural elements were formulated allowed meanings to be given to action. The researcher asked how is this story shaped and what type of story underlies it? What wider narratives and story types does it draw on? What narrative resources shape how the story is being told? (Carless, 2013; Lieblich et al., 1998; Reissman, 2008; Smith, 2015). The plot lines were focused on and a timeline was drawn reflecting key events, transitions, turning points, highs and lows as specified by the participant. This visual display enabled a clear structure and balance to the story to be identified (Reissman, 2008). The research questions were always at the forefront.

## Results

**Table 4.1** Summary of Study 2 Results

<b>Costs Experienced</b>	Personal Sacrifice	Pressure to Perform	Pressure to Conform	Psychological pressures- team demands & expectations
<b>Influencing Factors</b>	Performance Narrative	Team Performance Narrative	Narrative alignment both increases	

			potential costs and buffers against them
<b>Significance of costs</b>	A Story of Loss and Gain	The gains outweigh the losses	
<b>Buffers</b>	Success	Social Support	

### **A Story of Loss and Gain**

This study explored the potential costs of high team cohesion developing understanding of what costs are experienced over a career of an athlete with a high performing team, what the influencing factors are and how significant they are. Over 7 hours of life history data were collected from the participant, a retired rally co-driver who had a 16 year professional career most notably with the same driver for over ten years. The study was conducted and data collected over the course of a year.

This produced a detailed and complex story of the costs experienced by Stephen. Dual Narrative Analysis- primarily holistic content analysis and holistic analysis of structure and form- showed that the most significant costs experienced were Personal Sacrifice- loss of family life and time, loss of friendships and friends, compromise of personal goals, identity foreclosure, and Pressure to perform, Pressure to conform- team orders- and the psychological pressures of team demands and expectations. The key influencing factors were performance narrative and team performance narrative with narrative alignment of these threads at once increasing potential costs and buffering them. Narrative alignment protects against threats to or tensions in the narrative which could result in narrative disruption/fragmentation and damage to mental wellbeing but narrative alignment also increases strength of narrative which here increases the psychological demands of high performance which can have a damaging impact. Stephen's story was a Story of Loss and Gain where he lived the life of an athlete: ultimately for him the successes outweighed the costs.

**Table 4.2** Career Span Loss and Gain

<b>Career Span</b>	<b>Cost/Loss</b>	<b>Gain</b>
Youth	Time and hard work	Initial Success
Early 20s	Identity Foreclosure	Professional Career in Sport
Early – mid 20s	Family Life	Championship Successes
20s – 40	Loss friends and friendships	Strong team relationship and friendships
		Contribution to team goals



## Compromised personal goals

20s – 40	Team Demands:  Performance pressure and  Pressure to conform	Elite Performance, high level  sporting success and accolades
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Table 4.2 demonstrates how in each part or chapter of his story he experienced both losses and gains and the analysis that now follows explains how for him the gains outweighed the costs.

**Living the part of athlete, “I always had this burning ambition to succeed”**

By conducting a holistic content analysis, a thematic analysis of the key themes permeating Stephen’s story, as they were situated within the context of his entire life story, along with a Holistic Form analysis, an analysis of structure and form, there follows an interpretation of Stephen’s story as a story of loss and gain.

Stephen was a successful high performance athlete: driven, focused, professional, dedicated to his sport and team and to winning. Stephen easily represents the key masculine traits of ambition, competitiveness, courage and independence demonstrated in a performance narrative. His easy complicity with the performance narrative however is not detrimental to him over his career and lifespan given his final and conclusive say on the way he has experienced the costs. The research literature has previously highlighted the dangers of a performance narrative demonstrating that many athletes struggle to maintain this mono-logical linear narrative over the course of their lives and can suffer narrative crisis and narrative wreckage when their life story encounters challenges to it such as in career transitions, loss of performance or tragic personal moments/events (Carless & Douglas, 2013a,b; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014).

Stephen did experience specific costs. Overall, personal sacrifice, relegation of family relationships, was less significant than his loss of achieving personal sporting goals when over his career Stephen's own identity became consumed in the team and sporting identity. Ultimately he experienced the greatest cost to always conform to team demands and expectations to always "Do as the team tells you!" This forms part of what is identified as a new narrative type in elite sport the team performance narrative.

This narrative where team performance is the only criteria for success relates to the category of costs rigid demands and methods. There has to be a commitment to team success no matter what, no matter what it takes, no matter what sacrifices are required. Team performance narrative displays three clear facets: 1. Team performance is the only criteria for success 2. Personal Goals are subordinated for team goals 3. Outside Relationships are sacrificed for team demands, team identity prioritised over personal identity. This team performance narrative encourages high social cohesion in the team. This can increase potential costs, while it simultaneously buffers against costs by increasing in-team social support.

Of importance in Stephen's story is despite his willingness to sacrifice, or at least to relegate, relationships and to sacrifice personal goals that he manages to negotiate a performance narrative and this team performance narrative without any long term damage to any other parts of his life. Although he does still have some regret that he did not pursue some of his own goals and sacrificed them for the team. Importantly he is foregrounded by a stable supportive family life and he is still able to sustain these relationships over the course of his career. Social support is a buffer. Similarly his social aptitude, ease and valuing of friendships within the team and sport act as buffers against some of the potential costs. This is in-group social support. Finally success is a huge buffer against the costs as he is able to sustain high level performance and success consistently throughout his career until retirement. Without this success and so sustaining of performance narrative his story would most likely have been different.

### **Early life: the Performance Narrative**

The over-arching narrative type that can be ascribed to Stephen's story is that of the performance narrative. Lieblich (1998) emphasizes the importance of first/early memories as a tool for a holistic understanding of narratives and Stephen's earliest memories include a "burning desire" for motor sport, a burning desire that persists over his career: that burning desire is *always* under-pinned by a desire to progress and achieve in the sport. When he talks about his early days he talks about how many rallies he competed in and the various drivers he teamed with so that he "*quickly developed*" in line with his "*huge ambition to do well in the sport.*" In recent research in sport and exercise a performance narrative, which permeates both academic and sporting cultures and is entrenched within the elite sporting culture, is viewed as potentially dangerous, or at the very least problematic, because the high demands to always achieve and achieve more in a sporting context cannot realistically always be met across a career and life span (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). The performance narrative is one in which the only way to experience success is through sporting achievement and winning, and ultimately this is something which is out with individual control due to any number of factors in sporting and/or personal context (Carless, 2012).

Stephen's story is one in which the performance narrative is adopted with ease and positivity:

*"I mean I was lucky that I started very young and I knew that this was a sport that I wanted to be, and I was very passionate about, the passion that I had when I started out was incredible, I was fairly ambitious and I wanted to succeed and therefore I therefore I kindof worked hard doing so many rallies, and so many events, and learning so much about it in my younger years. I wanted to progress with that.*

*"I actually completed 48 events in one year, so you can imagine in some weekends I did 2 rallies I might rally on the Friday night and then a stage rally on the Saturday or Sunday - one day events, I did a massive no of events at that time, co-driving for lots of different people, anything I could get to gain experience...*

*“I had massive ambition, yeah, and I worked hard at it, and I wasn’t necessarily the best, I was probably never the best, but I certainly had probably more ambition than most to do the job right and I kind of learned a lot as I went along ... and I think that I explained to you that in one year I did 48 rallies in one year...which is an absolutely exhausting schedule, being young at the time it just didn’t matter, you could just go and do that, probably kept me out of a lot of trouble but it was just great fun to do all that ... and I did have that huge desire and passion to do this.”*

It is clear here that a narrative which runs parallel and can co-exist with performance narrative is the narrative of working hard in sport, but significantly that is working hard for the sole purpose to perform better, advance in the sport and win more. It has been suggested that more complex understandings of achievement be encouraged by sport and exercise practitioners in order to prevent or minimise the potential negative consequences a sole performance focus can result in and that these should include effort (not for performance sake but for the valuing of the very characteristic of effort), the joy of embodied experience of sport, and sport as a means of discovery and creating and developing connections and relationships ( Carless & Douglas, 2012; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014.)

Stephen’s narrative does have under-tones of all these elements but they are over-ridden by a distinct performance-oriented thread that links and makes coherent his life story. From the outset of his story the monological voice of performance is the one that demands to be heard. A performance narrative is such that results and achievement in sport come at the cost or exclusion of other areas of life (Douglas & Carless, 2009) “The performance narrative is a *monological* narrative in that all stories are told from the singular self-position of ‘athlete’, with other life roles and identities subsumed and performance outcomes taking precedence.” (Douglas & Carless, 2013, p.31)

The performance narrative is demonstrated further later as he develops into a professional competitor:

*“... and of course always I did everything for fun because it was a very enjoyable thing to do and yet the underlying objective was to get better and better and better at what I was doing and see where that would bring me.”*

Ambition and winning is the core.

#### **A professional career in sport: the Team Performance Narrative**

Identity Foreclosure. Stephen gave up his job in his early twenties. He takes up the part of athlete and this becomes his identity:

*“ and I realised I could actually make a living from the sport but at the time I was ok because I wasn't married, I didn't have a family to support so I could just go for it.... ”*

It is a risk and Stephen knows that it is depended on his ability to perform. Once he becomes established as a professional driver his ability to stay in a team depends solely on his ability to perform. He talks later of the consequences on not performing in dramatic terms:

*Researcher “You said that a team member only valuable if perform as to what is expected of them?”*

*Stephen “Correct.”*

*Researcher “What is the cost: if not good enough?”*

*Stephen “The cost is dreadful, the emotional cost is dreadful, if you cannot make the grade and quite often ... it is driver and co-driver who stick together for a long number of years and go as a unit, a team and be employed by a team, and if 2 of them can't get their act together, and particularly the driver with this talent cannot achieve the goals, achieve the results, then you'd be dropped at the end of the season, or even in the middle of the season. If dropped like that for inability to perform, then you are very unlikely to be snapped up by another team along the way because you are obviously not good enough, and that's a massive emotional cost and of course, a financial kind of bang that you suddenly*

*have got no income, you're dropped you're gone. There may be no parachute for you, may be no other avenue for you. It doesn't happen like that, there is no easy path for you ... because ... if you're somebody who spent 300 days a year on the road you don't have the opportunity of building up ...no little business on the side for the day when stopped, you don't have the ability or chance ... so focused on what you are doing that there is no other avenue for you, no opportunity to look for something else."*

Stephen's narrative here is littered with metaphors as he emphasizes that identity is completely foreclosed now that the sport and team environment requires 100% performance commitment. Stephen's narrative acknowledges the fact that "storying one's life exclusively around the plot of the performance narrative can profoundly damage long-term identity development and mental health" (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p.28). This is the emphasis in the literature but Stephen's story is interesting because he is storying his life around the performance narrative but experiencing no such level of crisis or fall out. There is no doubt that individual's in elite sport need access to alternate stories to negotiate a high performance life (Carless & Douglass, 2013).

However we can learn from Stephen's experience of possibilities of how to negotiate this narrative. He does encounter points of narrative crisis particularly in terms of his family relationships and regrets his compromise of personal career goals. Because though he maintains satisfying relationships and a high level of success throughout his career he negotiates these moments of crisis and resolves his narrative to successfully live the part of athlete. We can also learn that he as he says is "lucky" as his story does emphasize how the performance narrative is fraught with danger.

For Stephen, this performance narrative is developed in a nuanced manner as part of what is a team performance narrative. Performance is everything but as a team competitor it is team performance which takes president over individual performance. Ultimately victory is the lifeblood of the team and the team is focused only on winning. The individual becomes subsumed within this:

*“It depends on the team, obviously the bigger the team you join, the more demands that are on you to perform...*

*“... say you are driving for a team in the WRC they have no other goal than to win that championship....so therefore the pressure is immense on every member of the team...whether it be mechanic putting the wheels on the car, or the manager, team principle, got massive pressure from manufacturer to perform and at end of day if the team doesn't produce results the team will probably no longer exist. So everybody else in team has got to perform, got to get best drivers co-drivers, team members you can to achieve that goal, best car and so on.”*

Stephen repeatedly emphasizes that “... delivering at that very high level for a full professional team is very pressurised.” Without results and performance, there is no team. This is immense pressure to perform. Stephen felt under pressure to perform and to “deliver all the time.” It is relentless. There is no respite. In motor sport differences are measured in fractions of a second and while the team is working on improving the car they know the next team is working just as hard or harder, the margins are decreasing all the time. *“You always wanted to do the best for you and your driver, to make sure you extracted the best from the team that you worked for.”* This doing your best means always pushing yourself to the limit. Furthermore, there is always a pressure to conform to the team and this is to some extent subtle:

*“The team always wanted you to do well because it was a reflection on them, they wanted the results from you and what you were doing....whether it was the sponsor...or a manufacturer...they were investing in you...trusting you....trusting a lot of money, committing a lot of money.*

*“Incredibly easy for a co-driver to make a mistake, make a time error or whatever ... and lose an event. You had to be sharp and very vigilant in what you were doing, to make sure you did the right thing at right time, to have your wits about you...”*

There is a psychological demand from the team to conform because it is a privilege to be part of this team and this adds to the pressure of not letting the team down. A cost of high cohesion is an increasing likelihood of a team performance narrative being

internalised and where the willingness to sacrifice for the team becomes blurred to the extent the individual does not have his own personal boundaries or modes of conduct.

**Turning point: narrative alignment**

Once Stephen progresses with a professional team and gains success two years later in the form of his first national FIA rally victory there is for him narrative alignment. This is alignment of his performance narrative and ambition to succeed with the cultural performance narrative of the world of elite sport in which he now lives and the team performance narrative in which team performance results is the corner stone.

*“...Then I kind of knew this was for me, I could do it, I was well able to do it.”*

For many athletes when there is narrative alignment that steer their stories firmly into this plot line- committing to following and fitting in with the dominant performance narrative there is a security of clear goals and motivations but simultaneously a threat if they are not able to sustain these goals and motivations. They experience a coherent story until there is narrative disruption when performance results are not achieved for some reason outside their control.

Stephen’s narrative can be termed a progressive narrative which follows the structure of a romance. This is illustrated by his start as a young boy with the love of a sport and a desire to succeed in that sport and him working hard and overcoming the odds to become one of the very few from his country to succeed at top level. His narrative has heroic elements but because he is negotiating a performance narrative this is always foreshadowed by potential tragic elements. When, the following year after entry to the professional world, Stephen teams with a different driver he finds a match with whom he goes on to win many events and championships and achieve great success:

*“I suppose we both had the real kind of fighting spirit, and the aim to be successful, M is, or was, a very good driver, so then it was a matter of us trying to pull our resources together to get the best out of each other, to be successful, to bring along the team with us as well, which was good, we worked with some*



*very good teams, and had some very good relationships with the different teams we worked with. Most of all we always had good fun in what we were doing, fun element to it but also the real aim was the kind of ambition we had to succeed.*

*“We would work quite hard in practise or preparation or whatever to succeed. Here ... we would have worked harder than any team competing against us... We had that determination all the time.”*

Athlete's themselves have been shown to view success in terms of winning and results, but also in terms of working hard in a process of effort and application (Carless, 2012). Stephen's narrative demonstrates how effort and application can co-exist with or within a performance narrative but this is when hard work is not a process to be valued within itself but as a process with the end result of performance. His team mate and partner share his performance orientation and they become a small team dedicated to whatever bigger team they work with. Here there is a relational thread within his performance narrative, but as a monological narrative performance always over powers this. Significantly though is that this relational narrative is valued by Stephen and that is something which helps in his negotiation of a performance story. This is though a performance story and performance is what matters:

*Researcher: “The goal is to win at that level, how does that manifest itself through the team apart from goal decision-making, how emphasized?”*

*“ It is very simple you wouldn't be competing in an event like that if you weren't there to do the very best to win the event or win your class you're gonna have those goals, ... you are not there to come second best to anybody else and you kind of do your best, you know what the goals are and you've got to have ambition to achieve those goals or you are wasting your time.”*

#### **Tensions in the narrative: sacrifice of personal relationships**

Being part of a high performing team in elite sport requires sacrifice for the team and this could be considered just part of the job. However, high cohesion and increased team bond means that there is then an increased demand to sacrifice to not let valued team mates down. This was commented on in Study 1 that a cost of high team cohesion

is a relegation of relationships out with the team and an increased valuing of team relationships. When these sacrifices are made there is the potential for negative repercussions for the individual team member:

*“The cost of your family...that is a huge cost when you are away that long and when you are with somebody else you are sacrificing that family life, a lot of people wouldn't do it because they can't cope with that, I mean I have been very lucky on my family life we have managed but it has been very difficult at times, and the cost of that would have been pressure on my marriage...we have a daughter who I'm sure you'll meet at some point, she's 29, ...*

*Researcher: “All consumingness, you have struggled for a balance but you are happy now so you managed to maintain it at some level?*

*“...its very true it's a huge cost and very relevant cost...Motorsport, F1 or WRC, the amount of time those people spend away from their families it would actually be worth a study as to how difficult it has been for people, how many marriage break ups in the sport...probably no other sport in the world that demands so much time ...travel...there are other sports I am sure that are as bad or nearly as bad but motor sport particularly bad...*

*“That was a human cost at time because I was away so much that ... even for instance wedding had to be planned in mid-December when the season was finished ... easier to do it then because knew was going to be home then. That was cost then to building my family life around my schedule which was a bit unusual, should have been the other way around...*

*Researcher: “The co-driving was the priority?*

*“Not that the sport was more important but it was that it was what I was doing and it was my job then at that time, and I had a schedule and we always knew at the start of the year where I was going to be, whether going rallying, testing, practising or whatever. My wife and daughter were very used to it. My daughter is involved in motor sport now, she is now 29 years of age, it was part and parcel of what it was ... definitely a human cost.”*

There is no counter-narrative to challenge the sacrifice to family time and relationships. Ultimately it was/is part of the sport and team culture and part of the team performance narrative: team performance comes first. This was accepted by his family who were willing still to support him from a distance and also to make that sacrifice. Stephen sacrificed family relationships and family time for his team and for team success but it was a sacrifice that was supported by his wife and daughter which meant he sustained these relationships over the course of his career and therefore the impact and damage was lessened for him. He admits there were moments of crisis when it was “difficult”.

This is supported by his daughter:

*“Growing up, I’ll start from the beginning, I was born three years before their marriage ... but my parents they were very much in love and dad was always away ... he was always away, mum brought me up...but then again then he was ... always a great dedicated father, you know, he would always bring me back presents from all his trips, and...it was just ... perfectly normal ... I knew no different ... I wasn’t really close to him ... I wasn’t close to him till I was about 15.*

*“...but you know growing up with him not being around, it was perfectly normal, and acceptable,*

*“It was always acceptable, it was always normal, as a child ... as I got into my late teens, when I got old enough to understand it and if it’s difficult you are just like it is just me there, me and mum, it’s just you know we couldn’t really have that family time that we should have had, he was away from home for 6 months on and off, and he’d be home once in a while, sometimes it just wasn’t enough you know ...”*

For Stephen the fact that it was an accepted and normal scenario to have long distance relationships made it possible for him to make this sacrifice without devastating consequences and narrative disruption. The stories we tell and the lives we lead are part of the wider stories and lives that exist around us and are culturally available to us (Carless, 2013). Importantly is that his wife came from a family who were involved in

high level team sport and so this narrative was one that existed for her and so she was able to live by it in her relationship with Stephen.

*Researcher: "Do you think she had any feelings about the situation ... now does she wish it had been different or accept that was the way it was?"*

*"She is a very accepting person, she is very like let bygones be bygones, and that's the way it is, you don't ask for these things, you can't predict these things, they just sort of happen, but...we're just the kind of people who just get on with it, it's fine, like I said it was perfectly normal, perfectly acceptable, but I couldn't give him full credit for raising me, he is a good person, wears his heart on his sleeve, very hard working and dedicated, I know I am biased but he is an absolute credit to his field, he is an absolute credit, and he's a great dad, but, he didn't raise me, I can't commend him for that which is unfortunate because parents should raise their children as unit, if it is a single parent situation yes that's unfortunate, if it is not a single parent situation, it should be 50- 50, it was 80-20.*

*"My friends families were a lot more settled, a lot more home birds, whereas dad, he came home, there was always a case in the hall, always a brief case, and there'd be just times, and it was normal now looking back, when I wouldn't talk to him or see him for a couple of weeks, or whatever, it was just normal, it wasn't abnormal, but looking at it from the outside it was abnormal, but from my point of view, it's dad and that's the way it has been. It is his life...it gives mum a good life as well...she deserves that.*

*"It's a curse and a blessing."*

For Stephen the cost of the demands of the team was to spend most of his time away from his family and that was a sacrifice he and his family were willing and able to accept. That might not be the case for other high performing athletes. Narrative theory describes the stories circulating in our social and cultural environment as the stories we have access to and from which we build our own story. In Stephen's environment there was a story of families that accept the sacrifice of the commitment to the performance and team performance narratives. This is not always or often the case. Furthermore,

unlike an individual sport, a team sport can provide the connection and relationship value from team mates that perhaps to some extent replace those subordinated.

*“The issue would be, kind of what we did, and the sport was very enjoyable .You’ve got to remember that goal in your life, a lot of sacrifices to make to achieve that goal, to achieve that amount of self-satisfaction and to enjoy what you are doing. Like at the end of the day firstly so few people in the world enjoy their jobs and secondly enjoy, or get paid, for the sport they love so much, so I was in that fortunate position that I was doing that and to a certain extent I still am because I am still involved in the sport, so I was very lucky, and you have got to make those sacrifices to make sure that you keep that level of competitive nature up to the right level, so yeah obviously that was...the down sides would be...being away from home, ...and that you I suppose adjusted your life to cope with that.”*

A recent qualitative exploratory study with ten elite athlete mothers found the performance narrative incompatible with the demands of motherhood (McGannon et al., 2015). When a field hockey athlete who was training with her national team had to miss a practise session for the first time in four months because her 9 month son was taken ill 2000 miles away and his regular carer was unable to look after him. As “a dutiful teammate. She didn’t want any special treatment, to feel as though she were putting her personal concerns above the group.” (McGannon et al., 2015, p.56)

This is what McGannon refers to as a “nuanced aspect” (p.56) of the performance narrative and what we have termed a team performance narrative- a willingness to sacrifice to team performance no matter what. It is expected that valuable relationships will be relegated for the team and often athletes are unable to reconcile the conflict of interest and polarisation. The field hockey athlete made the decision to put her child first and wasn’t willing to sacrifice her relationships with him for the team. Stephen was able to put the team first and have his significant others accept and stand by his choice and support him. Crucial for elite athletes is the pressure to negotiate relationships to maintain narrative coherence.

**Tensions in the narrative: sacrifice of personal goals.**

Similarly being part of a highly cohesive team means that team goals are the most important aim and personal goals become relegated for these. Stephen describes how at some level personal want and desire are the drive but once inside the team these become lost:

*Researcher: "Does a team seek to keep people because they have got cohesive unit?"*

*"Yeah but I mean different factors would dictate that you would move at certain times ... if a team was offering you better positions or a better car, or better chances of winning, or whatever, better all-round package you would be crazy not to move ... so you have got to go with whatever is best for yourself at the time."*

Stephen feels over his career he is making the choices and has some control.

