University of Alberta

Recruiting and Retaining Canadian Minor Hockey Players by Local Youth Club Hockey Organizations, Canada's Governing Hockey Organizations, Major Junior, and Intercollegiate Hockey Organizations: Exploring Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System

by

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ABSTRACT

There are two pivotal transition points for Canadian elite level minor hockey players and parents; the first transitional point is when a Canadian player and parent is transitioning from the Peewee (11-12 years old) level to the Bantam (13-14 years old) level, and must decide whether to try out for club level hockey or continue to play at a house league level. The second transitional point is between the ages 14 to 16 years old where a Canadian elite level player and parent has three pathways to choose from: the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), and/or National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I hockey.

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the strategies, processes, and support mechanism implemented by local youth hockey clubs, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior, and Intercollegiate hockey organizations (henceforth, Hockey Organizations) in Canada and United States with respect to the recruitment and retention of the most talented elite level hockey players in Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System (CELHDS). The methods of data collection used were interviews and secondary sources (e.g., documents). Interviews were conducted with representatives from local youth hockey clubs from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and the governing hockey bodies in Canada and Alberta; along with the experts who have a direct knowledge and experience with the CHL, CIS, and the NCAA.

A three study format was used for this dissertation; the first study explored the player retention strategies and regulations that can be influential in a player's

and parent's decision regarding trying out for club level hockey or continuing with community level hockey. The second study explored club hockey manager's recruiting, hiring, and retaining processes to have the most qualified coach to represent the club hockey organization. The final study examined the CHL, CIS, and NCAA support mechanisms provided to their member organizations for the recruitment of Canadian minor hockey players. Based on the findings from the three case studies, management of the Hockey Organizations take a professional approach to the recruitment and retention of the most talented Canadian elite level minor hockey players.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHDS	Alberta Hockey Development System
ADM	Alberta Development Model
AHL	American Hockey League
AUS	Atlantic University Sport
CAHA	Canadian Amateur Hockey Association
CELHDS	Canadian Elite Level Hockey Development System
CCHA	Central Collegiate Hockey Association
CHDS	Canada Hockey Development System
CHA	Collegiate Hockey America
CHL	Canadian Hockey League/Major Junior Hockey
CIS	Canadian Interuniversity Sport
CW	Canada West
ECAC	East Coast Athletic Conference
EMHA	Edmonton Minor Hockey Association
HA	Hockey Alberta
HC	Hockey Canada
KHL	Kontinential Hockey League
LTAD	Long Term Athlete Development Model
LTPD	Long Term Player Development Model
QMJHL	Quebec Major Junior Hockey League
OHL	Ontario Hockey League
OUA	Ontario University Athletics

MSO	Municipal Sport Organization
NSO	National Sport Organization
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NHL	National Hockey League
PSO	Provincial Sport Organization
WCHA	Western Collegiate Hockey Association
WHL	Western Hockey League

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The Canadian hockey industry is comprised of over 500,000 registered minor hockey players and over 100,000 active coaches (Hockey Canada [HC], 2011a). Canadian minor hockey players (also identified as players, or hockey players) have the option to play at the community level (also identified as house league) or if there is sufficient talent a player can compete at the club level (also identified as club hockey organizations, local club hockey organizations, or local youth club hockey organizations) hockey within Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System (CELHDS). Podilchak (1983) explained that "house league [or community level] emphasizes 'non-serious' enjoyment, whereas the selective leagues [club, or elite, level] emphasize skill display and athletic achievement" (p.15). The interval between the ages of 12 to 16 years represents a critical decision point for minor hockey players and their parents. They must decide on the level of involvement that they wish to have (house league versus elite level hockey) with the sport of hockey[1].

There are two pivotal transition points for minor hockey players and their parents when making a decision regarding whether to play elite level hockey. The term transition is used throughout this dissertation and refers to when "an athlete moves to a more advanced team, club, or squad…" (Green, 2005, p.247). The first transitional point is between the Peewee level (11to 12 years old) and the Bantam level (12 to 13 years old). Prior to Bantam, there are very few club level options

[1] Since this dissertation deals almost exclusively with Canadian hockey players, the study will identify the nationality of hockey players when the reader cannot assume them Canadian.

and most players compete at the community level. Parents and players have to decide when their son is 12 years old if they want to continue playing at the community level or try to earn a spot on a club level team. While a club level team might enhance their son's chances of playing at an even higher level, there is also a trade-off; playing a lot at the community level as opposed to playing little on a club team (if their son or daughter is not the best player on the team) as there is no requirement at the club level for coaches and management to provide equal amounts of ice time for players. Club hockey organizations that are involved hope to see the maximum number of players try out so that the organizations can identify talent for their teams.