*Researcher: "Ok so it's your personal goals...better for you....how do you decipher between your goals and your team goals?"*

*"Most of the time the goals would be identical, the goals would be to do the best and to be victorious."*

Stephen says that "most of the time" goal alignment is straightforward. However there are tensions in a team performance narrative as there will be times when personal career goals and objectives won't match with team goals.

*"But I think I told you in one of our previous interviews, an incident year ago, when we were working for one team, Ford at the time, and we were leading a rally and we had to pull over and let the other driver through, our second driver through to win that rally so he could win the championship, so that was, hmm, a difficult time, when the team goals were different to our personal goals for the driver and myself."*

*Researcher: Do all teams do the same?*

"*Probably, yeah.*"

*Researcher: Unspoken?*

*“It is more or less unspoken, yes. “*

*Researcher: What was the short term impact, personal feelings, long term repercussions?*

*Well it caused a bit of animosity between us, between, within the team at the time, with the management of the team, and us the driver, co-driver, and of course with the other driver as well, mmm yeah at the next event you dust yourself down and get on with it just get back to normal, Press the reset button and get on with it.”*

*Researcher: Did you speak about it? What did you say?*

*“Yeah we did, ... the fact is that we were their contracted drivers. We had to. They were the bosses, and they told us what to do, and at end of the day you had to observe their wishes.”*

In Stephen’s story he initially talks about family cost as the main cost of being a member of a highly cohesive team, that cost is counter-acted with the benefit of the closeness of a socially cohesive team and intense positive relationship with his driver such they have strong mental communication and understanding in the car as well as being great friends out. He has a family and support network who accept his performance orientation and are willing to sacrifice for him.

However as his story unfolds and in finality for Stephen the biggest cost is “doing what the team tells you” and in this means following team orders to let you and your team mate be beaten in a race. To go against your performance narrative in order to conform to team demands. Doing what the team tells you takes away some of your autonomy and sacrifices some of your own goals. This cost of conformity pressures at once colludes and clashes with the performance narrative: there is ingrained tension in this aspect of the sport and the co-acting team.

*Researcher: What have been your most and least enjoyable team experiences?*

*“The Toyota team here ..., small very cohesive team, we worked very well together and achieved a lot together. It was a very goal driven team. We did our very best to achieve goals and had a lot of input, very much so. The least enjoyable would be when wouldn’t finish race. Worse than that... would be making an error...ruined the chances of that team... a low point when you knew in your heart and soul that it was your fault.*

*Researcher: How would you cope with that?*

*“You would just have to brush yourself off...do best can next time, understand you had a problem and that was it, can’t dwell on these things too long...*

*“Another on the Isle of Man Rally...told to slow down to let our team mates through, a dreadful bitter pill to swallow. It was more beneficial for the team for them to win the event, we were leading and obviously going to win, Ford wanted us to swap places. We had to conform with team orders. Had to stop and let him through. It was a difficult one to swallow. We were aware it could happen ... weren’t sure till were told towards the very end this is what we have to do.*

*Researcher: How did you feel?*

*“Very annoyed...really pissed off. Obviously we knew why they wanted him to win...wanted him to win championship. At end of day they were paying our salary...accepted it, after venting our feelings. That is another sacrifice, another cost, you have to do what team tells you...*

*Researcher: Looking back on career anything you would change or do differently?*

*“Another good question ... perhaps I should have been more concentrated in my early career trying to go to WRC level at an early stage...much earlier...and have goal of winning WRC. You don’t know the Opportunities...path that I chose maybe would have outweighed other possibilities ... you don’t know how your life is going to turn out.”*

Team performance narrative demands that you sacrifice personal goals at two levels: in both wider career choices/pathways and being constricted within that team itself to specific team aims at that given time. Stephen’s narrative here demonstrates how in



hindsight although he felt he had control in his career path and direction he was steered by the team and did not sit down and prioritise his own ambition to such an extent he could have tried to go for performing in the WRC. In hindsight he wishes he had. Secondly the pressure to conform to team orders meant he sacrificed personal victory for team. Part of this high performance team environment is one in which there is a high social cohesion. This will further add to pressure to conform and perform for the team.

**High social cohesion: gain and loss of friendships**

Striking, is Stephen's insistence that high social cohesion can only be a good thing:

*“The more socially cohesive you are within a team, the better it performs, there is no doubt, and that is natural I think in any form of human ... any form of sport in particular...good teams...smaller teams, by nature, are more cohesive, predominantly male, bunch of guys hanging around together and you are there to do the very best you can for each other...and if you have a good relationship with mechanics, engineers, as driver, co-driver, they will go the extra mile for you to provide you with the best car, best service they can, and try to lift you along the way, also sense of pride in what you're doing, proud of what you do, give you the encouragement that you need to get on with this.”*

He feels strongly that social cohesion is only positive, yet he experiences the costs. Team members will vary in their perceptions of cohesion depending on personal and team factors and at high performance levels it would seem likely that the task and performance become more important than friendships or social cohesion (Kamphoff et al., 2005). This would increase the potential costs of high task cohesion as performance pressures increase. However here Stephen reflects an opinion voiced by many of the participants in Study 1 that even at this high performance level social cohesion is valued and sought to the same extent as task cohesion. This warrants consideration as an aspect unique to motor sport or common to other sports.

63% of participants in Study 1 reported costs of high social cohesion, similar to 56% in Hardy et al.'s (2005) study. Group level costs of reduced task commitment and communication issues were much stronger and more frequent than the personal level costs (of pressures, cliques and inside-outside team relations). At this high performance

level reduced task commitment is much less likely to be an issue but communication difficulties caused by high social cohesion has been shown to result in negative group phenomena that can impact on performance (Rovio et al., 2009). Stephen believes that social cohesion increases task cohesion and improves performance but also admits that this can result in the cost of further increased pressure and a collective fear of failure:

*“ ...everybody has the goal to win, everybody has the goal to succeed, and do their best for you and everybody else, and because of that kind of cohesiveness in the team it kind of gives you the impetus to kind of perform to even a higher level or a better level or a concentrated level, so you don't want to let the team down because you are all working as one unit, and if you have a failure, and if you do something, or you lose by making a mistake or whatever, the feeling of letting people down is immense, so yeah the cohesiveness in the team is very important.*

*“It would be devastating for everybody concerned , if you happen to make a mistake like that, because you let everybody down, you let the team down, let the employer down, whether it be a manufacturer or a sponsor down or whatever, just on awful feeling of failure, fear of failure would be a huge, a huge.”*

Hardy et al.'s (2005) study which was the first to generate athlete costs of high team cohesion was conducted with a parallel study which reported that 100% of athletes felt there were benefits to a team that was highly cohesive. In the organizational research literature, a recent meta-analysis of groups in business, educational, military, laboratory and sports settings social cohesion showed a significant relationship with performance as did task cohesion and overall cohesion (Castano, Watts, & Tekleab, 2013). A meta-analysis of research examining the cohesion-performance relationship in sports over the last decade concluded that there was a moderately significant relationship between overall cohesion and performance with a large relationship between task cohesion and performance but a small relationship between social cohesion and performance.

Here Stephen at once believes high social cohesion to have positive outcomes while simultaneously citing the cost in increased pressure. Increased pressure to perform

again intensifies the performance narrative and acceptance within the team that success is only about winning and that nothing else matters. Stephen's assertion that social cohesion increases task cohesion and willingness to perform for the task and for your team mates no matter what, to sacrifice, is viewed as a positive thing:

*Researcher: Motorsport culture you said it is a bunch of guys together and social aspect equally as important as task, do you feel this emphasizes masculine traits in the team: ambition, strength, single mindedness ...do you think then this also why social aspect more important than in other sports? .... a fit between culture of sport and competitors?*

*"The bond would probably be greater than in most other sports, rallies do take a long time you spend a lot of time together as a team so therefore there is more opportunity to bond with people in the car, in the same aircraft together a lot of the time, same hotel together and so on, it's a natural bond that develops between you and its more of a masculine sport so it's a more kindof easier to create the bonds."*

*Researcher: Do people in the team have to be socially adept?*

*"If you are very much a kindof insular person it's not easy to do that because it is very much a team sport and don't forget you've got to interact with the other person in the car so if that bond is not there you won't have that ... willingness to support each other and make sure that you achieve the same goals and you both have to have the same goals and that has to be a very ambitious type of goal and if you can't communicate that with your partner and the rest of the team it's going to be a big disadvantage."*

The friendship part of cohesion and the social bond between driver and co-driver is viewed as integral to team success. That intensity of relationship can compensate perhaps to some extent for the relegation of outside relationships required by a performance and team performance narrative.

*Researcher: "You were with M for 15 years- is that usual?"*

*“ That was unusual and sometimes when you spend that much time with someone you get a huge bond between you and a huge amount of trust between you.”*

Stephen talks about how the relationships in the team, and here that of driver and co-driver must be particularly intense, and how they can replace some of the relationships outside or out with the team. In Study 1 this was noted to be of concern and a cost as there was a loss of balance and this perhaps magnified what is not always a “real” relationship. However for Stephen this relationship was meaningful and continued into his retirement. Different then to athletes who compete in individual sports and relegate or sacrifice relationships in order to achieve sporting performance, athletes in team sports are able to create and sustain an intense level of friendship relationship with their team mates that can give value and meaning to their life.

This social cohesion has a great cost when those ties and bonds have to be broken. Motor sport is a unique sport in that death is a real consequence. Further to this is the movement of team members from one team to another is a regular occurrence. Stephen talks about the deaths of two former drivers as a great emotional cost.

*“It was dreadful, awful time for me to lose those two very good close friends of mine.”*

*“Going from one team to another, yeah some times its difficult when you are moving to another team, then you are competing against a former team that you have already been with, which is always ... you kind of have that guilty feeling...but everybody understands that you have to move on for a reason...”*

*Researcher: What would be difficult about it?*

*“The difficulties would be trying to put your skills against the team that you have already been with, that you have been with in the past and yet you have got to have 100% loyalty with the new team that you are with and of course you would still know everybody in the previous team and you would be getting to know the members of the new team so that could be difficult bit when you are setting down with your new team and you have got this feeling of, how would I say it, not guilt, but a feeling of kind of turning your back on the team you have been with for a period of time...”*

*“Yeah but I mean different factors would dictate that you would move at certain times...if a team was offering you better positions or a better car, or better chances of winning, or whatever, better all round package you would be crazy not to move...so you have got to go with whatever is best for yourself at the time.”*

It is somewhat contradictory that there is both a high valuing of social cohesion and that the developing of these friendship bonds is viewed as integral to team survival and team success while there is also knowledge that it is unlikely these bonds will be maintained; team members will come and go and change of team make-up is guaranteed. Stephen was unusual in his pairing lasting so long and this can be viewed as offering protection of some of the costs of high social cohesion.

**Success as a buffer against the potential costs**

“Losing is never easy in elite sport, nor should it ever be readily accepted. The challenge for developing teams is to pursue victory even against superior opponents and to draw consolation in defeat through the knowledge that team preparation, communication, tactics and delivery were as professional as possible.” (Kerr & Males, 2010, p.400).

For Stephen his career brought him continued high level success until retirement and losing was never contemplated as part of the performance and team performance narrative. Without this success there would have been tensions and disruptions in the narrative which may not have been resolved. Stephen’s example is one where he could be viewed as fortunate but also one where a cautionary note has to be taken against success at all costs. Stephen repeatedly talks in dramatic terms about failure in elite sport, individual failure to perform and achieve success to the standard demanded by an entrenched performance culture:

*“Dreadful admission to have to make in your life...you strive to be the best at what you do ... if you are at that level ... almost ...95% there...but you are not good enough ..professional golfer ...so many golfers who don’t make the tour . . .inordinate amount of time inordinate amount of money but not that extra 3% or 5%, they’re dropped, they’re gone. Their career is finished...put in years of*

*effort and lots money and yet just don't make it. Take prof racing drivers...so many out there ...given so much to it... yet have these ambitions to be professionals or whatever ... and just don't have that last ounce of speed or commitment or professionalism ...and are not taken up...So the Rejection...and the admission to yourself...sometimes you have to admit to yourself that you are not good enough ... must be a dreadful bitter pill to swallow... devastating .. rather than mid-range and very happy and go back to work on a Monday morn. That must be devastating to somebody, to sacrifice their life and sacrifice a huge amount of money to be piped at the post and told you are not good enough. It is a massive emotional cost."*

This culture of sport Stephen is entrenched in does not place failure as something that can happen to anyone due to circumstances such as injury or illness or because a fellow competitor is better. Equally Stephen places failure at the hands of the individual and their lack of "speed or commitment or professionalism". This narrative is one which sets athletes up for tension, disruption and ultimately narrative wreckage: from this Stephen was indeed lucky to escape.

**Accident/Retirement: not a crisis but a resolution and continuation**

For Stephen, he did in fact suffer what could have been a career ending, or at least career changing, injury but because this happened on his retirement competition he views this as fortunate and does not contemplate the consequences if it had happened earlier in his career. For him his retirement marked the end of a successful career in the car and, after recovery from his injuries, with help from those closest to him, there was a strengthening of relational threads in his narrative for him to engage in new projects within the motorsport industry at an organisational level. The time had come when he could no longer expect success in his co-driving and prior to his retirement he had forged new paths and opportunities to follow in which his reputation as a highly successful motorsport competitor went hand in hand with his ambition to find new success and continue his career in the motor sport industry.

Unlike findings by Carless where athletes, when negotiating the performance narrative, most certainly will find narrative tension that is "likely to be damaging" (p.707) to their identity and wellbeing, Stephen sustained a performance narrative without long term

damage. Hindsight did not give him overwhelming regret, he was proud of his successes and drive to win throughout his career. However regret did come to some extent from not completely following his own personal goals and that is a direct repercussion of the team performance narrative. Ultimately Stephen was fortunate to manage to maintain his family relationships around his performance drive and was protected by his success throughout his career. He however is aware that his story is not the story told by the average motor sport competitor or average elite sportsman. This contradicts previous research which has suggested that athletes living the performance narrative assume that this is the narrative lived by all athletes (Carless, 2012). This team narrative is one that should be explored more fully in future research.

### **Study 3**

The aim of this study was to explore the costs, particularly personal level costs, experienced by an athlete while being a member of a high performing team. The costs identified by athletes in Study 1 and in the research literature are both personal and group level costs. Study 2 and Study 3 with their use of narrative theory were designed to focus on the personal level costs and explore these, while Study 4 will focus on the group level costs.

This study was carried out in tangent with Study 2. This was not a comparison, the aim was for the two studies to complement each other and increase overall understanding of the potential costs of high team cohesion as experienced by individual athletes. An in-depth analysis of each athlete's story of their experience of the potential costs of high team cohesion illuminates wider problems and possible solutions. Stephen in Study 2 was a retired professional co-driver who competed with large teams. Thomas (pseudonym) the participant for Study 3 was a current driver with a small team. The key questions are reiterated: What costs of high cohesion are experienced? What are the influencing factors? (How are the costs experienced and when where/who with do they manifest themselves?) Which of these costs are significant and how significant are they? Are there buffers against the costs?

## **Participant**

For this study, the criteria was to recruit as a participant a motor sport competitor, currently a member of a co-acting competitive team, driver or co-driver, who had experienced/was experiencing the costs of high team cohesion. Due to the nature of the sport and the nature of the study this was a lengthy process and one participant was recruited for this study. The participant was given detailed information about the research and the life history interview procedure. Then, in order to prepare him with likely areas to be discussed, he was issued via email with a pre-interview information sheet (Holt & Dunn, 2004) (see Appendix A). He signed an informed consent and agreed that although a pseudonym would be used, and one researcher would conduct and transcribe all the interviews, it may still be possible to identify him due to the nature of the sport and his position: complete confidentiality could not be ensured. The participant waived confidentiality.

To situate the contextual detail of Thomas's story, and gain clarity of some of the wider cultural and social influences on his story, there was a continued emersion in all the websites and social media around motor sport, particularly rallying and his team, such as Twitter, Facebook, Rally Scotland (Carless, 2012; Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Thomas (pseudonym) was the current and five times national champion (Scotland) and previous UK champion in rallying. He was a rally driver and had been with same small highly cohesive team with same co-driver for 7 years.

He agreed to participate in the study as someone who had experienced the costs of high team cohesion. However fairly early in the interview process it became clear that he felt he had not experienced the costs. "When people tell stories about their lives, the process of story-telling has the potential to help them gain a better understanding of them. (Naess, 2001, p.125). This meant the study now had the opportunity to specifically ask and answer: What costs of high team cohesion were not experienced? What were the influencing factors when these costs were not experienced?



This change in direction was discussed in-depth with principal research supervisor throughout the interviewing period and, because it was felt that this participant's experiences were valuable and insightful and his experiences could offer significant developments in understanding of the potential costs through consideration of when and where they were not experienced, the aims of the study were changed to capitalise on interviewing this participant. Because of the way this study was situated, and conducted in tangent with Study 2, it meant that together these studies would now offer a wider and deeper understanding of the potential costs and the influencing factors around when and when they were not experienced.

## **Method**

Life history interviews were conducted with Thomas over the course of six months. Multiple extended interviews were used (Carless, 2012). This narrative life history approach results in rich detailed data which situates the biographical, historical and cultural context of the participant's current life situation (Busanich et al., 2012; Carless and Douglas, 2013a; Patton, 2002). The use of life history interviews gave insight over time and across life experience which increased understanding of the interconnectedness of what may otherwise seem unrelated factors (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Initial interviews were conducted via telephone, these interviews outlined the study in more detail and were designed to develop trust and rapport between the participant and interviewer. Three in-depth narrative interviews were conducted with the participant in his office at his home on three different days a couple of months apart. These were followed up by a final semi-structured interview. Interviews varied in length between 90 and 180 minutes. These were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Over 6 hours of data were collected which is similar to other studies which have used a similar approach (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). This informal conversational participant focused approach has been used successfully in recent research (Busanich et al, 2012; Carless & Douglas, 2013b; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014; Phoenix & Smith, 2011).

The interview process was initiated with the opening question, which is an edit of the Grand Tour question commonly used in Narrative Inquiry research, “Tell me about your life when you first became involved in motor sport till where you are now?” This very loosely structured invitation enabled the participant to lead the conversation as an expert on themselves and their experiences to give a ‘true’ or more authentic account of their life in sport (Lieblich et al., 1998; Plummer, 2001). This ‘true’ version is as it is related in this specific interview, reflecting the specific “...temporal, physical, social, and emotional context of the narrator” (Braveman et al., 2003, p.144).

The narrative flowed easily from Thomas and questions from the interviewer sought a deepening or development of understanding or a clarification of issues raised: how did you feel/think/react to this or what did/does this mean to you? This type and style of interview returned rich descriptive data as a complex life story because it encouraged real on-going reflection that supported the construction of the participant’s narrative in a way that a one off structured interview would not have been able to do (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). Fundamental to narrative is that this is not only a story of past events but through this act of storytelling the author creates future possibilities and their future story (Frank, 1995). The story is “who we are and can become.” (Phoenix & Smith, 2011, p.630)

Thomas’s story is one that is still being written, as are all stories, edited, re-edited as they are retold and relived in the art of narrating, but as he was in the midst of change in his career this story was a place where he was defining and redefining the rest of his career. Thomas was still very much developing his identity and story as a current athlete as his career unfolds. Use of multiple life history interviews enabled clarification from him, and indeed for him, of key narrative threads and identification of a clear plot structure.

After each interview there was a listening and re-listening to the story paying close attention to the plot structure, turning points and areas of narrative tension. The interview was transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to gain a holistic sense of

emerging themes. The hand written notes of key points of interest raised in the conversation and a mind map created during each interview were examined: picking out significant parts of the story for more in-depth analysis in following interviews. A plot timeline was drawn up. A mind map was created for themes and features of language. Links made to research literature and key questions and conceptual insights were noted for clarification and development. These were discussed with the doctoral supervisor who acted as a 'critical friend' to challenge or offer direction on initial interpretations and their theoretical implications (Sparkes & Partington, 2003). Before data analysis Thomas was sent a copy of the transcribed data to confirm it was an accurate account of the interview process and to add or amend anything if he desired. He did not wish to do so and was happy with his account.

The transcript was coded with an interpretive code on the left hand side margin and a direct code on the right hand side margin (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). An interpretive code was an analysis of the data based on particular sport, psychology or narrative theories, e.g. identity foreclosure or flow or relational narrative. A direct code summarised the issue as expressed by the participant in their own words, e.g. value of family relations or desire to achieve the championship. Features of language particularly imagery, sentence structure and word choice were highlighted, labelled and analysed on the transcript.

Features of language aid understanding of both the thematic and structural make-up of the story. Earlier thematic mind maps were recreated and developed and an overall plotline was drawn out. Key themes were clarified within the context of a clear story structure and type. From this analysis the most illustrative examples were selected from the text to best demonstrate the story of Thomas (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014).

## **Results**

The participant stated that on reflection of his whole story he did not consider there to be any costs of high team cohesion:

Researcher: “Do you see any disadvantages (costs) of firstly high task cohesion?”

Participant: “No, no.” Researcher: “Do you see any disadvantages (costs) of high social cohesion?” Participant: “I don’t think so. No. I don’t think so.” The results of the four research questions are detailed in the following table:

Table 4.3 Summary of Study 3 Results

<b>Costs Not Experienced</b>	Pressure to Perform	Compromised Wellbeing	Rigid Demands and Methods	All Consumingness/ Lack of Balance
<b>Influencing Factors</b>	Dialogical Multidimensional Narrative	Relational Narrative as Core Narrative Thread	Unwillingness to Sacrifice	
<b>Significance of costs</b>	A Story of Narrative Resistance	The Costs Were Minimised		
<b>Buffers</b>	Flexibility and Creative Control	Social Support		

### **A Story of Resistance**

Resisting the part of athlete: “*I still consider myself just a normal person.*” This is the story of high performance athlete, the best in his country, competing on a world stage, resisting the performance narrative: overtly. Carless and Douglas (2013) separated elite athletes’ negotiation and response to the elite sporting culture into three distinct groups. Firstly, athletes who conform to the performance discourse directed to by the wide sporting culture, who foreclose identity, sacrifice wider/outside relationships and jeopardise holistic wellbeing, are considered to be living the part of athlete. Secondly, athletes who do draw on multidimensional narratives and adapt according to specific contexts but within sporting circles are seen to follow the performance narrative, and

silence other threads of existence, are termed as playing the part of athlete. Thirdly, athletes who openly deviate from the performance narrative drawing on other narrative types to value their life and motivate them in sport are seen to be resisting the part of athlete.

Thomas's story demonstrates him resisting the part of athlete. Thomas draws on a relational narrative as his primary narrative source with threads of discovery/flow narrative taken up at various points. His key motivations and what sustains him in his sporting performance is connection and relationships (Leiblich, 1998). Underlying this there is the excitement of the sport and the joy of pushing himself physically and mentally to drive as fast as he can (Sparkes & Partington, 2003). The more success he achieves in the sport, the more the pressure and pull of the performance narrative which is the dominant and recurring narrative in the sporting world in which he competes (Carless, 2013). However, for him, winning and success are never the only options. *"I'm not the most competitive person, ... I think it's because I started off in the sport as a hobby, as a passion, just to go rallying and we never put any pressure on ourselves, yeah of course I want to win, of course I do or I wouldn't be competing."*

His motivation and purpose for competing is also about creating a legacy, being remembered within the rallying world and rallying community. It is about giving something back to the people who matter to him: his family and girlfriend, his team, his supporters and the people of his home town and country. Carless (2013) states that this is "never easy" and not without serious costs to resist the performance narrative within the elite sporting world. Thomas does encounter times of narrative tension and indeed narrative crisis when he is not willing to sacrifice to progress to the next level, European or WRC, at the possible detriment of his business career and livelihood. The financial risk is a step beyond which he is willing to go. It might be that Thomas in refusing to be dictated to by the sporting culture and make the required sacrifices, might later regret that he had not done everything to succeed at the highest level. However in his career now while he is at a moment of tension, and coming to terms with the fact that as time goes on he is more and more he is unlikely to progress, he is defining and redefining his idea of success: and that is ultimately about the people who matter to him and his love of the sport itself. Not a love of winning.

### **Multidimensional Narrative**

Thomas is overtly resisting the part of athlete and not conforming to the performance narrative. From the opening of his narrative Thomas emphasizes his humble roots:

*“At that time they weren’t particularly wealthy at all, obviously now, if you would look around, we’ve got, there is a bit of wealth in the family now through the successes of the business, but back then it was very small scale as that picture up there probably demonstrates...”*

Throughout his story he defines himself as an “ordinary guy” who is not driven by the glitter or prizes that his sport offers and which are an integral part of the performance narrative (Carless and Douglas, 2006). At the time of interview Thomas was the five times national champion in his sport, he was also a former British champion and had competed at European and World level. Motor sport itself can be seen to require display of the elements courage and skill required of the heroic sportsman in the extreme of danger literally at every corner and he engages in “breath-taking feats of (the) expert or “elite” athlete ...who can perform apparently impossible skills with remarkable consistency and precision.” (Swann et al., 2015, p.3). Yet in his narrative he actively seeks to define himself on ordinary terms and as “very much a people’s person.” The tone of his story is consistently understated, with muted vocabulary and persistent use of colloquial language which all work to define him as a man of the people and a man who values relationships and connection above performance and achievement.

Rallying is his “passion”- this key metaphor is reiterated throughout his story. This metaphor is asserted strongly at the opening and in conclusion to his story giving a frame to the structure of his narrative and demonstrating the core significance of his passion and love of the sport (Reissman, 2008). It is his love of the sport not his love of winning that initially and ultimately drives him.

*“ ... my earliest memories all I wanted to do was go rallying, at school didn’t particularly want to be at school, gruded it when was there, left as soon as I could, wanted to go rallying, of course, rallying and the business are the two passions in my life...so growing up I was always on the rallying scene.”*

His early career demonstrates his passion, love of the sport and his sheer delight in participation. His narrative has elements of the discovery narrative shown in his joy of driving and pushing himself to the limit and this thread is strongest as he pushes himself to find out where his limits are in the beginning stages of his career. The thrill and excitement of this are evident:

*“So it was an absolute dream start to rallying, the car never missed a beat...probably the most enjoyable weekend of sport I’ve had in my life.”*

Researcher: *“O.k.”*

*“You know, because everything was so new, you know, just going into the stages and speaking to marshals, the scrutineering prior to the rally, everything was so new, and it was just absolutely amazing...”*

*“Going back it was just really fun, there was no real drive to succeed in the sport, it was just purely for the enjoyment of rallying, we went out, we done our first rally which was December 2004 and managed to win in our class which was...it was a well supported class, and to get a win in the class, was, it was quite amazing actually, it was the talk of the rally to a certain degree.”*

For Thomas to repeat how “amazing” this competition was reflects the joy and excitement of his early participation and his early success as this vocabulary jumps out starkly from the overall understated and muted narrative.

Researcher: *“Most memorable weekend when you won...?”*

*“I won the class and won, got the best improvement in seeding in the other which was the following day ... so you know the Saturday I’d never even looked at the stage times I never even asked about stage times, all I wanted to do was to drive that car from point A to Point B and have fun, driving as quick as I could so I never looked at stage times to see how we were doing in our class or how we were doing against other people, obviously the Saturday we’d managed to win our class and that was good, a lot of people congratulate us and everything else and then when we went to do the rally on the Sunday.*

*“I never really I never really considered myself to be good, I just thought we’ll just take each rally as it goes and the excitement, it was the same the first event*

*was more or less the same for the first year or so there was always excitement of going scrutineering, always the excitement you know it was only really, and then we started having accidents, even still in the first year I never really looked at result too much, more people around me were saying your only 15 seconds off this and 10 seconds.”*

There is no performance narrative evident from Thomas himself in his early participation but there is the beginnings of outside expectations. The performance narrative considers natural talent as part of the precursors to high achievement and sporting culture was identifying Thomas as a young talent, although he himself didn't think he was particularly talented at this point, and looking to his performance results and a possible progression in the sport. It is important that “As a result of the dominance of the performance narrative, those experienced athletes who do not subscribe to the terms of this story type must do narrative ‘work’ if they are to resist the cultural pressures towards a singular conception of success (or identity) to create and sustain a personal story that allows them to continue despite inevitable fluctuations in form, fitness, and so on. ... this process of resistance is a necessary one if athletes are to avoid the dominant monological story to, instead, sustain a dialogical and multidimensional narrative thread which supports identity possibilities that do not end when sport career ends.” (Carless & Douglas, 2012, p.396).

For young competitors to be aware of the pressure to conform to the performance narrative and to have their own motivations valued from the outset is one way in which those involved in sport such as coaches can encourage a strength in other narrative threads such as relational and a sustained effort narrative.

Part of Thomas's ordinary guy status is as a working man and his working ethic is an important part of his story out with rallying and he shares it with his workers and his co-driver:

*“The guys across there in the office have got a mad passion for rallying, and that's great knowing I can get away and the work, the business, isn't going to be affected, they aren't going to be bitter, oh David's away bloody rallying again,*



*you know, they appreciate the sport, you know, they appreciate what I am doing, and it doesn't affect their work ethic at all, and that's great to know, it's good to know, mentally,"*

His co-driver has ultimately to share his passion and motivations:

*"So yeah he's very much the same as me, business, hard working at business, works very very hard, and fits the rallying around his business, he was the same, grew up with the same passion as me from a young lad, going and watching the RAC rally when it would come through the local forest at his house, you know it's all he wanted to do, so yeah we've both got the same enthusiasm and determination."*

His relational narrative and importance of not only family but wider rallying community is evident throughout his story:

*"...after a rally it is great to get all my rallying friends who've got families and everything, it's always great just to get out after a rally, it's all the rally people who've got the one passion in life, to get them all into a pub one night and its great fun"*

*"Purely enjoyment...I am sure that I went to bed at night dreaming of being world champion but in all honesty when I started out whether that was auto-testing in the field up into my early days of rallying I never said my expectations high, I never really dreamed of winning a rally, I never really dreamed of being Scottish Champion, I never dreamed of being British Champion, of course it was a dream but it really wasn't a goal that I had set, I just thought I just want to rally purely for enjoyment and it all just went from there...so as a 14 year old it was a way of life, all I wanted to do was to turn 17."*

*Researcher: "So did you think, you know, it's not a dream, it's in your head somewhere because that is how you could see your life, if you thought of your life?"*

*"Yeah it was a dream, it was something I dreamed of doing but realistically not reaching that dream you know, I never really set that as somewhere where I wanted to be, it was just somewhere I'd love to be but I never really expected it*

*to happen, I never expected to be Scottish champion, British champion, I don't know if that makes sense, it was a dream but a dream I thought I could never really achieve."*

*Researcher: "So it's maybe just something gradual?"*

*"Yeah, one good result, next good result, your expectations raise and the whole time each good result the expectations were raising and raising and raising ...oh I've won a rally now, I want to win that championship, I've won that championship, I want to win this championship...so I never looked right to the ultimate goal of being world champion, I just kept upping my expectations after every successful stage time or rally or championship."*

Thomas's narrative demonstrates how his love of the sport and passion grew into a desire to succeed and progress in the sport. His multidimensional dialogical narrative has elements of relational narrative, sustained effort and discovery narratives and as he becomes more involved and more successful in the sport the performance narrative becomes more evident. Performance results mark a turning point when Thomas is able to see himself as having a career in this sport:

*"Coming out of the rally?...after being at the event, yeah, unbelievably positive, I couldn't believe I got the result I did, so yeah I think it was just the most enjoyable weekend, as I say, that I ever had in motor sport, so no, it was good, so that just ... the motor sport fire was there, that really just threw petrol on it and ignited it, you know, the dream was alive and we were ready to go."*

*Researcher: "So that is a turning point?"*

*"Yeah definitely, definitely a turning point."*

**Performance Narrative: narrative tension**

Thomas in his early years sets out experience and learning goals and not performance goals but, as he quickly becomes more successful and builds a team he is comfortable and confident with, performance becomes more important:

*“... step by step, of course, as soon as I won the Scottish Championship I thought the British Championship would be nice, it was in progressions, to winning a stage, to winning a rally, to winning the Scottish Championship, to winning the British Championship, that’s when you start... that’s when you extend your goals...at that point that’s when I thought, right, we really need to make the next step, and that was out into Europe and costs completely prohibited that.”*

Thomas’s success escalated to the extent that he quickly became national champion but even at this point the performance drive is not his primary motivation and he states just that it “would be nice” to go to the next level. He is now performing at the highest level in his sport but he reacts against the performance narrative and does not experience the cost of high team cohesion Pressure to perform to the extent he is adamant that in his highly cohesive team the bond and unity decreases the pressure:

*“I think you feel less pressure because you are working as part of a team you know it’s not just solely on one person you know its pressures divided if you like between the members of a team so I would say less pressure, it’s not just all the pressure on one single person.”*

*Researcher: “What now are the greatest pressures as part of a team?”*

*“Again they don’t really put any pressure on to perform, I put that pressure on myself, so...”*

*Researcher: “So you don’t feel there are any pressures that come from the team?”*

*“Don’t think so, no.”*

*“Do you feel that you put any pressures on the team?”*

*“Probably. Can do on occasions, generally when things aren’t going 100% to plan, e.g. if there was a problem with the car, that isn’t stopping the car competing in the rally but it is hampering its performance you can get these problems when it comes down to something as silly as a sensor that is when the*

*pressure really is on the team, and I think you have to put pressure on for guys to perform, there is a balance you don't want to put too much pressure to be breathing down their neck but you have to put pressure on."*

*Researcher: "The team doesn't put pressure on you, if they did: would it be detrimental or helpful?"*

*"If you put that kind of pressure on you don't achieve your goal for that event and it just brings negativity so no I don't think they put pressure on."*

Thomas agrees that pressure to perform is detrimental and he believes it would hamper performance. This is a significant cost of high team cohesion identified in the previous research literature, and in Study 1 and in Study 2. Thomas believes that it is not a cost experienced by his small cohesive team. This may be due partly to his dialogical narrative where the valuing of the team relationships and outside relationships and the love and fulfilment of the sport itself and him and the team performing to their best comes before victory and performance result outcomes. Unlike Stephen in Study 2 who felt immense pressure to perform and conform from his team at every level, Thomas describes how their sponsors do not add to the pressure:

*"(Sponsor) guys ... their attitude towards rallying is very good as well, they do want us to win and they share the disappointment when we don't, but they do look at the positives, you know they wouldn't curse me for making a mistake."*

Later in his narrative, it is more evident how much the dominant performance culture has infiltrated and influenced him over time:

*Researcher: "Looking back on your life which is strongest setting that has impacted on you?"*

*"Probably it has changed, I think the enjoyment of driving rallying stages is still there, it is always great when you come out of a stage and think that was awesome, but there's that point as well that it wouldn't be so awesome if the time wasn't good you know, it's almost like you need the good times for that stage to then be awesome so I think you just get to driven on results, stage times, of course you do enjoy the driving part of the rallying but now I think we go to rallies just wanting a good result which has changed from when we first started*

*and we just went to take part really, everything before the rally and driving the rally and if at the end you got a good result it was like oh right that's fine I'm not really interested that's it, not that I wasn't interested but that wasn't the priority whereas now all that there isn't the priority the result is the priority."*

However, despite winning now being his goal it is clear that he wasn't effected by the all-consumingness and lack of balance described by the participants in Study 1:

*"... obviously I've put a lot of thought and a lot of effort into rallying and I think it's great at times to just get away from the sport altogether I think it makes you a better person for it you can get just too focused on the sport and it's good to switch off, relax and get away from everything."*

*"I think at the end of the season it is always good to have some down time, and the nice thing is just to leave rallying for a while, I think it is good just to get a break from the team (ok) a break from John for example although I am speaking to him on a regular basis it is good to have a month or so of doing very little ..."*

### **Narrative tension and crisis**

Thomas experiences narrative tension and crisis when his progressive narrative is set back due to lack of finances and funding which would enable him compete consistently at the European and World level. His narrative is littered with metaphors as he describes this narrative disruption in dramatic terms. He states that it "knocked wind out of our sails." The impact is that his narrative is slowed down and on rocky waters- he is trying to negotiate a way forward. He repeats that they "Hit a brick wall." He is rendered powerless at this point in the story. There is a momentary block. A recurring metaphor is that they were "Sold a dream." Here the passive tense which reflects how he and the team were rendered control less in their story. They have won everything repeatedly at the level they are competing within their country and they have the desire and ability to perform on a world stage but the nature of the sport is that they have to bring back up and finances with him. Thomas talks about this as the "bullshit in rallying" and this goes against his core values of love and passion for the sport which is what motivates and drives him.

*“ ... so, aye it was a wee bit disappointing, I always understood, there is other drivers out there who have been sold a dream, have taken out credit cards to do this rally, taken out a bank loan to do that rally, thrown everything into a pot, chasing a dream, in all honesty wasn't there, it was never there,”*

The recurring metaphor adds to the tragic overtones in the narrative but it is clear Thomas is not willing to sacrifice to progress and achieve the highest performance possible. He is successful and happy where he is and his narrative realigns as he returns to the pull of his relational and flow/discovery threads and he lets go of the performance pull. Study 1 identified that a cost of for team cohesion was pressure to conform and part of this is a willingness to sacrifice for the team. Sacrifice is overwhelmingly reported as a good thing in the research literature. However sacrifice is not necessarily a good thing. Athletes sacrifice their identity through identity foreclosure and sacrifice their wellbeing through lack of balance. However Thomas is adamant he is not only not willing to sacrifice his identity to become the “athlete” and overtly resists status as this. He is not willing to sacrifice financially and jeopardise other parts of his life out with his sporting existence:

*“ ... but I don't want to put myself under that pressure that other drivers do, I'll take out another credit card, I'll take out another bank loan, and I'll hopefully get this dream, you know, I've never been of that opinion, if it comes it comes, if it doesn't it doesn't”*

Study 1 pointed to the uniqueness of motor sport for its financial demands on participants/competitors with all members of a team expected to share the financial onus/burden required for success. In Study 2 Stephen spoke pointedly about peers who had made great financial sacrifice only to be dropped or not progress in sport. Here it is clear that Thomas's unwillingness to sacrifice goes against performance narrative which is the dominant narrative of the elite sporting world he is trying to progress in. Because Thomas has a multidimensional narrative he has a performance thread which he is aiming to follow but stronger relational and flow threads which enable him to resist this narrative pull.

*Researcher: “Have you ever made any sacrifices for the team?”*

*“...long pause....no serious sacrifices...”*

*Researcher: "What have you lost and gained through your involvement in motor sport teams?"*

*"Don't think I've lost anything and gained everything, gained friends, gained success, gained ... yeah, friends, success, knowledge, ... happiness, I think, yeah, rallying has gave me a lot."*

Thomas has managed to negotiate a successful happy career in sport without succumbing to the pressure to adopt a performance narrative and his dialogical narrative has led him through the times of tension and crisis.

### **Buffers**

Success has contributed to his perceptions that he has not experienced any of the costs of high team cohesion at all:

*"It could be expected that members of successful teams with strong perceptions of task and/or social cohesion would perceive fewer and/or less intense costs than members of unsuccessful teams possessing equally strong perceptions of task and/or social cohesion."* (Hardy, 2005, p.183)

In his narrative there is a high valuing of social cohesion and friendship bonds within the team. Thomas is clear that in his opinion social cohesion is as important as task cohesion- and should be sought unequivocally. Cohesion has been shown to be stronger in smaller teams (Rovio et al., 2009). Thomas demonstrates how in co-acting sports the driver and co-driver relationship can be considered the ultimate small team, *"there is a bigger team around but ultimately it comes down to two people and one machine."* For Thomas cohesion is key:

*Researcher: "Why do think you are such a successful team?"*

*"I think it's the bond."*

This bond he has with his long term co-driver was one that took time to find. He had a variety of co-drivers who he felt he couldn't connect or bond with in his early career and for him despite the success of results he didn't feel he had full success. For Thomas

success is about results and performance, but success is also about sustained effort, working hard, and developing meaningful connections with his co-driver and team mate and the wider people around him. When he finally drove with his current partner John (pseudonym) he felt that all parts of the puzzle now fitted together. This cohesion was high for task and equally high for social:

*Researcher: "Ok, so...team...you and John....why works so well...any challenges and overcome?"*

*"John counts for a major part, he's a calming influence in the car, I think if I had somebody that could get easily wound up, easily annoyed, I think it would just throw petrol onto the fire, you need somebody that's calm, who can sit back, analyse the position and give you an honest point of view, you know I think John does that, you know when you get stressed, when you get worried, your mentality can change, its that's there is somebody there who can keep you on the straight and narrow, it just works well, I think you've got to have that click together, the corners we talk about, I've always relied on him, if we're watching a dvd before a rally, we can discuss a corner, you know, I can always rely on him for information: what do you think about that? And we generally agree on things and that's very comforting to know, I know his skills as a co-driver are second to none, I can go to a rally not worrying if he's done his job correctly, I know he has done his job correctly, so he's reading notes, we're in 6<sup>th</sup> gear going over a blind crest I know the roads straight after the blind crest, I know he's not got it wrong and it's went to the left, so I think it's all about having faith, which is certainly there, having confidence which is certainly there, I think friendship counts for a huge huge part of it, I think that goes unknown, you spend so much time together, you know, it's got to work, we spend a night before every rally going through the dvd and pace notes, we spend 1 or 2 days, or 2 or 3 days during a rally, you know where we just are together all the time and you've got to have somebody you just click with, and during a rally if you're on a long section for example, its sometimes nice just to switch off, and just stop talking about rallying, talk about football, talk about going to the pub, talk about whatever, just talk about something else, I think it lets your mind relax and then when you come to the stage again you can switch on to rally mode, I think it's just about being relaxed."*



*Researcher: "What does he think?"*

*"Just the same, we just get on so well, we are a hard combination to beat, and I think he knows that his input is so crucial to what I'm doing, that's what makes it work, and I think the fact that I am very quick to praise him, it's never Thomas Smith, it's always Thomas Smith and John Jones."*

This in-team social support is a significant buffer against the costs for Thomas for the cost of pressures. Similarly he has very strong out-with social support which buffers against all-consumingness and lack of balance:

*Researcher: "Tell me about the people in your life: the part they have played, how they have influenced you, anything important in how they have affected you in your story of motor sport?"*

*"I think yeah I think the family and girlfriend are very important, especially in the lead up to rallies they're very important because I think if you go to a rally with a negative mindset or problems that transfers onto the stages, so I think family is the important is thing."*

### **Flexibility and creative control over goals and decisions**

Flexibility and creative control in goals and decision making are evident as buffers against the cost of pressure to conform. Flexibility was important right from his early career:

*"I could always get cover up when I was away, I was always very fortunate to that degree, I could always get cover, I am even still to a certain extent, still the same now, I can always be contacted on the phone, I can always get away when I choose, and I think that is very important in rallying."*

Pressure to conform to team members expectations and to team demands was reflected in two parallel categories in Study 1. The category of Rigid Demands and Methods was perceived as a group level cost and Perceived Pressures including Pressure to Perform as a Personal level cost.

*“I think the fact that I do have control of what happens within the team that then doesn't allow for any situation where I am put under pressure to conform with any team members and the decisions that they would like to be made ... fact goals are set and everyone aiming in that direction, yeah.”*

In a highly cohesive small team it is much more likely that team members will share the same goals and it is less likely than in a larger team that there will be conflict of interest in goals, goals are much more autonomous than aligned goals. Thomas thinks that mutual goals are vital: “I think it is very important everybody has the same goal to go for.” However there is much more flexibility in approach to setting these goals and the decision making process this involves as well as in the goals themselves which are not always performance outcome goals.

*Researcher: “Do you think there are any constraints from the team or can you input whatever you want and how to do things?”*

*“Certainly within our team...mm, certainly the further you progress in the sport it is more structured, everybody has their job, you do your job and that is it, nobody ... I don't know ... I don't think ...that is probably the hardest question you've given me yet.....”*

*Researcher: “Why don't we take it from your personal point of view....are you able to be flexible?” “Yes, without doubt.”*

*Researcher: “How important is that to you?”*

*“Very important, very much so.”*

*“Why is it so important?”*

*“ The two most important people in the team are myself and my co-driver, at the end of the day it comes down to us and what we achieve, ok, in the bigger picture there is a team surrounding us but ultimately the buck stops with us, and I think it is important.”*

*“I call the decisions within the team although not hierarchical, it is open for everybody to be as individual or creative as they want, that is not restricted.”*

*Researcher: "You and John: mutual decisions?"*

*"More or less yeah John's great because he has involvement, a lot of co-drivers try and make too many of the decisions, a lot of co-drivers side with their driver because the driver thinks that way whereas me and John we discuss things, we've got a similar mind-set towards our rallying and it's great that I can ask him questions and he can give me an honest answer which nine times out of ten we share the same answer on that."*

*Researcher "And what if you don't? The once out of ten?"*

*"If we don't it's just something we have to discuss and make a decision between us, so yeah ultimately the decision would lie with me because I am the driver, I wouldn't get involved with any of his side of the car be it the timing or the maps or the pace notes, I would leave that completely with him, the driving I would often John his opinion because he is in the car himself but ultimately but ultimately the decision would lie with myself."*

Ultimately, Thomas has creative control over goals and decision making and this counteracts the pressure to conform and rigidity demanded by a cohesive team in this environment. This reduces pressure to perform and reinforces autonomy for individual team members which protects wellbeing.