The second pivotal transitional point is after the Bantam level (when the child is 14 or older). During this period, a minor hockey player who wishes to transition to higher competitive levels will have to decide on a specific pathway that will best meet their future goals in the sport of hockey (see Appendix A). The different pathways/leagues available for minor hockey are playing in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL; also referred to as Major Junior), or trying to earn a scholarship to play intercollegiate hockey in either Canada for Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS; also referred to as Intercollegiate), or in the U. S. for the National Collegiate Athletic Association[2] (NCAA; also referred to as Intercollegiate or Intercollegiate Division I hockey). By playing in one of these leagues, Canadian minor hockey players have an opportunity to advance and play

[2] These organizations (i.e., CHL, CIS, and NCAA) are also identified as institutions in Chapter 4, 5, and 6.

professional level hockey (e.g., National Hockey League [NHL]) and receive financial assistance for education while playing hockey.

The types of organizations involved at each of the two pivotal transition points are local club hockey organizations, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior, and Intercollegiate hockey in Canada and the United States (henceforth, Hockey Organizations). Management of these Hockey Organizations reveal different player retention strategies (henceforth, strategies), coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes (henceforth, processes), and player recruitment support mechanisms (henceforth, support mechanisms) that are influential in the decision making process for minor hockey players and parents. Strategies, in the context of this dissertation, are those actions that are developed and implemented by management of the local club hockey organizations used to achieve the player retention goals and objectives of the organizations. For example, some of different types of player retention strategies are player development, facility ownership by the local club hockey organizations, performance-driven outcomes, and information sharing with prospective minor hockey players and parents.

Processes, within the context of this dissertation, differ from that of strategies as these are a systematic group of activities that are used by management of local club hockey organizations in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of the most qualified coaches. Some examples of specific activities are website advertising (recruitment processes), interviews (hiring processes), and honorariums (retention processes). Support mechanisms are those policies and

practices implemented by management of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to support their member organizations in the recruitment practices of Canadian minor hockey players. Different types of support mechanisms include scholarship programs, and strategic alliances. Thus, the implementation of strategies, processes, and support mechanisms by management of the Hockey Organizations are part of the recruitment and retention activities used in attracting minor hockey players to compete and try out for elite level hockey at the two pivotal transition points.

For the Hockey Organizations, and the CELHDS, the recruitment and retention of hockey players is a *sine qua none* of their existence. As a representative from Hockey Canada (national governing body for the hockey in Canada) informed this researcher (personal communication, February 22, 2011), "recruiting and retaining young players is the biggest challenge in our sport". Recruitment and retention challenges facing Hockey Organizations are evident in the fluctuations that occur within the CELHDS. Some examples of the different types of fluctuations are 1) the number of players trying out for local elite level hockey organizations, 2) the ability recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches, and 3) the number of players that join an organization at the elite level. Minimizing the impact of negative fluctuations is especially critical at the two pivotal transition points. Failure, which would mean less than 100% availability of the most talented players, would threaten the organizational stability within the CELHDS.

How do the management of Hockey Organizations achieve organizational stability with respect to the numbers of players that try out for a club team from one year to the next? This research approaches the question by examining the recruitment and retention of players within the operating domain of the Hockey Organizations.

The Hockey Organizations (The Empirical Domain of this Research)

Club Hockey Organizations

Local youth club hockey organizations are the starting point for players entering into the CELHDS (see Appendix A). Playing for a club hockey organizations provide the greatest opportunity for Canadian minor hockey players to advance to the CHL, CIS, or NCAA Division I. According to HC (2011b), the club system does not emphasize competition per se; rather, says HC (2011b) it allows "players to advance through the developmental process and compete at the highest possible level appropriate to their ability" (p. 7). This dissertation focuses on club hockey organizations in the Edmonton, Alberta, Canada region (henceforth, the Edmonton region). The reason for the focus on the Edmonton region club hockey organizations is: first, I have a local interest in club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region due to my background in coaching for some of the local club hockey organizations.