**Narrative realignment and resolution: "All that glitters is not gold."**

In the conclusion to his narrative he returns to his core values of love and enjoyment of the sport. He reasserts family and relationships and his love of the sport over sacrifice and performance:

*"... what we were going to do, it was just we'll carry on as rallying, that is just what I wanted to do, my passion for rallying has never died, it was always driving the car as fast as you could, point A to Point B, you know I enjoyed the build up to a rally, I enjoyed the after celebrations of a good results, I enjoyed the near misses, they are the ones that we always talk about ... when you are in sixth gear and you go off the road, skim the trees and come out with no damage there is no better feeling than that, that's ..I suppose that is the dare devil*

*feeling you know, the fact that you have a close call and get away with it, that's ...it's what we enjoy, it keeps the heart beating ... so, yeah, it probably was it was a step back, I agree, but you know nobody had ever won four straight (national) championship titles, and it was a chance to do that, equal (anonymous's) record of four titles, so we did that, in the Mitsubishi, and at the end of that year we put the Mitsubishi into retirement, we had won a British Championship, four Scottish Championship titles, and the Mitsubishi Evo Challenge, we had won 6 championships in 5 years, I still have that car, put it back into pristine condition, and it's parked in the garage and we are just going to keep it."*

Passion is his number one motivator, not winning. There is a reassertion of his multiple motivations and here his discovery/flow narrative reappears, his love of the physical and mental challenges of the sport. In the end it comes back always to passion and his relational narrative:

*"So at the minute, just taking everything as it comes and if you keep doing that it allows you to carry on enjoying what you're doing, and ultimately when you go back to base, as a family that's why we're doing it, it's purely for the enjoyment, all of us, and if we do progress, if something comes of this, furthermore, then yeah great, that's ideal, but if not, we're still more than happy. My feet r still firmly on the ground, we're still all working hard in business, we're still all enjoying the sport, but there's not that real drive that some people would see."*

Thomas's story is that of a high performing athlete achieving success and renowned reputation in his sport and his country but one who does so while resisting the part of athlete and resisting the performance narrative of the sporting culture in which he competes. He is a rare example of an athlete who does "powerful narrative work" (Carless & Douglas, 2013) and develops his relational narrative and discovery/flow narrative to negotiate the meaning of success in sport. His valuing of relationships over the "glitter that is not gold" which is winning at all costs means he has not competed consistently at the world level in his sport but he has both success and the happiness which is not evident in all the performance stories in the research literature.

## **General Discussion**

These two studies are both exploratory in nature and both build on the results of Study 1 which evidenced the high extent of potential costs of high team cohesion and a high number and variety of categories of potential costs. Each study did this by utilising the lens of narrative theory to analyse an individual story of the potential costs of high team cohesion as experienced by a specific athlete in his team(s). To reiterate these are not comparative studies but both give examples of one individual athlete's personal experiences of the costs of high cohesion in teams in order to offer a depth and richness of data. Analysis of this data develops understanding of which costs are most significant, when and how some of the potential costs are experienced and when and how they are not experienced. This enables strategies to be offered to minimise these potential costs in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Neither Stephen nor Thomas perceived they experienced any compromise to their wellbeing due to their experiences in a highly cohesive team. From these studies compromised wellbeing would be indicated to be a less significant cost. The most significant costs over a lifespan career in highly cohesive top performing teams were pressure to perform and pressure to conform (including team orders)- and the psychological pressure of team demands and expectations that they bring. High social cohesion was seen to increase and intensify these potential costs.

### **Compromised Wellbeing**

Pressure to perform and conform has been shown to potentially compromise long term psychological, and physical, wellbeing. Participants in Study 1 reported lack of balance in a highly cohesive team as detrimental because your life becomes the team, and "the team becomes your life" which echoes the team performance narrative where personal relationships and personal goals are sacrifices each team member has to make. Thomas, in Study 3, was able to achieve outstanding achievement in elite sport and sustain a multidimensional narrative by actively resisting the expectations and demands to follow the team performance narrative. He perceived his highly cohesive team to reduce the pressures he felt and perceived that being part of a highly cohesive team did not

compromise his wellbeing. Study 2 demonstrated that high team cohesion can potentially compromise wellbeing through sacrifices of personal relationships and goals and that living the part of athlete and concurring to a team performance narrative over a lifespan career is likely to cause at very least tensions and at most damage. Fortunately Stephen, in Study 2, was able to negotiate the team performance narrative and the potential costs of compromised wellbeing primarily through a sustained level of success throughout his career coupled with significant social support.

### **Pressure to Perform**

Study 2 and Stephen's story of loss and gain builds on the recent work in sport psychology and sport performance that demonstrates sporting culture attempts to coerce athletes into the dominant monological performance narrative. This research takes this further by identifying a tangent or nuance of the performance narrative which is a team performance narrative. The team performance narrative has three key tenets: *1. Team performance is the only criteria for success 2. Personal goals are subordinated for team goals 3. Outside relationships are sacrificed for the demands of the team, team identity is prioritised over personal identity (potentially increasing social cohesion).* The team performance narrative is reflected in team owner and manager, and previous driver, Stuart McLeod's (pseudonym) definition of the key qualities required to be a successful rally driver/co-driver, "Belief number one, commitment, those are the two kind of natural skills, you have to have belief in your ability, so therefore you've got to have a level of ability, you've got to have a commitment to see it through no matter what, unswerving, undefying commitment to succeed and overcome all obstacles."

This *no matter what* is about performing and conforming, it involves sacrifice of both personal relationships and personal goals. Stephen in reflection- with hindsight and as conclusion to his story- felt the biggest cost of a highly cohesive team was the demand to "Do what the team tells you." Team success is the aim and the everything. This narrative requires athletes both perform and conform.

The pressure to conform can be explicit or blatant. Performance is the only criteria in which success is measured in elite team sporting environments. This could lead to similar areas of tension as with performance narrative but is also dangerous in terms of sacrifice of an individual competitor's own personal goals. This is a psycho-social process similar to performance narrative where there is no room for alternatives. Similarly to the performance narrative, thought processes and decision making along with actions and behaviour are influenced by sociocultural processes. Here within the team, the team pressures team members to follow the performance plot and refit their life around it accordingly (Carless, 2013).

In the small group research literature performance pressure has been described as a "double-edged sword" at once increasing drive and motivation for performance whilst simultaneously potentially hampering performance through the effect of group processes (Gardner, 2012). This relates to Study 1 where a team member feels that they are "no more than a cog" and does not feel valued as an individual: identity is only team identity. This can be somewhat lessened by a strong social cohesion and a bonding where team mates come to be family and replace some of the sacrificed and subordinated relationships on the outside.

However problems with this are that heightened relationships in this environment might not survive in outside world and that change of team, a natural regular occurrence in the sport, means these relationships cannot be sustained if previous close friends become competition and adversaries. Furthermore, some research has demonstrated high social cohesion hampering performance.

### **Pressure to Conform**

In sport, conformity has been defined as "submission to perceived group pressure where request to conform has not been presented" (Rovio et al., 2009. p.429). In small group research, "Conformity is defined as a subject's behavior or attitudes following those of the object. The subject is the individual who conforms. The object can be external or internal factors that cause conforming actions, in the form of individuals, groups,

organizations, policies, rules and regulations, or the experience and natural instinct of the subject.” (Song, Ma, Wu, & Li, 2012, p.1367).

Conformity is usually not irrational (herd behaviour) but rational behaviour, which may involve majority influencing as one of many possible influencing factors, after logical thought processes. These processes are abidance, compliance or obedience. Pressure to conform in a team situation would include abidance whereby the team member adheres to the guidance of the team, compliance where the team member follows requests of the team – despite decision as to whether it is right or not- and obedience where the team member “keeps the action and attitude the same as that of the object to seek rewards or avoid punishments after summarizing, judging, and deducing the object” (Song et al., 2012, p.1369). In Study 1 a team member demonstrated abidance in pressure to give up time to team sponsors. In Study 2 Stephen demonstrated obedience to follow team orders. Normative influence where a team member agrees with majority team views publically while disagreeing privately involves compliance. High social cohesion has been shown to increase normative influence (Aspitch,2009; Rovio et al., 2009).

The team performance narrative evident in Study 2 would seek to strengthen team identification. Team identification “represents individual members’ perceived sense of belonging to a particular team. Team identification motivates members to behave in accordance with the group’s interests and strengthens the ties between members.” (Ruggieri, 2013, p.1172) As previously discussed, it has been proposed that the need for uniqueness is in fact a fundamental human need that drives individuals to reassert individuality when identification becomes too similar to others (Boucher & Maslach, 2009). Sacrifice behaviour increases team identification (Ruggieri, 2013). Sacrifice behaviour is an ingrained part of a team performance narrative. This is another way in which team performance narrative increases pressure to conform. It is evident there are immense pressures within a high performing team and the relationships and processes of cohesion and conformity are complex. The process of cohesion seeks to eliminate or at least reduce conflict. Conflict is viewed as a bad thing. This is a simplistic view.



Conformity and conflict are under researched in sport- as is the area of sacrifice which this thesis has demonstrated to be related to pressure to perform and conform. Sacrifice behaviour is an individual doing something or giving up something of value or worth for another individual or group without expecting anything in return (Prapervessis & Carron, 1997). The directionality of the relationship between sacrifice and cohesion is unclear. It is reported both that cohesion predicts sacrifice behaviour and sacrifice behaviour predicts cohesion (Shields et al., 1995; Zander, 1985). A study with 13 competitive male cricketers reported that sacrifice behaviour increased cohesion and this in turn increased perceived conformity to group norms by team members (Prapervessis & Carron, 1997). This study concluded that it was just as likely that cohesion follows from conformity and sacrifice follows from cohesion or that sacrifice follows from conformity and cohesion follows from sacrifice (Prapervessis & Carron, 1997). This demonstrates the complexity of these relationships.

Sacrifice includes social (social life sacrifice), outside (personal life sacrifices) and inside (practise and competition sacrifices). Prapavessis, Carron, & Spink (1997) found that leadership impacts task cohesion through the group processes of communication, team goals and sacrifice. Transformational leaders fundamentally inspire followers to sacrifice for the benefit of the group (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders are viewed in stark contrast to transactional leaders who “are negotiating agents who conciliate and sometimes compromise to obtain greater decision-making within the group. To achieve this goal, they perform a series of actions that enable them to influence and convince the followers, who are capable of providing valuable support... The aim of rewards and punishments is not to transform the followers but to ensure that the expected results are achieved.” (Ruggieri, 2013, p.1172) Transformational leadership “involves the building of relationships with followers based on personal, emotional and inspirational exchanges, with the goal of developing followers to their fullest potential.” (Callow et al., 2009, p.396).

The key characteristics displayed by a transformational leader are the valuing of individuals, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation such as creative problem solving, fostering acceptance of team goals, instilling high performance expectations and positive role modelling.” (Callow et al., 2009; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2013). One cross-sectional study with 199 ultimate frisbee players found that intra-team communication mediated the relationship between the transformational leadership behaviours of individual consideration and fostering of group goals and task cohesion (Smith et al., 2013).

Another recent cross-sectional study with 381 university athletes found that inside sacrifices mediated the relationship between leadership behaviours and task cohesion (Cronin, Arthur, Hardy, & Callow, 2015). This supports earlier research where the transformational leadership behaviours of valuing of individuals, fostering acceptance of group goals and high performance expectations were associated with task cohesion (Callow et al., 2009).

Transformational leadership theory and research accepts sacrifice behaviour as only positive but this thesis has demonstrated that sacrifice behaviour is not always a good thing although it is a behaviour demonstrated in resilient teams. The transformational leadership behaviours of fostering group goals and high performance expectations would correspond with a team performance narrative. However the conformity, lack of individuality and flexibility perceived by participants in Study 1 and 2, and demanded through a performance narrative, contradicts the behaviour of individual consideration demonstrated by transformational leaders. Some research has reported that transformational leaders do encourage conflict as a positive aspect of group behaviour (Hodge et al., 2014). In the small group research literature there has been some inconsistency in results however the evidence, supported by one recent study with 153 teams and 5579 team members which found a significant relationship between task conflict and performance but a negative relationship between task conflict and perceived performance, is that some task conflict is a positive thing (Bang & Park, 2015).

Cohesion is the antithesis to conflict. Cohesion increases unity and increases conformity. This further increases psychological demands and pressures on team members which are direct and indirect processes. Pressure to perform and conform can increase team performance and can have positive outcomes but it is clear that both are a double-edged sword.

### **Social Cohesion**

63% of participants in study 1 reported experiencing costs of high social cohesion, similar to the 56% in Hardy et al.'s (2005) study. In Study 1, perceived group level costs were reduced task commitment and communication issues. Perceived personal level costs were pressure, cliques and outside-inside team relations. The life history design of Study 2 and Study 3 focused on the personal level costs. Personal level costs will have impact and repercussions at the group level. The high valuing of social cohesion by Stephen in Study 2 contributes to the increased pressure to conform; the strength of team identity and the friendship of team members increases the implicit and explicit pressure to follow the team demands and expectations, to “do what the team tells you”- and to do what you perceive the team expects of you *no matter what*.

The considered importance and encouragement of high social cohesion also heightens the pressure to conform to the performance narrative and increases pressure to perform. This can be viewed as a mutually reciprocated relationship. The team performance narrative increases social cohesion which increases pressure to perform and conform to the team expectations; this, in turn, heightens adherence to the team performance narrative lessening outside relationships and influence and so increasing social cohesion. The high valuing of social cohesion could partly be a result of the influence of the team performance narrative.

This process of high cohesion increasing pressures was identified in Study 1 as the category of perceived pressures encompassing both performance and conformity

pressures. This was perceived as a personal cost of high team cohesion: Study 2 makes clearer the intricacies of these group processes. In Study 3 Thomas feels that “the bond” and the high social cohesion is what protects him against pressure, and in fact perceives that the pressure is divided amongst team members, and feels that high social cohesion is part of what improves performance. Thomas’s multidimensional narrative, with the strongest thread being relational, buffers against the influence of the performance and team performance narrative; social cohesion remains high with the pressure to perform and conform relatively low. These findings correspond with recent research on resilience within a team.

Team resilience is defined as a “dynamic process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effect of the stressors they collectively encounter. It comprises of processes whereby team members use their individual and collective resources to positively adapt when experiencing adversity” (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013, p.552). Stressors have been identified as competitive, organisational and personal (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Resilience is vital in sport because athletes must persistently manage and cope with a sustained variety of pressures in order to consistently perform and achieve (Mustafa & Fletcher, 2013). Resilient groups and teams effectively use psychosocial processes at both the personal and group levels to counter stressors.

The first study of resilience in sport at the team level, which built on all the previous studies of resilience which were all at the individual level, utilised focus groups with five elite sport teams (Morgan et al., 2013). This study found that the key characteristic of a resilient team in elite sport is the “quality of relationships” (Morgan et al., 2013, p.557). This characteristic is reflected in all of the four categories identified by Morgan et al. (2013): group structure, mastery approach, social capital and collective efficacy. In particular, the category of social capital refers directly to the group relationships and how the core of resilient teams is the intense bonding at the emotional level (Morgan et al., 2013).

This intense bond mirrors that of the driver and co-driver relationship described by the participants in both Study 2 and Study 3 and their valuing of high social cohesion. This bond is explained in the research as having 3 clear characteristics: identity, pro-social interactions and perceived social support. “*Perceived available support* refers to one’s potential access to social support and is a support recipient’s subjective judgment that friends, family, team-mates, and coaches would provide assistance if needed. *Received support* reflects the specific helping actions provided by friends, family, team-mates, and coaches, usually during a specific time frame.” (Freeman, Coffee & Rees, 2011, p.54 -55). Resilient teams can manage and overcome adversity through striving to put the team goals above individual goals through “selfless exchanges” (Morgan et al., 2013, p.556). This is akin to sacrifice behaviour.

A recent qualitative study in which 12 Olympic champions were interviewed reported 5 categories of psychological factors at the individual level which buffered against perceived pressures: positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus and perceived social support (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). The resilience of a team encompasses the processes by which both individual and collective resources of a team are mobilised to overcome adversity. The team performance narrative evident in Study 2 encourages high social cohesion in the team which can increase potential costs of high cohesion but it simultaneously buffers against costs by increasing in-team bond and in-team social support. Thomas in Study 3 was demonstrated to have a very positive personality and was able to mobilise particularly strong social support from both inside and outside his team. Thomas also was “lucky” to have flexibility and creative input in team decision making which was lacking and contributed significant to costs of rigid demands and methods and pressure to conform evident in Study 1 and Study 2.

### **Conclusion and Thesis Progression**

These two studies offer analysis of rich data from life history interviews with two particular high performing motor sport athletes. One athlete was a retired co-driver who had worked with various large professional teams. The other was a current driver who works in a small team. The studies are not comparative but develop athlete accounts of how the potential costs of high team cohesion are experienced in real life team

situations. Results are not generalizable but the in-depth accounts significantly develop our understanding of the potential costs of high cohesion in sport teams, when and how these costs may occur or may not occur and which are most significant.

The results suggest that compromised well-being is not the most significant cost but this area still merits more investigation. The most significant costs were pressure to perform and conform and the psychological pressures that come along with these processes. These costs directly correspond with the categories of pressures and rigid demands and methods in Study 1. Pressure to perform and rigid demands and methods/conformity were perceived in Study 1 as personal level costs but Study 2 has clarified that these potential costs can have negative repercussions at the group level. This will be investigated in Study 4.

Importantly Study 2 identified a new narrative in sport, a team performance narrative. Study 3 identified that a multidimensional narrative can buffer against a performance narrative and against the costs of high team cohesion particularly pressures and conformity. Acknowledging, supporting and encouraging multidimensional narratives in athletes is one of the main ways in which coaches and sport psychologists can begin to minimise the exposure to the significant potential costs of high team cohesion in order to improve team members' wellbeing and team success. It is important now to build on the evidence in this thesis so far as to which costs are the most significant and to consider if/how these group processes which result from high team cohesion impact upon performance.

# **Chapter Five**

## **Study 4**

## **Introduction and Aims**

The overall purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between some of the most important costs of high team cohesion and performance. Cohesion's contribution to optimal group performance and success remains a current continued key concern in sport as it does in business, organizational and all group settings. Cohesion in sport is defined as "a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in its pursuit of instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of members' affective needs" (Carron et al., 1998, p.213). Cohesion is a multidimensional process incorporating both task and social cohesion at both individual and group levels (Carron et al., 2002). It has both goal and friendship elements along with individual's perceptions of both their involvement in these and perceptions of how the group as a whole reflect them. The directionality of the relationship between cohesion and performance is unclear. Cohesion and performance are considered to have a reciprocated positive relationship but there is stronger research evidence for the effect of performance on cohesion than cohesion on performance (Carron et al., 2002; Filho et al., 2014). However, some studies have indicated that high cohesion may not always improve performance (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997; Rovio et al., 2009).

The study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how one elite level team sport performer experienced the costs of high team cohesion over the course of an entire season and how these costs influenced performance. This will build on the evidence in this thesis so far as to which are the most significant potential costs of high team cohesion in sports teams and if/how these group processes resulting from high team cohesion impact upon performance. The key questions to be answered were:

- What were the costs of high team cohesion experienced?
- When did these costs of high team cohesion impact on performance?
- How did these costs of high team cohesion impact on performance?

High team cohesion as well as its numerous benefits also brings costs such as increased pressure to perform, pressure to conform and communication issues (Hardy et al., 2005; Rovio et al., 2009). Study 1 reiterated these were costs athletes themselves identify as a



consequence of being part of a highly cohesive team. Studies 2 and 3 have particularly highlighted how the cost of pressures can have a negative impact on individuals within a team and that reducing pressure has a positive effect. The most significant costs identified in Study 2 were pressure to perform and conform and the psychological pressures that come with these processes. These costs directly match the categories of pressures and rigid demands and methods in Study 1.

In Study 2, pressure to perform and pressure to conform to team demands were part of a team performance narrative where team members were required to “Do as the team tells you.” This was at the detriment of personal autonomy, goal control and individual creative input to decision making. This team performance narrative required team members to realign personal goals with team goals. It required team members to put the team before themselves and follow “team orders” to let a fellow team mate win. Long term this sacrifice behaviour can contradict personal wellbeing and career satisfaction. This team performance narrative where team success is the only criteria for success in sport is produced and reproduced in an elite sporting environment with the intention of increasing performance success. However the negative impact on individuals within a team may lead to negative repercussions for the wider group and for team performance.

Not all athletes experience the costs of high team cohesion all the time and Study 3 was an example of a case where an athlete did not perceive experiencing of the costs of high team cohesion. However, the limited research literature has shown that there are important costs of high team cohesion (e.g. Aspitch, 2008; Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Carron et al., 1994; Hoigaard et al., 2006; Paskevich et al., 2001). Study 1 and Hardy’s (2005) study indicate that a high number of athletes do experience the costs of high team cohesion and this will have negative repercussions for them personally and for the team itself. Some athletes will not perceive that they experience the costs but may be subject to the implicit and subtle group processes that result as a cost of high team cohesion. Other athletes may not experience the costs of high team cohesion and others may not experience these costs all the time but only at certain points.

Importantly Study 3 demonstrated how a multidimensional sporting narrative buffered against the potential costs of high team cohesion and reduced the pressures felt by the

athlete. As discussed earlier in this thesis, the performance and team performance narratives work as monological narratives and as the culturally dominant narratives in elite sport the athletes who are able to resist the performance narrative and manage to sustain a multidimensional narrative do so against the odds: they are few but they do exist (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Pressure to perform and conformity were perceived in Study 1 as personal level costs but Study 2 made more clear that these potential costs can have negative repercussions at the group level; indeed pressure to conform is a tangent category to the group level category of rigid demands and methods. Pressures have been shown to implicitly and explicitly affect group processes such as communication which is a key predictor of team performance. Previous research literature and Study 1 identifies increased social loafing as a potential cost of high team cohesion and a cost which would likely impact negatively upon performance outcomes. There is likely to be direct and indirect effects on performance from all these costs and the interaction of these costs.

The evidence in this thesis, along with previous cohesion research, has suggested that high social cohesion produces more group level costs and high task cohesion produces more individual level costs which would mean that high social cohesion is more likely to produce costs that have a direct negative impact on performance than high task cohesion. It is clear that the dynamic processes involved are interactive and complex. Therefore, the initial interviews in this study will consider cohesion, and the intricacies of team dynamics, in relation to the costs of pressures (performance and conformity) and communication issues which have all been shown to be significant costs of high social cohesion as well as costs of high task cohesion. Wellbeing will also be examined as a pertinent cost of high task cohesion, which is a requisite of all high performing teams, to consider if/how it impacts firstly at the individual level and if/how this effects performance.

### **Social Loafing**

Social loafing is when in a team situation "... an individual team member deliberately reduces his/her own effort to save energy" (Hoigaard, Boen, De Cuyper, & Peters, 2013, p.33). Social loafing will result in decreased performance outcomes. Social loafing is increased in larger teams (Hoigaard et al., 2006a; Williams et al., 1981). Social loafing is increased when individual team members do not feel they make a

unique contribution to the team (Kerr, 1983; Kerr & Bruun, 1983). Social loafing was an identified cost of high team cohesion and included in the category of reduced task commitment in Study 1. Furthermore, the category of cost reduced member input which was a perceived cost of high task cohesion would further contribute to this. Social loafing would have a negative impact on performance.

One recent experimental study suggested that increased team identity reduces social loafing and improves performance (Hoigaard et al., 2013). This is contrary to the bulk of previous research evidence which suggests that high team cohesion increases likelihood of not criticizing social loafers (Carron et al., 2005). In an elite performance environment where winning and success are the key criteria for involvement it is most likely an environment in which social loafing would be low. It would be most likely that high social cohesion in combination with low task cohesion would create conditions to increase social loafing (Hoigaard et al., 2006a,b). However in a highly socially cohesive team there may be decreased criticism of social loafing irrespective of competition level as was identified by the participants in Study 1. This is an example of compromise in communication processes within a team due to increased social cohesion. This study will examine the group process which result from high team cohesion: if and how these processes impact upon performance.

### **Pressure to Perform**

Baumeister (1984) defined pressure as “any factor or combination of factors that increases the importance of performing well.” (p.610). Intense pressure to perform is an inevitable part of elite sport (Hodge & Smith, 2014). Research based in narrative theory has demonstrated that the over-riding narrative of performance that permeates elite sporting culture not only encourages but indeed insists upon achieving performance and results at the detriment of maintaining multi-dimensional identity and balance between sport and outside sport existence; this can have damaging long-term effects on the well-being and life experiences of top level sportsmen and women (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009).

A highly cohesive team may somewhat lessen the pressure to perform through e.g. shared responsibility for failure. Thomas the participant in Study 3 felt that the cohesiveness of his small knitted team lessened the pressures. Study 1 participants

reported an overwhelmingly increased pressure to perform to not let valued team mates down. Study 2 showed increased pressure to perform and a team performance narrative in a highly cohesive team increases psychological demands and produces a collaborate fear of failure. The more highly cohesive the team the more the pressure felt not to let valued team mates down. Some research has shown that high performance expectation predicts task cohesion, regardless of performance level (Callow et al., 2009). This high performance pressure is a consequence and a cost of a highly cohesive team.

“Choking in sport is a process whereby the individual perceives that their resources are insufficient to meet the demands of the situation, and concludes with a significant drop in performance- a choke.” (Hill et al., 2009, p.206) Choking is a consequence of pressure to perform (Baumeister, 1984). Causal mechanisms of choking are unclear but the 2 main theories of self-focus (skill execution focus) and distraction (self-worry focus) agree that pressure produces anxiety and this results in attention shifts. (Oudejans, Kuijpers, Kooijman, & Bakker, 2011). Choking is negative consequence of real or perceived pressure that would damage performance outcomes. However, cohesion may simultaneously operate to somewhat lessen the negative potential impact by the strength of bonds created and a sharing of the worry and anxiety between team mates as explained by All Blacks coach Henry Smith: “We believe it contributes to performance... A lot of your performance, I think, depends on the connections you have with people around you... connections with the game, but also connection with the fans of the game, connection with your family, and with each other [teammates]. And generally those connections are stronger if you’re a good bugger, and you do things the right way. That’s where a lot of your resilience comes from, I reckon; is that you’re playing for other people, as well as yourself.” (Hodge et al., 2014, p.66).

Sport is traditionally “a site where men can bond” (Naess, 2001, p.127) and motorsport is a sport still firmly dominated and entrenched with traditional masculine values where this male bond is considered as vital and necessary to team performance. This thesis has evidenced how highly valued and all-encompassing the male bond and high social cohesion is in motorsport and how this can both increase and decrease performance pressure. The relationship between cohesion and performance is complex as are the many mechanisms involved in this process. It would appear that the moderating factors

result in a fluctuating relationship but the lack of clear findings in the research literature urge more examination.

### **The Cohesion-Performance Relationship**

Much of the research literature suggests that there is a reciprocated relationship between cohesion and performance with performance having a stronger influence on cohesion than that of cohesion on performance (Carron et al., 2002; Carron et al., 2007; Grieve et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2009; Senecal et al., 2008; Williams & Widmeyer, 1991). The two significant sport specific meta-analyses carried out have indicated that there is a positive relationship between cohesion and performance (Carron et al., 2002; Filho et al., 2014).

The first, in 2002, examined 46 sport studies encompassing 9988 athletes and 1044 teams and found a small to moderate positive relationship between cohesion and performance: for both social and task cohesion, in co-acting and interactive sports, across competitive levels, age and gender levels (Carron et al., 2002). Most recently a 10-year retrospective meta-analysis was conducted focusing on sport research examining cohesion and performance in the last decade (Filho et al., 2014). In this meta-analysis 16 studies were included in the final analytical pool revealing a significant moderate relationship between cohesion and performance. Task cohesion was shown to have a greater relationship with performance than social cohesion- but both showed a positive relationship. There was a weaker cohesion-performance relationship in elite sport, although the sample size was small. Both of these meta-analyses found the cohesion-performance relationship was stronger in all female teams than in male or mixed teams. Importantly though the earlier studies did not consider the “nested” nature of the data by multilevel analysis (Benson et al., 2016).

A recent comprehensive meta-analysis found that the task cohesion and performance relationship in sport had a much weaker relationship than in a business setting (Castano, Watts & Tekleab, 2013). This meta-analysis supported earlier significant meta-analysis across group settings indicating both social and task cohesion *are* significantly related to performance (Beal et al., 2003; Mullen & Copper, 1994). However, social cohesion in sport had a weaker influence than task (Filho et al., 2014). Various specific studies have contradicted these general findings with an experimental study in 2000

demonstrating cohesion had no impact on performance (Grieve et al., 2000) and a key case-study in 2009 demonstrating social cohesion impacting negatively on performance (Rovio et al., 2009). A very recent study in elite youth sport reported that cohesion was not a predictor of performance and that in elite sport teams more important to performance is “the development of team cognition and tactics”(Benson et al., 2016, p.40). This study will examine the relationship between potential costs of high cohesion in a sports team and performance.

## **Method**

Previous cohesion- performance research has called for longitudinal real life qualitative studies (Hoigaard et al., 2006a; Rovio et al., 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). In-depth case-study design would be most helpful in developing understanding of the complex and unique nature of the phenomena (cohesion, costs and performance) by examining one motor sport athlete’s real life experiences of the team processes across an actual season (Collins et al., 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Hodge et al., 2014). Multiple sources were utilised for data gathering (Hodge et al, 2014). From this study the specific illustrates the general but is not representing all or every case, this study is representing the particulars of the case being presented (Holt & Hodge, 2002; Voight, 2012). A narrative methodology framed the case study and data analysis (Lieblich et al.,1998; Riessman, 2008). A narrative methodology allowed exploration of the costs experienced by the athlete and a deeper understanding of when and how they impacted on performance (Carless, 2012). This is an approach which has been used successfully in similar case-study and cohesion-performance research (Collins & Durand-Bush, 2010; Hodge & Smith, 2014; Hodge et al., 2014).

## **Recruitment and Participant**

Due to the nature of the study, the sporting context and challenges of recruiting and working with elite athletes, purposeful sampling was used to recruit a participant. Access to high performing teams participating in championships is even more challenging (Ronglan, 2007). The study sought a member of a currently high performing team who would be available and willing to share information on team dynamics and performance across the course of an entire season. A potential participant was identified by a contact established from networking for Studies 2 and 3. Full ethical

approval was obtained from the university. The participant was given an outline of the research and what his involvement would require, he had a telephone briefing with the lead supervisor of the PhD Project and agreed to participate. He was emailed a participant information sheet and consent form.

He was assured that the data would be treated with complete confidentiality and a pseudonym would be used. He was informed that he could withdraw at any point during the research process. He gave consent to the research. The participant was very open about team dynamics and processes within the team throughout the interview process and due to extent of the discussions stimulated by the interviews asked for his identity to be fully protected and to be assured complete confidentiality at the end of the data collection process.

### **Design and Procedure**

The data were collected over the course of an entire season from the first competition to the last competition over a ten month period. The main data were derived from telephone interviews with the participant lasting between 20 and 40 minutes after every competitive event: there were a total of 13 interviews. The telephone interviews were semi-structured around five key areas designed to generate discussion of the participant's experiences of cohesion and the team processes over the course of the season in order to collect data as to what costs of high team cohesion he experienced and when and how these costs impacted upon performance. These areas were 1) cohesion, 2) team dynamics, 3) pressures, 4) communication and 5) wellbeing. There was recording of outcome performance results from each competition. The researcher followed the televised commentary on each competition and regularly checked online various sport specific and sport general websites, following online social media such as Twitter and Facebook and the participant's own online blog, and interviews given by the participant to sporting websites and organisations. This added to the depth of knowledge and understanding the researcher had of the sport and this specific competitive season as well as the performance outcomes. After each competitive event the telephone interview was conducted as soon as was feasible, in terms of participant post-competition commitments and travel, and handwritten notes were typed up with additional commentary and links made to theory and research.

Subjective measures represent an athlete's performance more accurately than purely objective measures as they take into consideration environmental and situational factors such as weather, terrain, performance of competitors and injury (Filho, Tenenbaum & Yang, 2015). Outcome performance (results) was monitored, recorded and analysed as part of the research process but due to impact of these environmental/situational uncontrollable factors on performance results, subjective measurement and a self-performance rating- for both individual performance and team performance- was the key performance data for the study (Castano, Watts & Tekleab, 2013).

The participant gave a numerical score out of ten for his own performance and a numerical score out of ten for the team's performance after every competition of the season. Cohesion was also measured qualitatively with the participant scoring both social and task cohesion out of ten, with a summative score, for every competitive event of the season. It is clear that "... considering performance as a gross dichotomy of either success or failure may ignore more specific performance outcomes. For example, a team may play extremely well but lose on a chance shot. Conversely, a team may play poorly but win due to a superior effort by one of its members. Simply studying winning percentage of the teams may mask these subtleties." (Grieve et al., 2000, p.222). This is further accentuated in motor sport where sport specific uncontrollable factors such as engine failure, puncture or requirement to deploy the safety car have a major influence (Dasil, 2006).

Interviews were conducted via skype after the final competitive event of the season. Interview guides were designed to allow the participant to describe his perceptions of the costs of high team cohesion and how this impacted on performance over the course of the season (Voight, 2012). The interview began with general questions used to establish a relaxed informal atmosphere and give an over-view of the season:

- What were your personal goals and the team goals for the season? Explain how and why these changed/developed and were re-aligned as the season progressed?
- What has been your drive and motivation across the season?
- How do you feel about your own performance and team performance throughout the season?



The second part of the interview guide was structured around the key areas where costs had been identified from the telephone interview data: rigid demand and methods, conformity, communication issues and team goals and team processes.

The third and final section of the interview guide focused on four specific different rallies from the first half of the season where cohesion, particularly social cohesion, was high and costs of high team cohesion had been established. It was designed to stimulate elaboration from the participant in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of how these costs impacted on performance. The interview was semi-structured to allow for the interviewer to follow the participants lead on any pertinent issues around how these costs impacted on performance and initiate any further questions that would deepen understanding or give more depth and detail to what had previously been touched on in the telephone interviews. The participant now had hindsight which created a new wider perspective. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis**

There was an ongoing process whereby the telephone interviews were initially analysed along with all the key online data as it emerged over the course of the season in order to establish which, if any, potential costs of high team cohesion were evident across the entire season. At the end of the season, after the final competitive event, the typed telephone interviews were printed off onto hard copy and a rigorous content analysis was conducted to establish the central costs. Key themes relating to previous cohesion research and costs of cohesion were highlighted with chronological time of occurrence and other significant points noted in the margin (Rovio, Arvinen-Barrow, Weigand, Eskola, & Lintunen, 2012). The researcher re-read all the online data and identified corroborations or discrepancies along with the particular point in the season that these occurred.

The semi-structured interview sought clarification and elaboration on the wider context of the occurrence of the specific costs, the participant's understanding of these costs and how this affected performance. Due to time restriction of final interview it was decided to structure the interview firstly around these key themes/costs as the participant felt he had experienced them over the course of the season; then to also examine incidents

from 4 specific competitive events in the first half of the season where there was a clear anomaly between cohesion and performance and the costs of cohesion were evident.

## **Results**

### **What were the costs of high team cohesion experienced?**

The participant identified 4 significant costs of high team cohesion which impacted over the course of the season and all of these were shown to be inter-related. Pressure to conform was experienced with evidence of normative influence. Rigid demands and methods with a narrow team goal focus was another significant cost experienced. The participant experienced communication issues as a cost resulting from high team cohesion and further exacerbated by pressures to conform and rigid demands and methods. Pressure to perform was the final significant cost experienced by Michael over the season.

### **When did these costs of high team cohesion impact on performance?**

There were significant dips in performance at the four competitive events B, E, J and L as shown in Table 4. As detailed in Table 5 and Table 6, overall cohesion remained high and was not matched by overall team performance or Michael's own performance. In each of the significant dips, cohesion remained high with social cohesion higher than task as presented in Tables 7, 8, 9 and 10. After a better than expected first competition in terms of performance result outcome, cohesion which had started high increased, and consequentially the cost of increased pressure to perform was evident. This was followed with a then dip in performance in the next event B - a retirement from the competition- where pressure to conform and communication issues were identified as a cost of high team cohesion. Cohesion remained high increasing again slightly being its highest after the 4<sup>th</sup> competitive event of the season at which event the outcome results did not reciprocate, an accident, and a dip in performance in the following competition E as again increased pressure to perform was evident. Cohesion still remained high but there were two other significant dips. In the fourth last competition J there was evidence of pressures and communication issues. Finally in the second last competitive event of the season L "one of the toughest days of the year" - and pressure to conform and communication issues impacted again on performance. The data is described and interpreted in the figures that follow below.

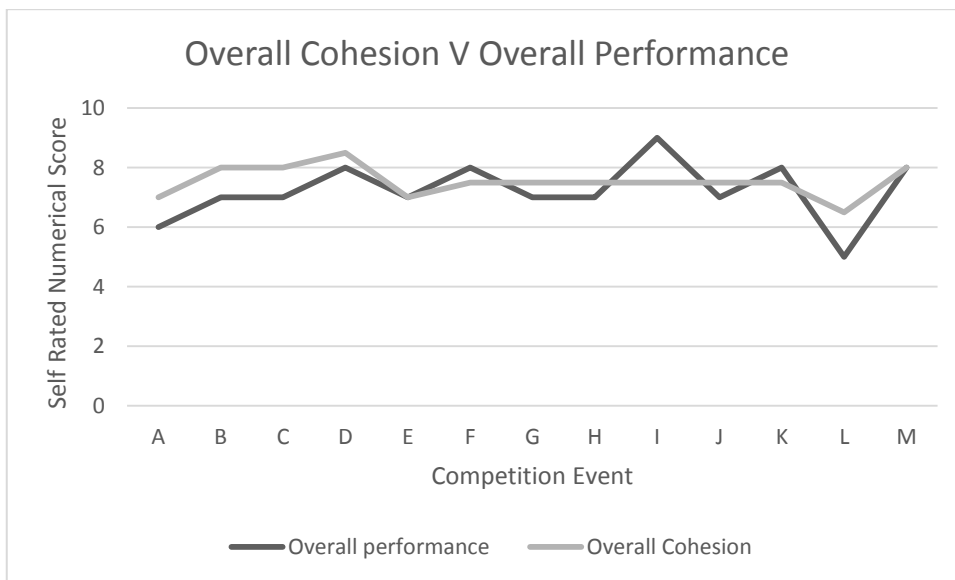
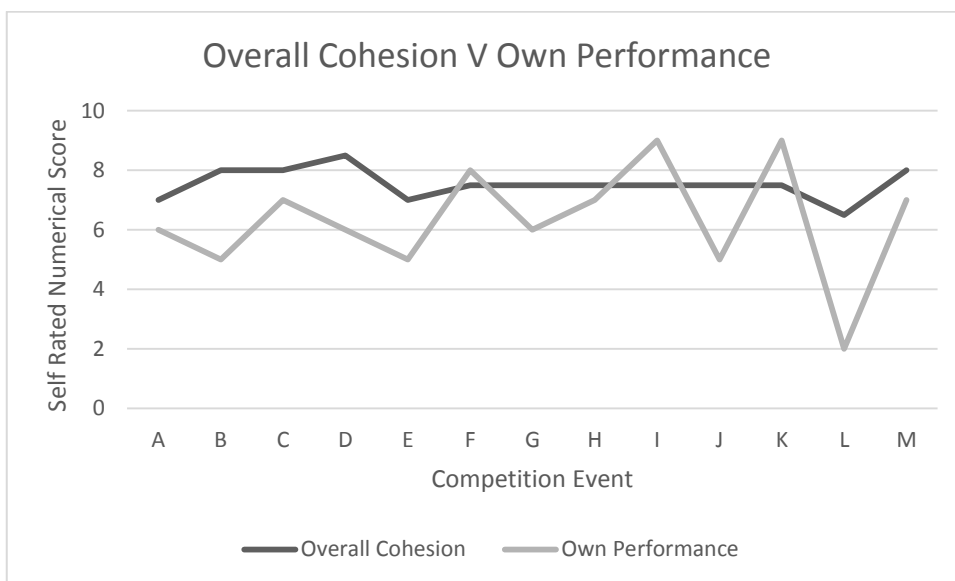


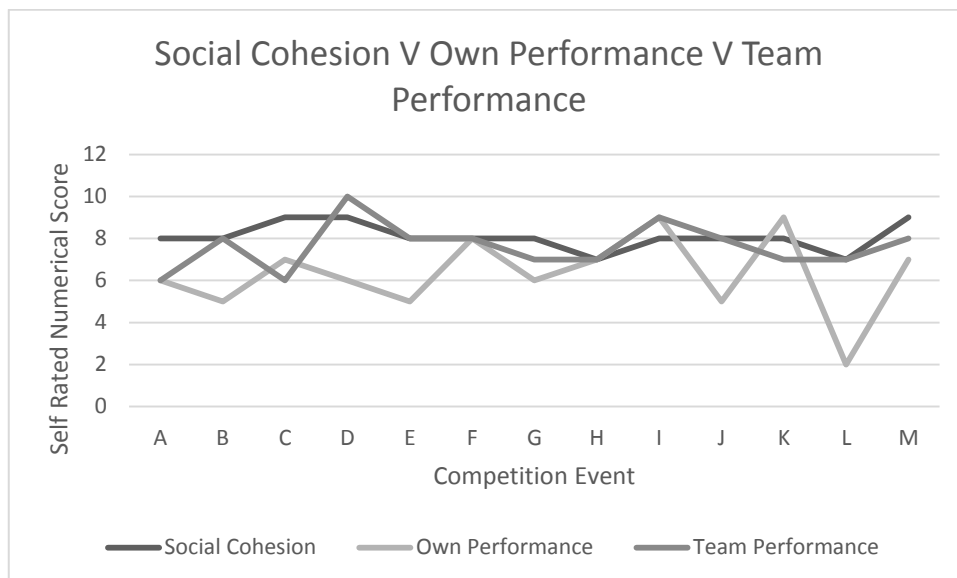
Figure 1

Cohesion started at a high level and increased over the first few competitive events. Cohesion was maintained at a consistently high level across the season with minimal fluctuations and ended higher than it started. Overall performance did not match cohesion levels and fluctuated across the season; an initial rise at the start of the season was then followed by significant dips at competitive events E, J and L.



*Figure 2*

Michael's individual performance fluctuated considerably and did not correspond with the stable high cohesion levels. There were significant dips in his performance at events B, E, J and a plummet in performance in competitive event L.



*Figure 3*

Social cohesion started high, higher than task, and remained consistently high across the season while own performance and team performance were not reciprocated. Performance fluctuated and dipped despite high social cohesion levels.

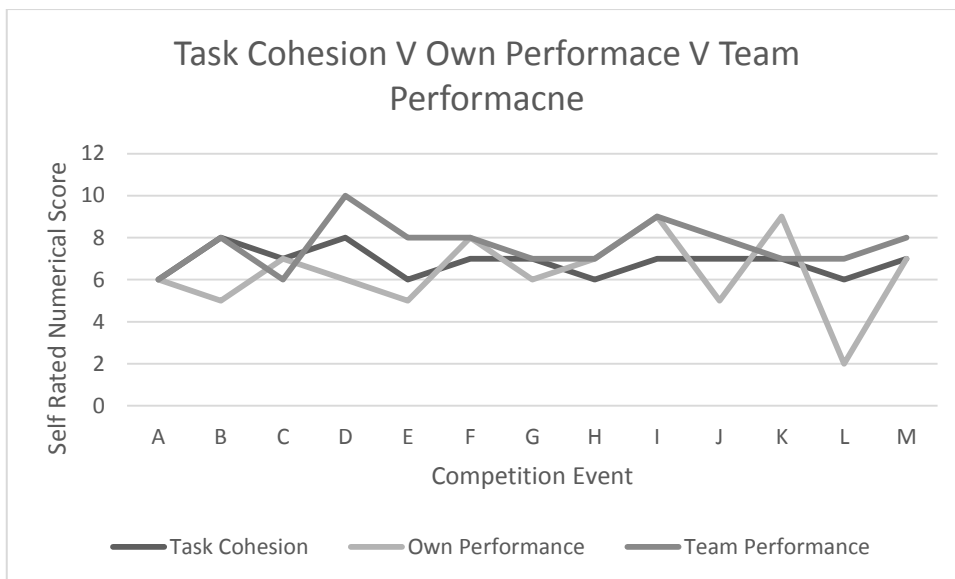


Figure 4

Task cohesion was very consistent across the season with minimal fluctuations and ended a little higher than it started. This consistently high level of cohesion was not matched with the fluctuations and dips in performance.

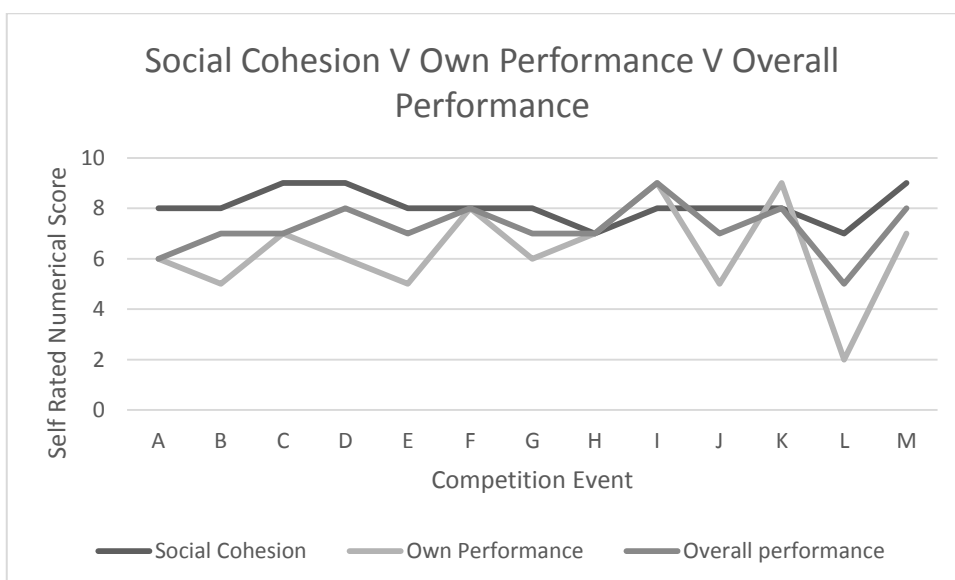
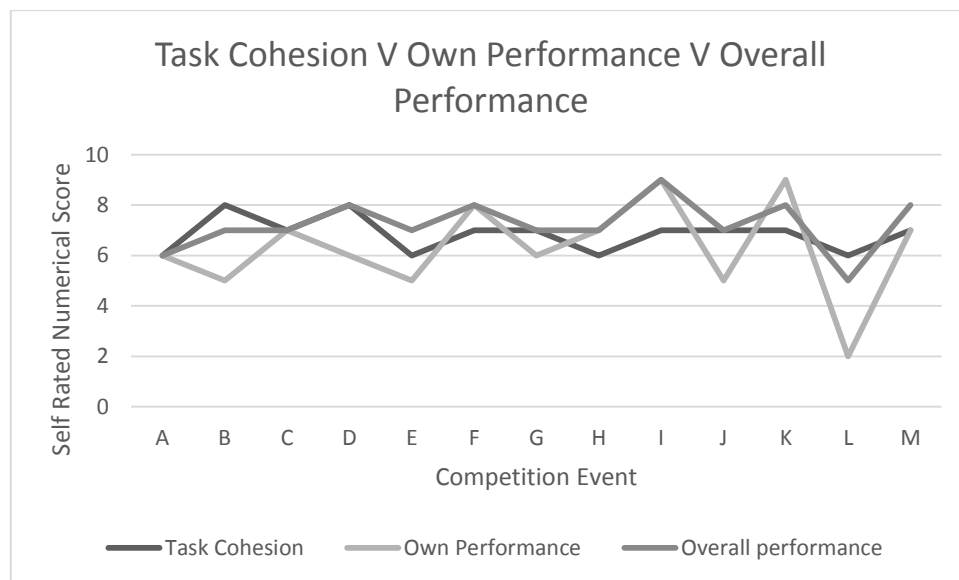


Figure 5

Overall performance remained higher than individual performance but showed similar slightly less dramatic fluctuations and dips as individual performance. Social cohesion and performance were not reciprocated.