The second is that club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region have been able to successfully and consistently develop hockey players to make it to the NCAA, CHL, CIS, or even the NHL. For example, the Edmonton region is home to many players that came from the CEHLDS and have played in the CHL

(e.g., Brendan Troock [Seattle Thunderbirds of the WHL], Brendan Ranford [Kamloops Blazers of the WHL], Nathan Burns [Vancouver Giants of the WHL], and Colin Smith [Kamloops Blazers of the WHL]), NCAA (e.g., Kieran Millan [Boston University], Blair Manning [University of Massachusetts-Amherst], and Dean Dyer [Lake Superior University]) , CIS (e.g., Ben Lindemulder [University of Alberta], Terry Sydoryk [University of Alberta], and Brock Heilman [Royal Military College of Canada]), and NHL (e.g., Cam Ward [Carolina Hurricanes], Mark Messier [Edmonton Oilers, and New York Rangers], Randy Gregg [Edmonton Oilers], Jay Bouwmeester [Calgary Flames, and Florida Panthers], and Mike Comrie [Edmonton Oilers, Ottawa Senators, and Pittsburgh Penguins).

The minor hockey system in Canada is divided by age categories, which means that essentially players are competing against players their own age. Teams comprise those age categories and make up leagues that are based on the skill level of the player. This means that players then are competing against other players that are similar in age and skill level.

Local youth club hockey starts with the Bantam level in the Edmonton region[3]. Prior to the Bantam, players compete in house league based organizations, which are divided by tiers and are based on the talent levels of the players. For most club hockey organization in the Edmonton region, players can compete from Bantam through to the Midget level (15 to 17 years old). The focus of this dissertation research was on minor hockey players transitioning into the

[3] One Edmonton organization starts its club hockey program at the Peewee level (ages 11 to 12).

Bantam level from the Peewee level and those players moving into the Midget level from Bantam.

Within the Bantam and Midget levels, local youth club hockey organizations offer teams for players at the AAA (henceforth, *Triple A*) and AA level (henceforth, *Double A*). The difference between the two is based on skill and competition. Triple A hockey is the highest competitive level for club hockey organizations and provides the greatest opportunity for a player to advance to an even higher level to either the CHL or to Intercollegiate hockey (HC, 2011b). The Triple A teams are the flagship teams for the organizations and garner the greatest amount of visibility. Double A is a developmental level in which players receive training through coaching so that they may gain the necessary skill sets to make the Triple A team the following year (HC, 2011b).

A club hockey organization's structural design is illustrated in Figure 1. At the base of the pyramid is the level with the greatest number of teams. As a player moves up the pyramid, the number of teams decreases. For example, most club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region have three to four teams in the Bantam level. One is typically a Triple A team, while the others are Double A teams. At the Midget level, the number of teams decreases to two teams: one Triple A team and one Double A team. Similarly, the number of roster spots available will also typically decrease as the player gets older, because of the incorporation of two or three age groups on one team. This means the opportunities to continue to play club hockey decrease as a player gets older.

Chapter 2 provides a more detailed description of the club hockey organizations selected for this dissertation.

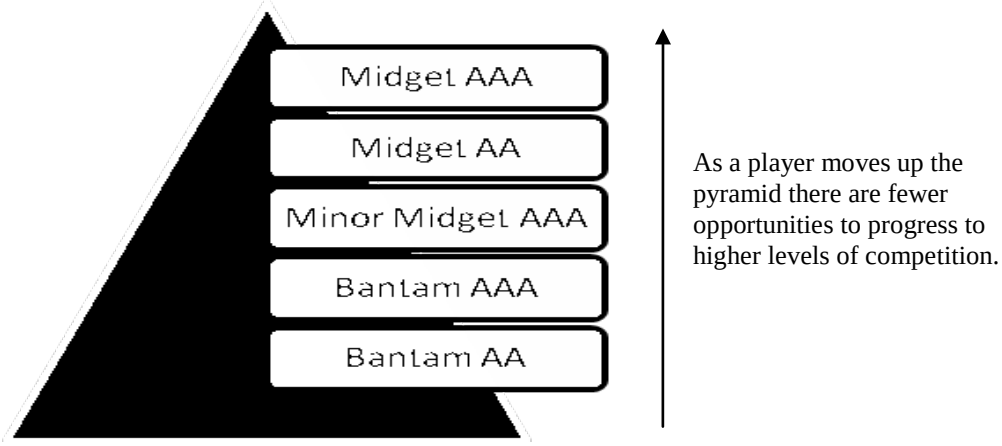

*Figure 1.*Club hockey structural model in the Edmonton region.

Governing Bodies

The bodies that govern hockey exist at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. This dissertation research references Hockey Canada (HC), Hockey Alberta (HA), and Edmonton Minor Hockey Association (EMHA). These governing hockey bodies are responsible for developing, implementing, and enforcing policies, procedures, and regulations within the CELHDS. Also, these governing hockey bodies develop literature pertaining to player development, and they conduct clinics that focus on coach development, training, and certification. This dissertation research used information available from the governing hockey bodies to augment data that the researcher collected on club hockey organizations.

The CHL

In the western provinces,[4] 14-year-old players are presented with three pathways[5] or options for advancing to higher levels of hockey, such as the CHL, CIS, or NCAA Division I teams. Major junior hockey—the CHL—"produces more NHL players than any other development league in the world while also serving as the leading provider of post-secondary scholarships in Canada" (HC, 2011b, p. 6). For example, the CHL has produced over 50% of NHL talent since 1969 (Ontario Hockey League [OHL], 2010). In Canada, "The majority of elite level players choose Major Junior Hockey Leagues in order to enhance their chances of advancing to the professional level" (HC, 2011b, p. 12).

Players in the CHL range in age from 16 to 20 (HC, 2011b) and compete to win a national championship (the Memorial Cup). Each CHL member organization or franchise plays in one of the three regional sub-leagues: the Western Hockey League (WHL), the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL). Currently, the WHL has 22 member organizations/franchises, while the OHL has 20 member organizations/franchises (HC, 2011b). The QMJHL currently has 17 member organizations/franchises, with a team from Sherbrook set to enter into the QMJHL for the 2012–2013 season (Quebec Major Junior Hockey League [QMJHL], 2012). A list of the franchises that constitute the CHL can be found in Appendix B.

[4] The western provinces of Canada are British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

[5] While these pathways are not the only means by which a player can reach higher levels of competition, they are the ones that are most typical within the Edmonton region.

The CHL franchises require players to submit to a draft process similar to that of the NHL. Each individual league has a different age at which a player can be drafted. For example, players in the WHL are commonly drafted from club hockey organizations at Bantam Triple A level, or in some cases at Bantam Double A level if the club hockey organization does not have Triple A team (e.g., some teams in the province of Saskatchewan). Once a franchise drafts a player, that franchise owns the player's playing rights, and that player cannot try out for any other CHL franchises.

Some of the players that are drafted by CHL franchises are required to move to the town where the franchise operates. For example, a player whose hometown is Edmonton, Alberta, could be drafted by the Kamloops Blazers in Kamloops, British Columbia. This player will move to Kamloops and live with a Kamloops area family. The Blazers franchise would pay the player's room and board plus a stipend.

The CIS

The CIS is a multi-sport governing organization that oversees university sports across Canada. Between September and March, student athletes at Canadian universities compete for national championships in 18 different sports. The CIS develops policies, membership rates, scholarships, general rules for sports and eligibility standards for student athletes for the member organizations (Canadian Interuniversity Sport [CIS], 2011a).

Hockey is one of the sports for which the CIS is responsible. In men's hockey, 868 students were reported to be members of the 2009–2010 university

teams (CIS, 2011b). Thirty-four universities across four regions compete for a national championship in hockey (e.g., University of New Brunswick, Brock University, and University of Alberta). These regions are Atlantic University Sport (AUS); Canada West; and Ontario University Athletics (OUA), which is divided into two divisions: East and West (CIS, 2011c). A complete list of the universities that field men's hockey terms in each division appears in Appendix C.

Typically, players choosing the CIS pathway are graduates of the CHL (HC, 2011b). In a presentation delivered to potential players by CHL representatives, CHL reported that 74% of CIS players in the 2009–2010 season were CHL graduates (OHL, 2010). This is an important fact for players choosing this pathway to consider, because being a player in the CHL is almost a necessity to play on a CIS team. There are some exceptions, which are subject to the decision by individual teams and coaches. Furthermore, players who play in the CIS are not likely to go on to play in the NHL. They are more likely to play in European professional hockey leagues or to get a career outside of hockey.