*Figure 6*

Fluctuations and dips in performance do not correspond with the high consistent task cohesion across the season. The difference between task cohesion and performance is not quite as stark as with social cohesion: both social and task cohesion levels do not correspond with performance.

### **How did these costs of high team cohesion impact on performance?**

The pressures created in tangent with, and as a consequence of, goal alignment issues and unclear communication were identified as leading to “inconsistent driving” on the part of the participant prior to the first dip in competitive performance due to an accident. The participant had a clear aim “to make it to the end of the (competition) with no mistakes. We won’t be paying too much attention to the result, but rather looking to learn as much as possible.” This aim became unclear when he performed better than was initially anticipated by the team and he was then given “mixed messages” and encouraged to push harder.

This increased pressure to perform affected him psychologically as he didn't want to take a too risky approach and wanted to stick to the original goal. There is also pressure to conform to the management and team expectations that now differ from those the participant had initially agreed and accepted. The accident followed a pace notes error but it would seem that there were indirect repercussions of the increased pressure to perform and pressure to conform. Cohesion and particularly social cohesion then increased partly due to the team, including the participant, pulling together to repair the car.

Cohesion peaked two competitions later, despite another accident, but as cohesion increased so did pressure to perform; goals now became about stage times rather than the over-riding learning goal for the season, expectations increased and for the team it was no longer about 'just' finishing.

After the second accident which was "*just a small mistake on my part*" the high cohesion within the team was evident along with the high pressure to perform: "*I couldn't really get over how supportive everyone at (the team) was. To go out and do what the team requested was the only way to repay them properly....seeing the progress in pace.*" After a good recovery there was intense pressure which is the pressure of 'not wanting to let it slip' which meant Michael (pseudonym) felt that he wasn't able to relax or drive naturally which negatively affected performance. This carried through to the next competition where there was a clear dip in performance as the pressure not to have an accident and not to let the team down had a detrimental effect on the driving: "*the determination not to make a mistake got in the way of the driving.*" Michael described this competition as frustrating as he wasn't fully relaxed and so performance was average at best and not natural.

This scenario was repeated again at the third performance dip where outcome performance was good (8<sup>th</sup>) but pressures negatively affected driving and performance. The team had achieved 4<sup>th</sup>, their best result, in the previous rally but this meant the team

were now expected to perform and they had to finish the event. Michael felt that this pressure was intensified by the added pressure of lack of preparation time due to PR commitments and the fact that this was a new event for him meant he couldn't relax and was particularly unsettled at the start of the race. This meant that he did not push and did not enjoy the race. There were also communication issues at this event in the wider team and oversights in terms of mechanical issues causing "distraction" from the goals and performance. Michael explained that dip 2 and dip 3 came after narrow team goal focus and performance goals added psychological demands and pressures.

When asked if there had been any incidences where narrow team goal focus (performance goals) had a negative impact for the team?, Michael replied: "When the goal was to be reliable and not make mistakes it quite possibly put pressure to finish events on more than one occasion and probably hampered what could have been a better result ... I would say definitely events like E and J that we were going to for the first time you know that the pace was not really what it was let's say on the previous event or the event afterwards ehm so that you knew there was more there to come, because it was a new environment and you didn't feel comfortable, the risk of an accident was high so we didn't push and the risk was probably less than what it could have been"

There was pressure not to make a mistake, "to be reliable" and to finish the event. Michael felt that these psychological pressures definitely affected his performance: he couldn't relax and didn't settle at start, he didn't cope with the pressure particularly well and this meant there was low satisfaction behind the wheel. The final and biggest performance dip of the season occurred when cohesion was still high, and off the back of a good performance, where he described himself as "overly keen" in desire to prove he could repeat success on differing terrain and this dip could be explained to some extent by an over-confidence which led to unreliability in driving and a "disaster ... really one of the toughest days of the year." In some ways if they had been more cautious they felt they could have prevented it but he explained that basically it was due to his approach to the event and impatient mistakes along with other factors to do with the pace notes.



One communication clash at this event was after first day, and because now they were in no position to fight, the driver and co-driver were instructed to make changes of position/goals they didn't really agree with. Here there is evidence of pressure to conform again, the team wanted to play it safe and Michael didn't feel that was necessary and neither did his engineer. This pressure to conform and lack of autonomy impacted on the performance by the effect it had on their state of mind and contradictory thoughts about the goals. Feedback from the team and primarily the team manager wasn't massively negative but more disappointment, the team manager accepted they knew it was their mistake in approach and put it down to lack of experience. After the even Michael felt frustrated at the communication during the even in terms of goal changes and in the under-performance which resulted.

## **Discussion**

This case study has developed understanding of the dynamic nature of the relationship between cohesion, the potential costs, and performance. The key themes identified in the data analysis were:

1. Pressure to conform and normative influence
2. Rigid demands and methods with a narrow goal focus
3. Communication issues
4. Pressure to perform

Michael in Study 4 experienced the costs of high team cohesion but did not experience the cost of compromised wellbeing that was identified in Study 1 at a significant level. The key themes which did emerge from the data analysis are all potential costs of high team cohesion and all inter-related. These potential costs all impact at both the personal and group level. These potential costs are all significant. These will now be discussed in the following, alongside quotes from the participant accompanied with wider theoretical considerations, in order to describe fully where and how these costs impacted upon performance.

**Pressure to conform and normative influence**

Michael emphasized the differences in views and opinions within the team over the course of the season but that cohesion attempted to minimise these differences and keep conformity “There was a lot during the year, especially with tyres, that I didn’t agree with or my gut didn’t agree with but again in the view of safety and being cautious and all the rest of it that I just went with it because it was more important to finish the event than push boundaries for better results.” He described how throughout the season there were situations he disagreed with but that he did not challenge; in order not to create conflict within the team he went along with the majority view. Cohesion attempts to create uniformity and to minimise conflict.

Conflict has been investigated extensively in small group and business research and is defined as “a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (Barki & Hartwick, 2004, p.234). The participant said that there were “a lot of” incidents in terms of “tyres and set up and certain tactics” when he didn’t voice his disagreement with a group decision and was swayed by the group to accept a decision. He asserted that “there were definitely occasions like that where I thought it was better to keep quiet because of my position in the team at the time.”

He put this down to being new and not wanting to cause discord within the team. He emphasized that “there would have been” pressure to conform within the team to things he did not feel comfortable with. Normative influence is defined “as an individual’s adaptation to the attitude of the majority in order to gain acceptance by the group. A situation in which an individual accepts the majority’s attitudes as valid information is referred to as informational influence.” (Rovio et al., 2009, p.429) Normative influenced is strongly evidenced in this study. The participant was new to the team, in his first competitive season at this level, and wanted to be accepted into the group fully, he did not want to rock the boat or go against the majority of the team. So he resisted conflict.

As previously discussed in this thesis, conflict is under researched in the sport literature (Martin et al., 2014). After one earlier study examining the conflict-cohesion relationship (Sullivan & Feltz, 2001), there was a paucity of research until some important recent studies all of which reiterate the importance and relevance of continued focus and development of research into conflict in the sporting literature (Holt et al., 2012; Leo, Gonzalez-Ponce, Sanchez-Miguel, Ivarsson, & Garcia-Calvo, 2015; Mellalieu, Shearer, & Shearer, 2013; Paradis, Carron, & Marin, 2014a). A validated sport-specific conflict questionnaire, The Group Conflict Questionnaire (G.C.Q.), was recently developed in order to enhance the conflict research (Paradis, Carron, & Martin, 2014b). Normative influence works to avoid conflict.

The way in which the participant from this study responded to potential conflict reflects the intuitive consideration that conflict is a bad thing and something to be resisted and avoided. A recent study with male and female professional footballers reported that perceptions of team conflict had a negative impact on self-efficacy and dented team confidence and belief (Leo et al., 2015). However, avoidance of conflict can restrict development of creative thinking and problem solving strategies which would benefit a team. Study 1 showed that the potential cost of high team cohesion, Rigid demands and methods at the group level, similarly produced a stifling of creativity.

The research evidence from the organisational literature, where there is a lengthy and large volume of studies, and the limited sport specific research, is that conflict can potentially create opportunities for creative thinking, improved decision making and practical problem solving strategies: producing possibly better results for the team (Dionne et al., 2003; Jehn, 1995; Tuckman, 1965, 1995). Conflict “can be a growing moment and can help and direct focus” (Paradis et al., 2014a, p.14). This was demonstrated by a comment from a participant in Study 1 that thinking ‘outside the box’ can identify “a “better solution” if team members are open to discuss and consider differences of opinion in disagreements and work in positive conflict resolution. This is supported, as discussed earlier in this thesis, by the Transformational Leadership research.

The sport literature describes conflict between two or more members of the same team as intra-group conflict or inter-personal conflict, the two labels are used interchangeably, as multidimensional, involving damaging disagreements at the task (practise or performance) and/or personal (relationship) level (Holt et al. 2012; Mellalieu et al., 2013; Sullivan and Feltz, 2001). Importantly conflict consists of cognitive, behavioural and emotional elements (Barki & Harwick, 2004). The organisational research into conflict in groups offered three different types of conflict which are task, personal and process (Jehn, 1997).

The sport literature research has not included process conflict as a separate category as the organisational research has done because process conflict refers to conflict in how the task is processed: order of subtasks, workload distribution and decision-making relating to this. The responsibility for this in sport teams lies primarily with the team manager or coach (Jehn, 1997; Paradis et al., 2014a,b).

In a recent qualitative study with 55 intercollegiate athletes the “over-riding perception was that it (task conflict) is inevitable in competitive sport.” (Paradis et al., 2014a, p.4). Furthermore another qualitative study to examine conflict in the run up to and during major competitions and games found that athletes reported conflicts much more frequently than the management and support staff (Mellalieu et al., 2013).

The limited research in sport supports the organisational research evidence that personal conflict is more damaging than task conflict and similarly does suggest that task conflict can be potentially positive but only if it is a moderate level that is resolved quickly (Holt et al., 2012; Paradis et al., 2014a). However relational conflicts in a team despite being the most detrimental can if approached positively result in the biggest growth and change through development of self-awareness and communication skills (Mellelieu et al., 2013). This contrasts with the view of conflict as a threat, and something that is considered to have a negative impact on performance (Carron et al., 2002; Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Holt et al., 2012; Sullivan & Feltz, 2001). If conflict is not approached and resolved it will have a damaging long term impact on any elite team

(Paradis et al., 2014a). Study 1 reported that a cost of high social cohesion was to decrease effective communication, avoiding conflict by failure to criticize social loafers, and supports the idea that conflict avoidance is not always a good thing.

Conflict in teams is a complex issue with both potential for negative and positive outcomes. Importantly, having a variety of ideas in a group or team is advantageous. When individual team members perceive pressure to agree with ideas and actions instead of offering alternative ideas and actions then as a group there is potential to miss a better alternative or solution. “Task conflict facilitates critical evaluation which reduces the groupthink phenomenon by increasing thoughtful consideration of criticism and alternative solutions.” (Jehn, 1995, p.260). This study supported the idea that team members view conflict as having only negative outcomes seek to resist conflict. Conflict appears to be the antithesis to cohesion and so the stronger the cohesion the stronger that resistance will be.

In this study normative influence was evidenced as a cost and consequence of high cohesion. This is a negative group process. This finding supports previous research where high social cohesion has been demonstrated to increase normative influence and compliance (Apitzsch, 2009; Prapevessis & Carron, 1997; Rovio et al., 2009). In retrospect the participant felt that he had been wrongly swayed on various decisions across the season and wished he had spoken out. The pressure to conform to group opinions and expectations was not a good thing.

In particular this pressure to conform was pressure that effected performance in the first dip of the season. There was pressure to conform to the management and team expectations to change the original goals and to aim for a higher scoring performance. Michael at this early stage in the season and wanting to be accepted fully with the team was swayed to go against what he wanted to do which led to “inconsistent driving” and a poorer performance. Similarly in the third and fourth dips in performance cohesion was high but there was pressure to conform to changes in goals and simultaneously communication issues.

### **Rigid demands and methods with a narrow goal focus**

Self Determination Theory (SDT) emerged as a new important theoretical consideration from the results of Study 4. Pressure to conform, and normative influence, not only works to avoid and resist conflict, but simultaneously reduces autonomy. This can reduce the value and meaning competitors find in their sport. SDT proposes that there are 3 clear areas that must be fulfilled for psychological needs satisfaction: relatedness, autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This highly cohesive team succeeding at a high performance level is clearly fulfilling the competence element of SDT and is related in the way the team members do care for each other (Hodge & Smith, 2014). However, the way the rigid demands and methods and narrow goal focus of the team operate means autonomy is obstructed and denied. The team demands that the participant follow the change of goals from wide learning goals to performance goals which he does not feel comfortable with:

*“The goals for the season, the majority, were to basically learn as much as possible- on the new rallies that would mean making sure that we got to the end, ehm, without any mistakes, making sure that we got maximum experience and on some of the events that we did better we were in the position where we could experiment a little bit more but still trying to focus on maximum experience which was the goal at the start of the year.”*

When the participant was probed by the interviewer as to why the personal and team goals changed throughout the season, he hesitated and responded “Ehm, throughout the year I think, ehm, maybe on certain rallies there was tension...” It is clear that as team goals changed he had to change and align his personal goals. This means that his autonomy was reduced and this will reduce intrinsic motivation and personal value found in competition and in the sport (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Hodge & Smith, 2014). When learning turns to performing for the team there is a narrowing of the goal focus and a reduction of personal consideration and individual in-put. This reflects the team performance narrative identified and explained in Study 2 which reduces personal autonomy, goal control and individual creative input to decision making. Fostering acceptance

of group goals has been shown to increase both task and social cohesion (Callow et al., 2009).

Within a team situation, team goals are the priority but personal goals should be taken into consideration encouraging individual self-development while allowing precedence of team outcome and success (Rovio et al., 2012). This thesis has emphasized the limited research into elite athletes and teams and there is minimal research examining motivational climate in elite sport (Hodge et al., 2014). Michael is in a co-acting team where they are the subordinate team, he is number 2 driver, and although he is motivated by performance and wants to perform to the best of his ability and achieve his personal highest in every competitive event, the team sometimes requires and demands that he must get round and score points to contribute to the wider team, this mean driving more cautiously to prevent an accident. There wasn't the finances or development and workmanship time devoted to his team as to the other car, driver and co-driver:

*“Looking back I would say yes there were definitely different strange points during the season, I don't think I was intentionally unmotivated but I think I found myself in positions where I wasn't really sure what to do, it was difficult to know what to aim for having come from the lower classes where you were always going to win, winning at the experience level I was at last year was unrealistic, ehm, and so it was sometimes I wouldn't say I was unmotivated but it was difficult to know what you were motivated towards and what you were really expecting and what made you happy.”*

The participant felt that the team could have pushed harder and “that was difficult to get everybody perhaps really pushing to the nth degree” across the season that he would have liked them to. This contradiction and tension in personal and team goals that is unique to a co-acting team is that two teams are competing against each other while being part of the same team and competing to achieve team points simultaneously. Stephen in Study 2 described the emotional backlash that results from this and how it creates an angry response in the heat of the moment; in retrospect and with hindsight it is a huge cost of being part of a highly cohesive team where there are implicit and explicit pressures to perform and conform to the teams desires and demands.

The participant when asked to describe any incidences where narrow team goal focus (performance goals) had a negative impact for the team responded:

*“...long pause...ehm...there probably has...hard to think off the top of my head...yeah I would say ... it is a difficult one because you could argue that sometimes when you are fighting ... when the goal was to be reliable and not make mistakes it quite possibly put pressure to finish events on more than one occasion and probably hampered what could have been a better result.”*

This study is framed in narrative theory and the participant is describing the contradictions and conflicts he experienced, at times struggles to find and express in words to reflect experience. Michael was being fairly open particularly in the telephone interviews and talking freely about frustration and annoyance at changes in goals and lack of autonomy but he is obviously aware of confidentiality and that he would not want his team manager to be aware of the full extent of his feelings and thoughts.

Michael described an instance of goal tension in the first dip of the season where the initial goal was not to crawl but to finish and “We won’t be paying too much attention to the result” but after they “just naturally increased the pace a little during the event” he was encouraged to go faster and keep an eye on the car in front in order to try and achieve points and performance results for the wider team. He emphasized at this point at the start of the season it was important to stick to goals but that because this was only the second race of the season there was a greater pressure not to let the team down and to do what they wanted.

He describes his emotional response to this: “it is just that it makes you feel uncomfortable I think and almost a little bit pissed off because you had been told to come here to do something and all of a sudden you are being told to do something else so yeah it is difficult to process and then it makes you rethink what do I do here and



that's when you make the decision to go with what they say or stick to the original goal.”

Through telling his story of the season in the interview process Michael is developing understanding of his own position within the team and how the team is influencing him (Carless, 2012; Naess, 2001). On this occasion it was discussed in services and he had time to some time to think about it but this is evidence of mixed messages and confusion. Obviously this has potential to further hamper communication. And performance.

### **Communication Issues**

Communication is an integral component of any team-building process to increase cohesion and effective communication has been identified as both a prerequisite to and consequence of high team cohesion (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Yukelson, 1997). Communication, implicit and explicit, intentional and unintentional, is complex and will vary in quality and quantity throughout all stages of competition preparation, performance and de-briefing.

Communication a three stage process: encoding and sending, receiving, decoding and interpreting; communication is susceptible to disruption at any point (Eccles & Tennenbaum, 2004). Recently a study proposed an updated framework of team dynamics in sport where cohesion was a prerequisite for team mental models/team coordination and communication (Filho et al., 2015). Filho and colleagues (2015) reiterated that communication problems was a negative impact of low social cohesion and emphasized that team expertise begins with social and task cohesion.

Participants in Study 2 and 3 emphasized emphatically that they perceived social cohesion to increase and improve communication between team members. However this study has shown that increased cohesion, particularly social cohesion, increased pressure to conform and particularly the negative group process of normative influence. Thus communication decreased despite high team cohesion; the participant was not

willing to speak up honestly with the force required to offer a different opinion to the majority view- this was in terms of specific tactics and tyre choices and the wider issue of team goals.

In their study of a Finish ice-hockey team, Rovio and colleagues (2009) demonstrated how high social cohesion resulted in the coaches having lower, and more realistic, perceptions of the team's performance, in practice and performance, but the players themselves- who were a high socially cohesive unit- avoided and denied difficulties, and despite being a highly cohesive unit did not communicate effectively. There was evidence of both normative and informational influence. This break-down in communication and negative group processes hampered performance.

Similarly in this study, Michael felt that "mixed messages" which is unclear communication hampered performance. There were several instances of mixed messages and unclear communication described by Michael over the course of the season. Study 1 identified that high social cohesion compromised communication as it reduced honesty and constructive criticism along with clouding decision making processes within a team. Michael stated that "communication between myself and the team was always maintained at a consistent level" but at times of there was not quality of communication:

Describe the decision making process in terms of choices of events, approaches and tactics to specific rallies in terms of individual and team input.

*"Quite a bit of input because I think the team wanted me to be comfortable with what is expected for that event ehm to be honest it wasn't discussed at great lengths ehm and sometimes even though it had been discussed beforehand, moods, etc, ehm, determined how well the team responded to a performance on an event you know ehm but on the whole I would say on the whole what we discussed we tried to go and do and in most cases that was achievable."*

Here again Michael is uncomfortable in the contradictions and conflicts he has in expressing the communication processes within the team. Communication is dependent on emotions of team members and this will effect both quality and quantity. A further

example is when he is told to “do as he pleases” in a particular rally but he has to interpret this and does so as a message that he is required to perform and achieve results:

Describe any particular races when your personal goals have been different to team goals?

*“Yeah in some instances the goal was to go and do as you please there’s no pressure to finish because you’ve got experience of the event for example so then I was free to make my own decision on goals and how I wanted to approach the event although secretly I knew if I was given that I was expected to perform to quite a high level.”*

Here communication is not clear as “do as you please” still means to perform and a lack of performance would not please the team manager. At one point in the season the team manager said to the press that Michael was “off the leash” in relation to his driving and performance expectations and again this is unclear communication and in fact poor management: it caused negative feelings in Michael. Negative emotion has been shown to result in communication problems and break-down (Apitzsch, 2009).

As explained earlier it had previously been hypothesised that cohesion might affect performance through its effects on communication- but there is still limited research exploring this relationship (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). There is even less research examining elite sport teams (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

As discussed earlier in this thesis the direction of the relationship between roles and cohesion is not clear and although not directly examining the communication-cohesion relationship, research supports the idea that high task cohesion would be a result and consequence of effective communication and would increase performance but that high social cohesion might negatively influence this relationship through the mediating influence of the variable of communication (Cope et al., 2011). Across the season in 3 of the 4 performance dips there was high social cohesion along with evidence of communication concerns and issues.

### **Pressure to perform**

“The ability of individuals and teams to withstand stressors is a prerequisite for sporting excellence.” (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2015, p.91). In the other performance dip, the second of the season, pressure to perform had a high impact on performance. Michael emphasized that *“with the driving it (increased pressure) does hamper your ability to relax and drive naturally.”* Increased pressure a cost of high cohesion was evident across all the performance dips. Although there was not the same evidence in this study of the level of intensity in the “bond” that was the core of the team relationship for Stephen in Study 2 and Thomas in Study 3, social cohesion was valued highly and was part of the motivation and drive for performance outcomes as Michael considers his team mate to be “I guess their friend”. When the participant wanted to “repay” his team mates, for the way they positively responded to his lack of performance, with performance it reflects that “A lot of your performance, I think, depends on the connections you have with people around you ... with each other (team mates)” All Blacks coach Graham Henry (Hodge et al., 2014, p.66). This reflects Study 1: *“You are not only letting the team down if you mess up but letting friends down. It adds to the pressure!”* Increased pressure to perform can contribute to negative processes such as choking and create a collaborative fear of failure with potential for collective collapse.