The NCAA

The NCAA, the U.S. counterpart of the CIS, is the governing organizations for collegiate athletics in the United States. The NCAA board and committees make decisions regarding sport policies, regulations, and procedures in conjunction with member universities and colleges. The NCAA oversees 23 sports, 89 championships, and more than 400,000 student athletes in three divisions at over 1,000 schools (National Collegiate Athletic Association

[NCAA], 2011a). The NCAA has three divisions: I, II, and III. Division I is the highest level of competition, and for most sports it is the level from which players and athletes advance to professional leagues. In addition, "Athletic programs at Division I universities and colleges can offer financial aid or athletic scholarships based solely on athletic ability" (Alberta Junior Hockey League [AJHL], 2011, p. 8).

One of the sports that the NCAA oversees is hockey. In the NCAA, hockey is played at two levels: Division I and III. At the Division I level, there are 59 member schools in six conferences: Atlantic Hockey, CCHA, Independents, ECAC Hockey, Hockey East, and the WCHA (see Appendix D). Teams in each conference strive to reach the national championship, called the Frozen Four championship. In the 2010–2011 season, 1596 players participated in men's NCAA Division I hockey (NCAA, 2011b).

Players who choose the NCAA pathway commonly play between two and three years of Midget AAA and then one or two years of Junior A, B, C, or D, depending on the province wherein they reside, and then move on to playing for a Division I or III NCAA member organization (e.g., University of North Dakota, Harvard University, or Boston College). For example, the AJHL is a Junior A league in Alberta, Canada. Players in this league are more likely to advance to an NCAA member organization rather than to the CHL. Furthermore, the AJHL website includes a *Guide for College Bound Hockey Players* (AJHL, 2011). This would suggest that the AJHL places some emphasis on the Intercollegiate pathway. The NCAA Division I hockey provides an option for Canadian hockey

players who wish to receive an education and pursue a career in the NHL, other professional hockey leagues, or to get a career outside of hockey through the education they receive.

The Purpose of This Research

Given the two pivotal transition points previously alluded to for minor hockey players, this dissertation purports to explore the strategies, processes, and support mechanism implemented by local youth hockey clubs, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior and Intercollegiate hockey organizations in Canada and United States with respect to the recruitment and retention of the most talented elite level hockey players in Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System. This research addresses six overarching questions.

- What strategies do local club hockey organizations use to retain players in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada?
- How does the elite level hockey system that includes local club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies in this region play a role in facilitating player retention?
- How do local club hockey organizations recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches as a strategy for maintaining the perception that such organizations are successful in the Edmonton region?
- Why are recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches so important to club hockey organizations?

- What types of policies and practices have been developed by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to facilitate the recruitment of Canadian hockey players by CHL franchises, universities, and colleges?
- How do the outcomes of these support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA actually contribute to the recruitment of Canadian players by member organizations?

The researcher presents a three-study (also known as a multi-study) dissertation format. Each of the six research questions is answered in one of the three studies (Chapters, 2, 3, and 4). The researcher employed a three-study format to gain experience in publishing scholarly work, which can be influential for the researcher's future in academia. In addition, a multi-study format could provide for a broader perspective of the actors in the CELHDS. Table 1.1 outlines the study numbers and chapters, the organizations involved, and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the studies.

The researcher employed two conceptual frameworks, which are recruitment and retention. The first such framework was player retention; while the second such framework was the recruitment, hiring, retention processes of coaches. The final conceptual framework was the recruitment of minor hockey players. The researcher used three theoretical frameworks, including the *environmental decoupling* model (Thompson, 1967), *organizational reputation*, and *organizational legitimacy*.

Table 1.1

Research Papers, Organizations, and Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks Addressed

Study and Chapter Nos.	Organizations	Conceptual Framework	Theoretical Framework
Study 1, Ch. 2	Club Hockey Organizations	Retention Strategies	Environmental Decoupling Model
Study 2, Ch. 3	Club Hockey Organizations	Recruitment, Hiring, And Retention Processes	Organizational Reputation
Study 3, Ch. 4	CHL, CIS, and NCAA	Recruitment Support Mechanisms	Organizational Legitimacy

Methods

The researcher used qualitative research methods to explore the roles of the actors within the CELHDS. Qualitative research methods are recognized as a meaningful way of conducting social research (Crotty, 1998). This "discovery-oriented approach" (Patton, 2002, p. 39) uses a "form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (Shank, 2002, p. 5) to provide insight into the human experience (Li, Pitts, & Quarterman, 2008). Shank's (2002) meaning and insight can be accessed through observation, interviews, and document analysis (Patton, 2002). The researcher's principle methodologies for developing case studies involved interviews and document analysis.

Case studies constitute a commonly used research design in qualitative research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). Such a design is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Eisenhardt (1989) suggested that case study research could build theory that, possibly, will lead to the recognition of patterns of relationships within their underlying logical arguments (Eisenhardt &

Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, case study research can contribute to the knowledge of individual groups in organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2003), and allow for “investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2003, p. 2).

Data Collection

The dissertation's primary data came from interviews with individuals currently active or knowledgeable concerning the Hockey Organizations regarding areas such as the operations of the organization, coaching, management, the league, policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and the governing hockey bodies. Additional sources were documents collected from the websites of local youth hockey clubs, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior and Intercollegiate organizations. The researcher employed these secondary data sources to validate the interviewee responses, to augment the primary data source, and for triangulation purposes. Triangulation is understood to be “the use of a variety of data sources in a study” (Janesick, 2000, p. 391).

Data collection for this dissertation started in 2009, when the researcher conducted six initial pilot interviews with interviewees across Canada for studies 1 and 2. The researcher conducted these pilot interviews for two reasons. First, the researcher needed a preliminary understanding of different hockey systems throughout Canada and how the elite level organizations operated within those systems. Second, the preliminary research assisted in determining the selection

criterion for recruiting representatives from the Hockey Organizations as interviewees for each of the three studies. Three criterions emerged as most appropriate;

- The prospective interviewee had to be currently involved with a Hockey Organization.
- The prospective interviewee had to have at least two years' experience with a Hockey Organization.
- The prospective interviewee had to hold a management position for the Hockey Organization.

In total, the researcher conducted 23 interviews for the purposes of this dissertation. The researcher determined 25 questions (reduced from 45) to ask during each interview, which led to an interview duration from 30 to 60 minutes. The questions were open-ended, and the researcher encouraged in-depth answers.

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta approved the data collection method for this research. In accordance with ethics approval requirements, pseudonyms were used for all study participants. Every effort would be made to insure anonymity for interviewees and their organizations. Because a relatively small, local and homogeneous collection of organizations that were involved, the researcher informed the interviewees that anonymity could not be guaranteed. The researcher gave the interviewees the option not to participate. In all of the cases, the interviewees verbally consented to the terms of the interview.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, I used interpretivism as the epistemological approach. Interpretivism is a means of examining social actions and the meanings behind the actions, in order to understand the world in which the study participants live and work (Creswell, 2003). “An interpretative approach seeks to explain the behaviors of people in terms of the meaning it holds for them” (Smith, Evans, & Westerbeek, 2005, p.100). Through interpretivism, researchers “seek to explain the reasons for intentional action in relation to the whole set of concepts and practices in which they are embedded” (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 37).

Researchers interpret the objective meanings of action through the intersubjective communication of individuals in the social world (Outhwaite, 1975). Informed by this understanding of interpretivism, the interviewee’s first-hand experiences and knowledge of the operations of the different Hockey Organizations were used to comprehend the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms implemented by management at the two pivotal transition points for minor hockey players. A more in-depth discussion of the data analysis used for this dissertation can be found in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Professionalization

As indicated above, there are two pivotal transition points for minor hockey players and parents as such managers of local youth hockey clubs, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior and Intercollegiate organizations approach to the recruitment and retention of the most talented

Canadian minor hockey players is critical for the stability of these organizations to operate within the CELHDS. Thus, this dissertation suggests that the retention strategies, processes, and support mechanisms are consistent with the concept of professionalization; more specifically a professional approach by management to the implementation of these strategies, processes, and support mechanisms. As a result, managers of the Hockey Organizations then are taking a professional approach to the implementation of strategies, processes, and support mechanisms for the recruitment and retention of Canadian minor hockey players. Although this research did not look for or examine the issues of professionalization, it is an underlying means that helps to explain the managers of the Hockey Organizations approach to recruit and retain the most talented Canadian minor hockey players from the CELHDS.