In the second dip of the season, the performance pressure was high because of a poor result in terms of performance in the rally before due to an accident and Michael felt that “the determination not to make a mistake got in the way of the driving.” He describes his state of mind prior to the competition: “ a bit more difficult to go quickly there, a tricky event and we knew already going there that we would be faced with a lot more of a challenge than what we did in (competition D) so ehm yeah that’s where we basically were with that we knew already going there that we’d be challenged a lot more to be able to show as good a speed and therefore we knew because it was a difficult event it was important for the mileage and then then obviously effects the performance in terms of speed.”

It is an expected and accepted part of elite level sport that athletes are not just able to perform under pressure but to excel under extreme pressure. Pressure has been described as a “double-edged sword” in that it can increase performance but also has the potential to hamper performance (Gardner, 2012). Study 2 and 3 have evidenced how narrative theory warns against storying an exclusive athlete story where performance is the all and the everything, however this study again reiterates how it is difficult to avoid the performance story in the elite sporting world and reiterates the intense pressure to perform that exists here. Michael has a strong performance narrative with performance being his drive and motivation and there is a strong team performance narrative where team points and positions are the main objective. As the number two car in a co-acting team there is a slightly different perspective in that the number one car are given most of the time and budget but the number two car are expected to support them and gain the required team points at every competition. Pressure to perform and please the wider team is evident across all the dips in performance while social cohesion is high.

## **Conclusion**

This longitudinal real life study examined one particular elite team over the course of an entire season and therefore cannot be generalised to other competitive levels, with female athletes and teams. However, the detail and depth offered from interviews after every single competition event across the entire season, an in-depth interview at the end of the season, as well as from secondary sources such as blogs, means the rich data significantly develops understanding of what costs of high team cohesion are significant, when these costs can occur and their possible influence and impact on performance.

This study, similarly to Study 2 and Study 3, found that compromised wellbeing was not a significant cost. The significant costs experienced were pressure to conform and perform, rigid demands and methods and communication issues. This supports and builds on the evidence of this thesis that these are the most significant potential costs of high team cohesion.

This study found that cohesion and performance were not reciprocated. There were four clear dips in performance across the season when cohesion, and particularly social cohesion, was high. High cohesion produced costs of conformity and normative influence, rigid demands and methods with narrow goal focus, communication issues and pressure to perform. These costs all inter-relate and interacted to have a negative impact on performance. Pressure to conform was a category of personal cost in Study 1 but this study clearly demonstrates that pressure to conform has direct repercussions at the group level. This directly corresponds to rigid demands and methods with a narrow goal focus which was a group level category in Study 1. This study demonstrated that conformity and rigidity lead to negative group processes such as normative influence and conflict avoidance which have long term negative impacts on team performance.

Communication issues is also a further consequence and a stand-alone cost of high social cohesion. This is a personal and group level cost. Pressure to perform is further increased in a highly cohesive team and in this study Michael was not always able to manage the pressure and it did have some negative consequences for him and the team. Wider research has shown that pressure to perform can have some positive consequences and if managed can improve performance. This thesis had demonstrated in detail the potential negative personal outcomes for a performance story and this study evidenced that performance pressure can hamper group performance and group success.

# **Chapter Six**

## **General Discussion**

## **Introduction**

Overall, this thesis sought to develop more understanding of the potential costs of high team cohesion in sport teams. From this, a key aim was to offer strategies to minimise the significant potential costs in order to improve both individual welfare and team performance and success. Firstly it reviewed the current cohesion literature. Secondly, it assessed the extent and nature of the potential costs of high team cohesion. Thirdly it explored the potential costs to develop understanding of which costs were most significant, how significant they were, and how they were- or were not- experienced by two specific athletes in two different high performing teams: assessing influencing factors and buffers. Fourthly, it built up evidence of which costs were most significant; then by examining when these costs occurred across an entire competitive season with an elite team analysed how these potential costs impacted upon performance.

Cohesion is necessary for team harmony and team performance. However, some athletes experience costs to high team cohesion some of the time and these costs may operate to hamper competition results and success. In Study 1 athlete generated responses showed that athletes had experienced a variety and multitude of specific costs. However, these costs may also have been influenced by a variety of other factors. The most commonly cited cost of pressure to perform, which was also shown to be a significant cost in both Study 2 and Study 4, is also clearly a part of elite sport as has been extensively discussed in this thesis. There are significant costs to being part of a highly cohesive team but these costs are also contributed to by other personal and situational factors. The evidence in this thesis is that the most significant potential costs of high team cohesion experienced by elite team athletes were pressure to perform and pressure to conform to team demands and expectations; these costs were exacerbated by the cost of rigid demands and methods with a narrow goal focus further increasing the cost of communication problems: this interaction and accumulation of potential costs did negatively impact upon performance.

The evidence in the research literature presents the potential advantages of high team cohesion. As this thesis has discussed, these advantages are clearly vital to a team but there is limited examination within the literature of the potential disadvantages and how



these fit into the picture of cohesion in teams. Study 1 and 3 supported that these potential disadvantages or costs are not experienced by all athletes or teams all of the time (Hardy et al., 2005). However Studies 1, 2 and 4 evidenced that a high number of athletes and teams do experience costs some of the time and that these costs do have impact at the individual and group levels.

An early proposal by Buys (1978) that increased group cohesion led to harmful group processes such as deindividuation and group think was reasserted in 2001 (Paskevich et al., 2001). There has been a limited number of research papers that have considered the potential disadvantages or costs to high team cohesion; these have evidenced that high cohesion isn't always -as it is usually always accepted- "a good thing" (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Carron et al., 1994; Hardy et al., 2005; Hoigaard et al., 2006b; Prapavessis & Carron, 1996; Rovio et al., 2009). This thesis addressed this existing gap of knowledge in the literature.

Study 1 examined the extent and nature of the potential costs of high team cohesion. 14 categories of costs were identified. There were costs at both the personal and group levels. Perceived personal level costs were greater for high task cohesion and perceived group costs were greater for high social cohesion. In the context of recent research literature the personal level categories of perceived pressures, to perform and to conform, compromised wellbeing and communication were considered the most significant.

Study 2 was framed in narrative theory to particularly explore the personal costs experienced over the life-span career of a retired professional motor sport driver. This was a story of loss and gains where ultimately the gains out-weighed the costs. This study identified a new narrative type in sport: a team performance narrative. The most significant costs identified were pressure to perform and pressure to conform and the psychological demands that go along with these.

Study 3 was somewhat different. This study utilized the lens of narrative theory to explore the experiences of a high performance motor sport driver who did not perceive himself as experiencing the costs of high team cohesion. The opportunity was seized to consider this alternate perspective and consider when and where the costs were not experienced by him and his team. Buffers against the potential costs were indicated.

Importantly, this study demonstrated how a multidimensional narrative offered some protection against the potential costs. This further supports the fourth strategy described in the following Cohesion Cost Reduction model in this chapter. Similarly in Study 1, the participants who had not perceived the costs were more likely to be from a non-elite level of sport and therefore have more access to and pursuit of multidimensional narratives for their motivation and participation in teams.

Further to this success was a huge buffer for Thomas in Study 3 and in Study 2 success also offered some protection against the potential costs. As discussed in depth in Chapter 4 of this thesis, those athletes who follow a multidimensional narrative and have success throughout their career are in the minority (Carless & Douglas, 2013).

Study 4 was a case study over an entire season examining where the potential costs impacted on performance. High team cohesion increased pressure to conform, particularly normative influence, and reinforced a narrowed goal focus through rigid demands and methods. This resulted in further communication issues. This was exacerbated by performance pressure. These costs of high team cohesion, particularly social cohesion, negatively impacted on performance.

The evidence demonstrated in this thesis is that athletes themselves perceive and experience, as well as the more obvious and well cited benefits, multiple various costs to being part of a highly cohesive team. These costs occur at both the personal-individual's perception of their own attraction to and involvement in the team- and the group level- perceptions of the team as a unit. There are a variety of costs for both high

task cohesion and high social cohesion. Athletes perceive similar costs. Many of the costs are inter-related. The number and variety of costs reported from Study 1 and previous research is high. The accumulative evidence from Study 1, Study 3 and Study 4 is that the most significant costs of high team cohesion are pressure to perform, pressure to conform and communication issues.

However, these costs themselves are complex processes that are influenced by a variety of multiple other factors. Pressure to perform was the most frequently cited disadvantage of high cohesion by athletes in Study 1 and in the study of interactive sports even though the participants in that study were less competitive level athletes (Hardy et al., 2005). Pressure to perform would most likely increase at higher competitive levels but would depend on a multitude of internal and external factors and is evident across all levels and across all sporting disciplines. Perceived pressure incorporates an array of general pressures felt personally from being part of a highly cohesive team including the pressure not to let valued team mates down. The closer the friendship ties are, the increased burden of pressure not to disappoint team mates. The demand of high performance sport and the pressure of the overriding monological performance narrative have been discussed extensively in this thesis. It is clear that although this is a significant athlete generated cost or disadvantage of a highly cohesive team, and evidenced as experienced by the athlete in Study 2 and the athlete in Study 4 of this thesis, that pressure to perform is also an integral and inevitable part of competitive sport. Therefore, the extent of causality cannot be established.

Overall, this thesis has evidenced that there are significant potential costs of high cohesion in sport teams. These potential costs are experienced by a high number of team members personally and these potential costs impact the team itself and team performance. Over half of the athletes in Study 1 experienced the costs. Study 2 demonstrated the impact of these costs at the personal level. Study 4 demonstrated the impact of these at the group level.

There are costs to high task cohesion and costs to high team cohesion and these costs interact and accumulate to negatively impact upon performance outcomes. Pressure to perform and communication problems are costs of both high task cohesion and high social cohesion. Rigid demands and methods is a cost of high task cohesion and pressure to conform is a cost of high social cohesion. The most significant potential costs of high team cohesion experienced by elite team athletes were pressure to perform and pressure to conform to team demands and expectations; these costs were exacerbated by the cost of rigid demands and methods with a narrow goal focus further increasing the cost of communication problems: this interaction and build-up of potential costs negatively impacted upon performance.

The results and accumulative evidence described in this thesis have several theoretical implications which are now explained. Then the practical implications are presented as a model for coaches, team managers, sport psychologists and athletes themselves: The Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model. This is followed by a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the research and linked into a number of future research directions which will further develop understanding of the potential costs of high team cohesion and their impact upon performance.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This thesis focuses on elite sport and elite athletes and built on the sparse research, and the particularly limited number of studies examining high performing team dynamics, in the sport literature: it gave two in-depth life history accounts from individual athletes who were members of different high performing teams and a case study of a high performing team across an entire season; these gave insights into team dynamics and team processes, explained the potential costs of high team cohesion and the potential buffers against these costs, and developed knowledge about how cohesion impacts on performance (Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2012, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2006a, 2009; Heuze & Raimbault, 2006; Hodge et al., 2014; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002 ).

A recent cohesion study has called for more research into specific groups or teams taking into account cultural differences in order to develop a cross-domain, nomothetic view of team processes and team dynamics and this thesis presented study 2, study 3 and study 4 as research into 3 different specific and unique teams (Filho et al., 2015). This thesis added to the limited literature evidence base examining motorsports and elite motorsports (Edmonds et al., 2008; Filho et al., 20015; Fuller, 2005; Klarica, 2001; Mullen et al., 2012; Yamokoshi et al., 2010). The results from all of the four studies in this thesis although not generalizable can be considered applicable at different levels to motor sport teams, all team sports and particularly gave support for the few studies examining cohesion in co-acting sports (Cormier et al., 2015; Tsang, 2000; Williams & Widmeyer, 2001).

The results of this thesis built on the limited understanding of the identified costs of high team cohesion from previous studies (e.g Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Carron, Prapavessis, & Grove, 1994; Hoigaard et al., 2006a; Prapavessis & Carron, 1996). Study 1 supported Hardy et al.'s (2005) study by showing that athletes themselves perceived there to be disadvantages and costs to being part of a highly cohesive team and demonstrating that there are a variety of cost for both social and task cohesion. The 14 categories of costs identified in Study 1 demonstrated that athletes perceive similar costs, regardless of gender and competitive level.

However it may be that these categories are experienced to different levels of intensity and with different outcomes depending particularly on competitive level but also on gender. Hardy's study had a higher number of female participants (61%) compared to males and the majority of participants were at university or club level. Study 1 in this thesis had a significantly higher level of elite or top level participants and there were only 3 female respondents.

A revised list of costs taking into account all research up into this point would have categories which are separate but overlap and interact: rigid demands and methods(incorporating negative effect); too serious; goal problems; pressure to

conform; pressure to perform (incorporating self-handicapping behaviour); compromised wellbeing; communication issues (incorporating decreased criticism of social loafers); time wasting, decreased focus and reduced task commitment; reduced social relations; cliques, incompatible attitude and social isolation; social issues (attachment issues and outside-inside team relations); reduced member Contribution; Over-specialisation; Achieving Consensus; and Balance (Carron et al., 1994; Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Carron et al., 2005; Coudeville, Ginis, Famose, & Gernigon, 2008; Hardy et al., 2005; Hausenblas & Carron, 1996; Hoigard et al., 2006; Maddison & Prapavessis, 2007; Paskevich et al., 2001; Prapavessis & Carron, 1996). This has expanded the original list from 13 to 15 categories. This thesis supported the previous research; it develops and details the categories to create much fuller and deeper understanding of the extent, nature and significance of the potential costs of high cohesion in sport teams.

The accumulative evidence from Studies 1, 2, 3 and 4 demonstrated that the most significant costs of high team cohesion were pressure to perform, pressure to conform, rigid demands and methods and communication issues. Hardy reported communication problems as a category of cost for both task and social cohesion (both at group level), Study 1 found communication issues to be a category of cost for social cohesion (at the group level). This was supported by Study 4 where pressure to conform and particularly normative influence were increased due to high team, particularly social, cohesion: communication became not only ineffective but detrimental to performance. Study 1 found pressures to be a cost of both social and task cohesion at the personal level and Hardy et al.'s (2005) reported it as a cost for high task cohesion at the personal level.

The other category for Hardy et al.'s (2005) study as a cost of high task cohesion at the personal level was negative effect which has similarities to Study 1's rigid demands and methods category which was a group level category. In both these categories high cohesion causes goal focus to become too narrow and this effects personal satisfaction in the team. The results suggested that, although these costs are identified separately as personal and group level costs by athletes themselves, these costs are related and that they negatively impact at both personal and group levels. It would be most useful now

to consider the costs as simply either costs of high task cohesion and/or high social cohesion. Pressure to perform should be considered as a separate significant but related category to pressure to conform. Rigid demands and methods should be considered a separate significant but strongly related category to pressure to conform.

Study 1 indicated that compromised wellbeing was a significant category of cost. However Studies 2, 3 and 4 have suggested that compromised wellbeing was not as significant as it first appeared. Study 1 showed that the all consumingness of a highly cohesive team was perceived as a potential cost by athletes and related to, and as a result of pressures, mental and physical health could be put at risk. This built on research that indicated elite athletes are willing to jeopardise their long term health for short term sporting performance (Therberge, 2008).

Burnout is a real potential consequence of elite performance and it is estimated that 1-9% of competitive athletes are subject to burnout: bringing immense personal suffering (Gustafsson et al., 2015). “A top athlete’s life is demanding. Besides training and competitions they may have sponsor activities, media interviews and pressure from coaches and teammates, in addition to maintaining a blog and sometimes worrying about their life after their sporting career. It is easy to get lost, to become part of a “spinning wheel”, and life becomes mindless, draining one’s energy, causing exhaustion and burnout (Jouper & Gustafsson, 2013, p.92). This links in with previous research that showed elite athletes and team athletes with a strong athletic identity and team performance narrative risk identity crisis during career transitions (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2013; Douglas and Carless, 2009). Pressure to perform and other pressure described in detail by the participants in Studies 1, 2 and 4 are as vital to manage as training load in preventing burnout (Gustafsson, Davis, Skoog, Kenttä, & Haberl, 2015).

Studies 2, 3 and 4 are based on the experiences of three individual athletes who experienced high cohesion and the immense pressures of a top athlete’s life but who did not experience compromised wellbeing- or perception of compromised wellbeing- as a

result of high team cohesion. The participant in Study 2 was protected by a “fortunate” successful career from start to finish and excellent in-group and out-group social support. He suffered serious injury during his retirement competition event and had this happened earlier in his career things might have been very different, and he admits he was one of the lucky ones. The participant from Study 4 was very young and only in his first season in elite sporting competition and did not have the benefit of hindsight. The participant from Study 3 was strongly buffered by a multidimensional sporting narrative and what he perceived as a sharing of pressure between him and his team; he importantly he also maintained flexibility and creative control within his team.

These findings would fit in with the work on self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2002). A highly cohesive team would fulfil the basic psychological need of connectedness to such an extent that along with the fulfilment of competence in a high performing team there could be some counter-action against the negative consequences of reduction in autonomy that might occur due to increased pressure to conform. This would be further counter-acted by buffers such as success and a multidimensional sporting narrative. The buffers might work more or less depending on specific team circumstances and individual team member’s personal life and experiences.

Study 2 offers an in-depth account of one elite athlete’s experience of the costs of high team cohesion across his career, including transitions to different teams and out of the sport to retirement, but this cannot be generalised to other athletes and teams.

There is limited research into a flow narrative in sport (Sparkes & Partington, 2003) but this thesis and particularly Study 3 supports the previous studies that have demonstrated the positive benefits of multiple narratives in sport (e.g Carless & Douglas, 2013). Chronic stress and pressures can lead to burnout and one study has shown that mindfulness not only enhances performance but is significantly negatively related to burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2015). Mindfulness has similarities to flow in its complete immersion in the present moment. It might be that future research will show that the category of compromised wellbeing rather than being less significant becomes



subsumed within either or both of the categories of pressure to perform and pressure to conform as an important element.

Study 2, 3 and 4 support the recent upturn in the use of narrative inquiry in sport research to explore and examine a variety of athlete sporting lives within their cultural and psycho-social context (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2013; Erickson, Backhouse & Carless, 2016; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). The in-depth accounts in Study 2 and Study 3 offer rich data which increase our understanding of the costs of high team cohesion. Study 2 identified and described a new narrative in sport, team performance narrative. This team performance narrative has three clear tenets: 1. Team performance is the only criteria for success 2. Personal goals are subordinated for team goals 3. Outside Relationships are sacrificed for team demands, team identity prioritised over personal identity. This team performance narrative encourages high social cohesion in the team; this, as has been discussed in chapter 4, has both negative and positive consequences. Pressure to perform and pressure to conform to team goals and demands encouraged sacrifice behaviour.

The research literature on the performance narrative, the dominant and entrenched narrative in the elite sporting world, suggests that the long term adherence to a performance script is most likely damaging to the athlete concerned (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006). Similarly the performance narrative is produced and reproduced in an educational environment resulting in similar potential for narrative wreckage of stories and lives (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). Of significance in Study 2 is that Stephen relegates relationships and subordinates personal goals but still does manage to negotiate a performance narrative and this team performance narrative without any serious lifelong long damage to his personal wellbeing or life. Success is the ultimate buffer for him and is what enables him to do this.

Study 3 built on the research evidence that performance narration is problematic by demonstrating how resistance to this narrative, although difficult and challenging, does

bring long-term benefits. Resistance in the form of a multidimensional narrative protected against some of the most significant costs of high team cohesion which were demonstrated to be exacerbated by a performance narrative in Study 2 (Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2012a, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2006a, 2009a). This thesis has offered important findings on compromised wellbeing and this is an important area for future research to consider in this context.

Study 3 demonstrated that in a small highly cohesive team, members were more likely to have similar goals and manage goal setting with individual input so that everyone feels they have goal control and autonomy. Study 2 and Study 4 demonstrated how in bigger cohesive teams there is more likely to be compromise or sacrifice of personal goals. Both rigid demands and methods and pressure to conform increased a narrow goal focus and decreased personal satisfaction. Study 2 illustrated how narrow goal focus on performance outcomes denied personal improvement and development goals and reduced autonomy. In a cohesive team there is no doubt that team goals have to be given priority (Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997).

However high team cohesion increases rigid demands and methods and pressure to conform to team goals which creates the danger of sacrifice of personal goals and reduces flexibility and creative input. The system takes priority and the process becomes rigid so that personal input and personal satisfaction become diminished. A recent team-building intervention study with a Finish ice-hockey team found that a focus on individual goals within the context of role defining and team goals could improve performance and result in increased motivation (Rovio et al., 2012).

There is very little research that examines individual and team goals in sport but this thesis supports that individual goals should not only be about team performance and team success but should also progress the player in his/her own career. Ultimately this requires that team tactics should aim to take into account team member's individual goals so that their personal development is a core of team progress and performance (Rovio et al., 2012).

The most recent research on goal motivation theory is based in SDT and has shown that autonomy supportive goals, through supporting psychological need satisfaction, increase goal striving and intrinsic motivation (Healy, Ntoumanis, van Zanten, & Paine, 2014; Smith et al., 2007, 2010). This thesis supports the research on goal motivation theory that autonomous goals are related to wellbeing whereas controlling goals may have significant negative consequences with higher levels of ill-being (Healy et al., 2014; Miquelon & Vallerand, 2006; Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2010).

Study 1 showed that the potential cost of high team cohesion, Rigid demands and methods at the group level, similarly produced a stifling of individual control, input and creativity. Pressure to conform can be explained as being the implicit and explicit pressures placed on team members, these are processes at the personal level. Rigid demands and methods is the category of cost reflecting the rigid systems in operation at the group level in teams. Both contribute to the narrow goal focus most commonly evident in high performance teams and this thesis explains how high team cohesion and contributes to increased pressure to conform and increased rigid demands and methods.

This thesis has extended knowledge on the limited research into cohesion and communication (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004; Filho et al., 2015; Lecouter & Feo, 2011; Rovio et al., 2009; Yukelson, 1997). Study 1 reported that a cost of high social cohesion was to decrease effective communication, avoiding conflict by failure to criticize social loafers, and supports the idea that conflict avoidance is not always a good thing. Similarly Study 4 showed that normative influence was a cost of high social cohesion and supported the research evidence that high social cohesion can have a detrimental impact on performance by increasing normative influence which negatively impacts on performance (Apitzsch, 2009; Rovio et al., 2009).

Studies 1 and 4, consistent with the current research, demonstrated how conflict is viewed by athletes as a bad thing. Studies 1, 2 and 4 support the recent conflict research by demonstrating the inevitability of conflict in sport teams and these studies gave

examples of how athletes would seek to avoid conflict due to the perception of it as something purely negative that would hamper team relationships and objectives (Paradis et al., 2014a; Mellalieu et al., 2013).