Professionalization has been conceptually discussed throughout the management and sport management literature (e.g., Abbott, 1991; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1992; Lawrence, 1999; Richardson, 1987; Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991; Abbott, 1991, p. 355). Previous studies have focused on nonprofit organizations (Houlihan, 1988; Thibault et al., 1991), classification of international athletes in the NCAA (Kaburakis, 2007), coaching (Taylor & Garratt, 2010), professionalization of player attitudes (Visek & Watson, 2005), changes occurring when sport organizations move from amateur to professional status (O'Brien & Slack, 2004), and professionalization of sport governance (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). The research conducted for this dissertation builds on the professionalization literature by examining a sport manager's approach to

player retention strategies, processes, and player recruitment support mechanisms with the Hockey Organizations at two pivotal transition points in the CELHDS.

The terms *profession* and *professionalization* have been applied to particular sets of individuals (e.g., lawyers, medical doctors, and accountants), associations (e.g., American Medical Association, and National Hockey League Players Association [NHLPA]), and organizations (e.g., NHL, National Basketball Association [NBA], Major League Baseball [MLB], and National Football League [NFL]). Whereas Abbott (1988) identified medicine and law as examples of professions, professionalization is understood to be the characteristics that distinguish an association or organization. For example, Lawrence (1999) discussed the professionalization of strategies within the forensic accounting field, and how these strategies characterize the association in terms of membership.

As recognized by Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, and Darcy (2006), and Chelladurai (1999), the managements of sport organizations are increasingly becoming more professional or business-like in their approach regarding strategies and practices. Through professionalization within the sport industry, there is a movement from a volunteer or "kitchen table" approach (Kikulis et al., 1992) to an executive board or businesslike approach with organizations operating at the elite level. The Canadian Sport System is a volunteer-based system that involves some of the actors studied in this dissertation. Nonetheless, a more businesslike approach is occurring throughout the Canadian Sport System (Houlihan, 1988; Kikulis et al., 1992; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1995a; Thibault

et al., 1991), and sport organization managers are applying business principles to the structure, operations, and the overall goals of the organizations. I suggest that because of more this businesslike approach, the recruitment and retaining of players and coaches is consistent with the concept of *professionalization*. Such an approach leads to a greater likelihood that the expectations of parents, executive board members, governing hockey bodies, players, and higher-level organizations are being met.

Hage and Aiken (1967), Hall (1968), Slack and Kikulis (1989), and Thibault et al. (1991) made the connection between an organization's structure and professionalization. I use Thibault et al.'s (1991) and Daft's (1983; 1998) three analytical categories for organizational structure to discuss the activities found in this research. These three categories are *specialization*, *formalization*, and *centralization*. Thibault et al. (1991) used these analytical categories to explain the impact that professionals have on an organization's structure when professional staff members (i.e., paid staff members) are incorporated into a volunteer-based non-profit sport organization. Similar to Thibault et al., I use these analytical categories to discuss my research findings.

Specialization refers to those activities performed by an individual that are narrow in scope and require a specific skill set or knowledge base to perform (Chelladurai, 2009; Daft, 1998; Thibault et al., 1991). Within the context of their study, Thibault et al. (1991) found that specialization meant that professionals develop programs and bring new ideas based on their professional training and

experience. Thibault et al. found that implementation of these activities to be having an impact on the organization's structure.

Formalization refers to the extent to which these actions taken by management that are implemented in a regularized manner and become a norm for the organization (Daft, 1983; 1998; Thibault et al., 1991). The term refers to actions that become standardized norms for an organization, such as procedures, job descriptions, regulations, or policy manuals (Daft, 1998). Lawrence (1999) suggested that, "Standards of practice provide guidelines, norms and legal prescriptions relating to how practices [or actions] are to be carried out…" (p.165). For this dissertation, the researcher employed Daft's (1983; 1998) definition of *formalization*.

C*entralization* relates to the entities or actors involved in making the decisions within a particular structure or system (Daft, 1998; Thibault et al., 1991), and "the hierarchical level that has authority to make a decision" (Daft, 1983, p. 15).While the analytical categories of *specialization* and *formalization* emerged from the data collected, *centralization* did not. As a result, *centralization* was not discussed within this context of this dissertation.