Studies 1, 2 and 4 demonstrated how high team cohesion increased conflict avoidance and so decreased opportunity for creative problem solving and did not always produce the most satisfying or best solutions to problems (Holt et al., 2012; Paradis et al., 2014a). Furthermore Studies 1 and 4 demonstrated the development of negative group processes such as normative influence due to athletes desire to avoid conflict. This thesis builds on the recent focus on conflict in the sport research literature and supported the finding from one recent study that conflict can reduce collective efficacy (Leo et al., 2015).

In direct relation to this Study 4 demonstrated how high social cohesion can lead to an over-confidence where by the perceived seamless unity is a buffer against perceived performance challenges and obstacles which supports the findings from Rovio et al.'s (2009) study where high social cohesion resulted in an over estimation of the team's ability and actual performance. Cohesion seeks unity which is antithesis to conflict; conflict creates opposition. This thesis has clearly shown that unity when it becomes uniformity and conformity has negative outcomes- high team cohesion has potential costs. Similarly, conflict does have negative outcomes, especially if it goes unresolved for a long time, but importantly conflict can also be beneficial to a team and push boundaries for new and better solutions allowing the team to build problem solving skills and grow together through challenges.

### **Practical Implications**

One of the key aims of this thesis was to develop a new model of strategies to minimise the potential costs of high cohesion in a team and so help create the best environment for individual wellbeing and team success. These can be used as strategies to minimise the costs. Not every strategy will be applicable to every athlete and every team, teams will be compromised by time restraints, but it can be considered a guide of good

practise. This is the Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model. The Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model is for the team and wider practitioners with responsibility for team members. It has four key strands of practical applications to minimise the potential costs and so improve team members' individual experiences and improve performance as illustrated below.

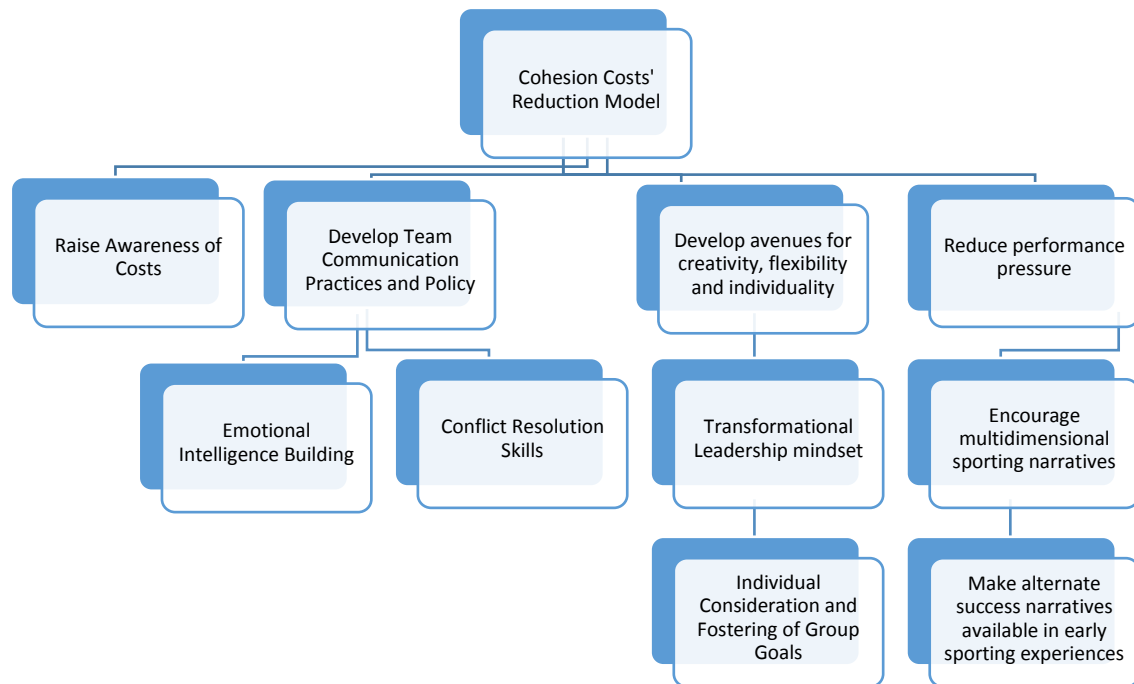


Figure 7

The first practical application is to raise awareness and counter the popularly held belief that cohesion is intrinsically and naturally only a positive phenomenon. This thesis has begun this process by building on the evidence that athletes themselves do perceive there to be costs of high team cohesion demonstrated in the results of Studies 1 and 2 and by clarifying the significant potential negative aspects, costs of high team cohesion through studies 1, 2 and 4: pressure to perform, pressure to conform, rigid demands and methods and communication problems. It is an intuitive response to consider that cohesion is *only* a positive thing and should be encouraged indiscriminately. Of course

cohesion is a positive and a necessary team requirement but this thesis has built up the evidence that it can produce significant costs for some athletes some of the time.

Study 1 supported previous research (Hardy et al., 2005) that a high percentage of athletes perceive that cohesion also has negative aspects. Approximately 63% of co-acting motor sport athletes considered there to be disadvantages to high social cohesion. 59% considered there to be disadvantages to high task cohesion. 29% considered there to be disadvantages to a team that was highly task and socially cohesive. While some participants in the study did not perceive there to be disadvantages or costs, that is not to say that they hadn't experienced the costs, or could experience costs in the future, and particularly some of the complex negative group processes this thesis identified as costs such as pressure to conform, normative influences and subtle break-downs and compromises of communication processes.

The raised awareness of this among team members and team practitioners will allow them to be pro-active in prevention of the instigation and development of these processes. These processes are subtle and implicit on many occasions and so raised awareness may act to potentially counter-act the set off at a moment of decision making; or may allow a more open viewpoint that prevents the negative process being set into action. Cohesion undoubtedly has multiple positive outcomes.

Cohesion can also have negative outcomes. Studies 1, 2 and 4 have demonstrated that pressure to conform, pressure to perform and communication issues are negative outcomes of cohesion that can impact on performance. This thesis points to the importance of practitioners being aware of these costs and being responsible to disseminate the implications among team members. When coaches and team managers are aware of the potential negative consequences of a highly cohesive team, they can seek a team environment which cautions against team building attempts to indiscriminately increase cohesion. Ultimately the participants in Study 1 and in Hardy's (2005) study believed a balance of social and task cohesion was the best team

environment. This thesis supports that excess is not a good thing and that balance is the best aim for cohesion within a team.

Secondly, and building on this awareness, is for team practitioners to view cohesion as a starting point for team success. It is vital to continue to build both task and social cohesion but team practitioners should also focus on creating team expertise and team coordination through processes of establishing and sustaining effective communication (Filho et al., 2015). Studies 1, 2 and 4 evidenced strongly how high team cohesion compromised team communication and led to subtle negative group processes such as failure to criticize social loafers and informational and normative influence. This thesis has discussed the importance of communication as pre-requisite of cohesion; if the cost of high cohesion is then subtle disruption in effective communication through implicit processes it will also then disrupt ongoing cohesion levels within the team.

As this thesis has discussed in detail, these negative subtle group processes are often unintentional. Therefore, emotional intelligence qualities of communication have emerged as potential strategies that individual team members can develop and adapt as a practical solution. This requires a conscious awareness of the processes within a team that actively seek to indiscriminately build cohesion and simultaneously complementing them with new practises that focus on enhancing communication, such as emotional intelligence building. Early research suggested that cohesion might impact on performance through its effect on communication (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). There has been little development in this area but this thesis supports the research evidence that high task cohesion would increase performance outcomes but that high social cohesion would impact on communication processes and increase negative processes that could negatively impact on performance (Apitzsch, 2009; Prapevessis & Carron, 1997; Rovio et al., 2009).

Emotional intelligence (E.I.) is defined “as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.” (Salovey

& Mayer, 1990, p.189). Goleman (1998) clustered the multidimensional construct of E.I. into the 5 desired behavioural groupings of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Self-awareness and self-regulation are the core of this: through development of these skills there can be a following of social awareness and relationship management. As discussed in depth in this thesis communication, operating through these key components, is a complex process: together these operate to establish and sustain effective team communication and work to prevent, or at least minimise, the emergence of the negative group processes that will compromise effective communication.

Self-awareness is a key characteristic of both an effective coach/manager and an effective athlete team member (Chan and Mallett, 2011; Goleman, 2003). Self-awareness allows for a conscious decision at a point where high cohesion is subtly influencing group dynamics and group processes. Thus self-awareness and self-regulation are the core of a communication strategy within a cohesive team. Through development and sustaining of these skills there can be a following of social awareness and relationship management which are fundamentally the key components of stable effective team communication.

Development of emotional intelligence in athletes and coaches and wider team practitioners are key strategies to improve communication and conflict resolution, and so minimise the potential costs of high team cohesion. This thesis has evidenced how conflict avoidance, which cohesion works to produce is not always a good thing. An important part of this practical strategy to prevent the break-down in effective communication which is a cost of high cohesion is an acceptance of conflict as healthy in a team environment. Effective strategies and procedures for conflict resolution should replace conflict avoidance. This should be developed into team communication policy.

Thirdly, and closely relating to effective communication is to counter conformity and rigid demands and methods, and subsequent detrimental sacrifice behaviour, with



creativity and flexibility in decision making and goal procedures. Rigid demands and methods is a potential cost of a highly task cohesion that encompasses the tight structure and demands within a highly cohesive team that reflect and increase a narrow goal focus: this means that team members are made to feel that they do not matter as individuals and become cogs in a spinning wheel. In Chapter 3 of this thesis the discussion of how transformational leadership can embrace conflict and encourage individuality and diversity of thinking leads to the practical solution to develop a transformational leadership mind-set within a team particularly focusing on the two aspects of individual consideration and fostering acceptance of group goals simultaneously (Hardy et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2013).

This is further supported by Chapter 4 and Study 3 where flexibility and creative control were vital in buffering against the potential costs of high team cohesion, particularly conformity and rigid demands and methods. This means an encouraging of diversity and individuality within a team, a true valuing of the individual and their input to the team, and most importantly allowing personal goals to be part of the wider team goal setting process. This means that practically part of fostering of group goals must also focus more on individual goals and personal development goals and a recent team-building intervention study could be used as an example of good practice (Rovio et al., 2012).

Fourthly, and finally, in order to minimise the potential costs of team cohesion within a team there must be a reduction in performance pressure. Of course, in elite sport everything depends on performance but this thesis has discussed in great detail the pressures faced by high performing team members and evidenced how the expectation for them to be super-human is at times impossible as well as a damaging expectation in terms of real life wreckage. The core of the strategy to reduce the potential cost of increased pressure to perform should be a celebration and encouragement of multidimensional narratives in sporting lives: all of performance, relational, discovery, embodiment and hard work narratives should be celebrated and encouraged.

Recent research emphasizes how athletic identity develops from first sport experiences and is dependent on socio-cultural factors (Carless & Douglas, 2013). This means that early sport experiences are vital in exposing young people to the acceptance and value of a variety of sporting motivations and alternate scripts to that of the performance. This is particularly challenging due to the entrenchment of the performance narrative in sporting culture but this ties in with The Government's new focus on the variety of outcomes that sport brings other than elite performance detailed in "Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation" which calls for sport to be at "the forefront of actively embracing diversity." (The Government, 2015). This is the responsibility of every practitioner who works with a young person or an athlete of any age. In school, college and university, in sporting, in community and in consultation settings it is every single person's responsibility to present and make accessible stories of success that go beyond performance and result outcomes (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009).

Douglas's (2012) study can be used as a further framework for sport psychologists working with athletes to encourage and make available and possible the adoption of wider multi-dimensional narratives and wider healthier conceptions of success in sport. A highly cohesive team may increase pressure to perform but team members can also simultaneously support each other in their wider sporting values and motivations and so make this pressure less of a burden.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The first great strength of this research, which is two-fold, is that it has identified the most significant potential costs of high team cohesion *and* developed a beginning of understanding of how these potential costs can impact on performance. The accumulative evidence from studies 1, 2, 3 and 4 supported the previous literature that identified significant costs and clarified the most important costs to be pressure to conform, rigid demands and methods, communication issues and pressure to perform. A number of important research directions have emerged from these findings.

The second great strength is that it has developed The Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model of practical strategies that can be implemented immediately by coaches and all team practitioners and members to minimise these potential costs and so lessen the potential of the costs to negatively impact on performance.

The third great strength of this research is its innovative and creative use of narrative inquiry to build on the wide significant work now being conducted in this area in sport research and in this that it has identified and describes a new narrative that of the team performance narrative. It has linked individual psychological level with historical and socio-cultural worlds to demonstrate the complexities of experience of cohesion and the costs of cohesion in a high performing team (Crossley, 2000).

The fourth and final great strength of this research was its focus on elite athletes and teams, further noteworthy in adding to the literature in motorsports, and in particular its methodology of a longitudinal real-life study across an entire season for Study 4.

With regard to limitations, all four studies recruited participants from co-acting motor sports and the sample was mainly male of high competitive level. Results are therefore not generalizable but the thesis gives in-depth examination of these participants' perceptions to significantly develop understanding about the potential costs of high cohesion (Patton, 2002). Studies 2, 3 and 4 deployed purposeful sampling in the recruitment process and in all three studies participants were male high performing motor sport athletes so results are not representative and cannot be generalized to other male competitive athletes in different sports or female team athletes or team athletes in different levels of sport. Furthermore, while motorsport was chosen partly for its strong co-acting component there will be differences in other co-acting sports such as cross-country running, golf or gymnastics due to the domain-specific requirements of each sport.

Study 2 and Study 3 utilized a narrative analysis of structure and form but a limitation is that this cannot fully represent how narrative structures are intricately fluid and perpetually moving and are created and situated between teller and listener (Carless & Douglas, 2009; 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2005b). The analysed stories fix the interpretation at that given point and time but the story itself is never final.

In Study 4 interviews focused only on the athlete's perceptions of cohesion and the potential costs. Interviewing the co-driver and team manager or gathering observational data would have create an even fuller and deeper understanding. All of the studies in this thesis supported and developed the conceptual model of cohesion as multidimensional and dynamic (Carron et al., 1985). Due to the constraints of working with an elite athlete over the course of the season a self-report measure of cohesion was adopted. This self-report measure included the participant's perception of both social and task cohesion. This measure is limited as is all self-report data by social desirability response. This was to some extent counter-acted by the study design and procedure and use of a narrative framework which aimed to develop trust and honest communication. Study 4, if time and access had allowed, would have been improved further by utilising the GEQ to include measuring the cohesion dimensions of attraction to the group and group integration at both task and social levels. The use of qualitative and quantitative measures would have been able to take more account of the complexities of the changing cohesion dimensions and captured subtle differences in more detail. Furthermore, as cohesion is dynamic and interactive any one specific measurement prior to or in retrospective of a competition performance cannot capture the full picture of the cohesion, performance, and costs relationship.

Study 1 utilised an open questionnaire to produce athlete generated costs of high team cohesion. Study 2 and 3 utilised narrative theory to interpret individual experiences of the costs of high team cohesion from two participants. Study 4 utilised a mixed method approach to analyse the relationships between cohesion, the costs, and performance. Overall this thesis relied primarily on qualitative data. Use of quantitative data in Study 4 was limited due to the nature and restraints of a longitudinal life study in the elite field. Additional quantitative data would have enhanced the findings. This research has

clearly demonstrated that athletes perceive and experience costs of high team cohesion but because this production is part of a complex process influenced by the interaction of various other factors, cohesion's impact alone is not clear.

### **Future Research**

The results and evidence presented in this thesis, along with the limitations discussed above, point to a number of key research areas to further develop knowledge and understanding of the potential costs of high team cohesion and their impact upon performance. Firstly, because the participants across this thesis were mainly a homogeneous sample of high performance male athletes in co-acting motorsport, a key area would be to consider moderators on the development of the potential costs of high team cohesion such as gender, skill level, sport type and leadership style.

Secondly the category of cost identified in Study 1 wellbeing was found to not stand alone as a single category cost for the three participants in Studies 2, 3 and 4: it was however strongly related to and part of the costs of pressure to perform and pressure to conform. Therefore, wellbeing as part of each or both of these categories is important for future research into the costs of high team cohesion to consider and clarify.

This thesis has supported previous research and developed evidence on which are the most important costs of high team cohesion, and demonstrated that they impact at the personal and group levels simultaneously: rigid demands and methods, pressure to conform, pressure to perform and communication issues. This thesis has discussed how these costs are also interactive processes which are influenced by a multitude of other factors. Therefore, future studies should analyse the importance of these specific costs by examining each of them individually in relation to cohesion and to performance.

This thesis identified and explained some of the perceived disadvantages of the costs of high team cohesion and developed a beginnings of understanding of how some of these

costs might impact upon performance; this has implications for the study of the group dynamics in sport teams in general. Study 4 found that cohesion and performance were not reciprocated. Study 4 supported another case study which evidenced that cohesion did not improve performance and in fact high social cohesion produced costs which hampered performance (Rovio et al., 2009). There were four clear dips in performance across the season when cohesion, and particularly social cohesion, was high. High cohesion produced costs of conformity and normative influence, rigid demands and methods with narrow goal focus, communication issues and pressure to perform. These costs interacted to have a negative impact on performance. This study demonstrated that conformity and rigidity lead to negative group processes such as normative influence and conflict avoidance which have long term negative impacts on team performance. The examination of the cohesion levels and experience of costs of successful and less successful teams over the course of the season would be valuable.

Communication issues is also a further consequence and a stand-alone cost of high social cohesion and this thesis supported tentative research proposing that cohesion effects performance through its impact on communication (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). Studies 1, 2, 3 and 4 evidenced that pressure to perform is further increased in a highly cohesive team and that it has negative consequences at both the personal and group levels. Wider research has shown that pressure to perform can have some positive consequences and if managed can improve performance and therefore an aim of future research would be to develop and apply team-building intervention studies aimed to manage the negative outcomes of performance pressure and enhance the positive outcomes. A further valuable and interesting future study would be one that develops a team building intervention that enhances cohesion while simultaneously implementing the Cohesion Costs' Reduction Model to reduce the potential costs of high team cohesion.

Finally building on the work of Carless and colleagues into narrative types in elite sport and their influence on wellbeing, future research should consider the influence of the team performance narrative. Further studies in this area should seek to propose other narrative types that exist or seek to exist beside the performance, discover/flow and

relational narratives. The research into the narrative ‘types’ experienced and lived in the sporting world is in its early stages. Developing greater understanding of how these three narrative types operate is clearly important as is identifying possible additional and alternative types.

## **Conclusion**

This PhD thesis has contributed to the sport cohesion literature and wider sporting literature in five significant ways. Firstly it has demonstrated that athletes do perceive a high variety of costs to high team cohesion. Secondly, it has shown that not all these costs are significant but the most significant costs experienced by athletes themselves are pressure to perform and conform and the psychological pressures of team demands and expectations that go along with this. Thirdly it has shown that there are buffers against the costs (e.g. a multidimensional narrative and creative control and valuing of personal goals). Fourthly it has demonstrated that the costs of pressure to conform and rigid demands and methods with a narrow goal focus create and exacerbate communication problems which negatively impact on performance; pressure to perform also negatively impacts upon performance. Fifthly it has identified and described a new narrative in elite sport, the team performance narrative. The Cohesion Costs’ Reduction Model enables teams and organizations to proactively seek and create the best environment for their team members and team performance. The findings contained in this PhD support the case for a cautionary against the push for unlimited cohesion in sports teams in order to protect individual wellbeing and improve team success.

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## Appendix A: Study 1 Questionnaire

### CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH TEAM COHESION

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- Please quickly and accurately complete section 1.
- Then read section 2.
- Finally answer the six questions in section 3.

**Please give as much information and as many examples as you can.**

The questions are open because we want you to express as much as possible from your own personal knowledge, understanding and experiences within your sport and team.

All the answers are treated with complete confidentiality and anonymity (unless you the respondent wants to provide further information for the follow up study).

Please return the questionnaire to [jennifer.milne@stir.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.milne@stir.ac.uk) within the next week.

Thank you for your valuable contributions.

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**SECTION 1**

SEX: MALE/FEMALE

AGE:

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YEARS

SPORT:

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SERIES/CATEGORY/COMPETITIVE LEVEL OF TEAM: \_

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CURRENTLY A TEAM MEMBER: YES/NO

LENGTH OF TIME AS A TEAM

MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL/CONTACT DETAILS IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE  
FURTHER VALUABLE DATA BY PARTICIPATING IN THE FOLLOW UP  
STUDY:

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## **SECTION 2**

Cohesion means to stay together, to be united, to be unified. It represents the strength of the bond among team members.

Scientists usually draw a distinction between social cohesion and task cohesion.

Social cohesion is thought to exist when team members get along personally, like each other, and consider one another to be friends.

Task cohesion is thought to exist when team members work well together, and are in agreement on what and how to achieve team success.

## **SECTION 3**

1) Do you see any disadvantages to you personally in being a member of a highly task cohesive team? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.

2) Do you see any disadvantages to the team itself in being highly task cohesive? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.

3) Do you see any disadvantages to you personally in being a member of a highly socially cohesive team? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.

4) Do you see any disadvantages to the team itself in being highly socially cohesive? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.

5) Do you see any disadvantages to you personally in being a member of a team that is both highly socially cohesive and highly task cohesive? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.

6) Do you see any disadvantages to the team itself in being a team that is both highly socially cohesive and highly task? If so, please explain in detail below with as many examples as possible.

## **Appendix B: Study 2 and 3 pre-interview guide**



Prior to being interviewed, please think about the time when you first became involved in motor sport and all the teams you have been involved in from your earliest memories until now. Particularly think about the any costs that have resulted from you being part of a highly cohesive team.

Please reflect upon some of the areas we may discuss below:

- Your motivations for being involved with motor sport and motor sport teams at the out start and over the years
- Your transitions from one team to another
- Your family life and influences
- Your relationships within and out with motor sport teams
- Your enjoyment of the sport
- Your competitive level
- Your achievements
- Your work-life balance
- Realisation of your personal goals
- Your physical and psychological wellbeing across your career so far
- Pressures within your sport teams
- Demands of your sport and teams you have competed with
- Conforming to team expectations
- High Points of your sporting career so far
- Low Points of your sporting career so far
- Significant Moments in your sporting career
- Sacrifices you have made for sport and or a team or team member: positive and negative
- Bad decisions
- Good decisions
- Group disagreements
- Communication processes within the team
- Individualism/Creativity within the team
- What you bring to a team

- What the team does for you
- Balance
- Anything you would change or do differently from your experiences
- Your future in motor sport

**COHESION**

Describe the task cohesion and social cohesion within the team prior to this competition?

Describe the task cohesion and social cohesion during the event and after?

**TEAM DYNAMICS**

Describe the atmosphere and relationships across the team prior to the event, during and now after?

What were your personal goals for the rally?

What were the team goals?

How do you feel about your performance?

How does the team feel about the performance?

**COMMUNICATION**

How well did communication processes operate prior, during and after?

What were the biggest challenges?

**PRESSURES**

What were the biggest pressures in preparation for this competition?

What were the greatest pressures at the event?and after?

How did you deal with those pressures?

**WELLBEING**

How were you feeling psychologically and physically prior?

How were you feeling psychologically and physically throughout the event?

How are you feeling psychologically and physically now?