Within the sport and management literature, discussions of professionalization refer to the following characteristics: expertise and knowledge (Kikulis et al., 1992; Thibault et al., 1991), exclusive membership (Lawrence, 1999, Wilensky, 1964), and specialized programs (Thibault et al., 1991). The professionalization of activities involves development of a standard (Slack & Kikulis, 1989; Lawrence, 1999; Wilensky, 1964), and the goal is to "convince the

public that [the association's or organization's] services are uniquely trustworthy" (Wilensky, 1964, p. 139). Trustworthiness can be established and maintained by reputation and legitimacy. By categorizing the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms, there is a better understanding of the managers of the Hockey Organization's approach to the recruitment and retention of minor hockey players.

Rationales for Conducting this Research

Recruitment

Barber (1998) maintained that "there is a relationship between human resource practices and 'bottom line' measures, such as return on investments, profitability, and even organizational survival" (p. 1), or, for the purposes of this study, organizational *stability*. Furthermore, Barber explained that the recruitment of potential employees is an "organizational function that depends on its ability to influence individuals (i.e., potential applicants)" (p. 7). Through these potential employees, management is able to draw in human capital to the organization.

In the case of sports organizations, management implements player retention strategies, processes, and player recruitment support mechanisms as a means of minimizing fluctuations to recruit the most talented athletes. By recruiting a large number of athletes to try out at the elite level, coaches and managers of sport organizations are able to identify the most talented athletes to represent their organization. While this dissertation research does not speak to talent identification, a rational for this dissertation is in fact the understanding that the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms affect the talent identification process.

The amount of research focused on recruitment has increased in recent years (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). As noted by Rynes (1991), recruitment researchers have primarily concentrated on recruitment sources (Curtis & Birch, 1987; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Windolf, 1986), recruiters (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Thomas &Wise, 1999), and realistic job previews (Breaugh & Billings, 1988; McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Wanous, 1973). However, few studies in the field of sport management have focused on investigating a sport manager's specific approach to the recruitment practices within the context of a player's transition from one level to the next. The rationale for this dissertation is to understand the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms used in the recruitment practices by sport managers, which is a perspective that this research contributes to the literature on recruitment.

The recruitment literature focuses on two primary actors. These are the potential applicant and the organization (Barber, 1998). Research from an applicant's perspective identifies the affects that management's actions and activities have on the recruitment of an individual. For example, Tom (1971) conducted a study using 100 college students enrolled with the University of California Career Placement Center. "The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of certain subjective factors in the organizational choice process" (p. 573). Tom found that "candidates tend to prefer organizations which they perceive to be similar to their own personality profiles" (p. 590). Hence, Tom's research focused on the applicant's perspective by investigating the personality profiles of the applicants.

However, research conducted from the organization's perspective is limited, as suggested by Barber (1998) and Taylor and Giannantonio (1993). In understanding the perspective of the organization, a manager represents the organization and makes decisions on behalf of the organization. Based on logic associated with the perspective of the organization then, in sport the inability to recruit the most talented athlete can threaten the stability of an organization by the perceptions created and decisions made by the manager of the of the sport organization. Thus, understanding a sport manager's approach to recruitment can be a means to assess the stability of a sport organization by prospective players and parents. This dissertation research provides a new perspective in examining recruitment practices within sport organizations and in the field of sport management.

Retention

Previous studies have focused on customer retention (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bolton, 1998), athlete retention (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008), student athlete retention (Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, & Gerber, 2009), volunteer retention (Kim, Chelladurai, & Trail, 2007), and employee retention (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996;Knoppers, 1992). Although it is evident that extensive research has been conducted using the concept of retention, few studies have specifically explored athlete and coach retention from the perspective of the organization.

Sport management research discussion of player retention has taken on a broad perspective of retaining players for the purpose of the sport and program

development (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou et al., 2008). However, the concept of retention can be more than just retaining players for the sport. It can also apply with regard to transitions from house league-based programs to elite level programs, because the sustainability of the club hockey organization requires the largest pool of talented players possible for talent identification purposes. Thus, retention then is a rationale for this study, because it provides a conceptual framework for understanding the transition point for minor hockey players who are making the decision on trying out for a club hockey organization or remaining with house league-based organization.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention are extensively examined throughout the sport literature (DuMond, Lynch, & Platania, 2008; Green, 2005; Hanlon & Coleman, 2006; Inglis et al., 1996; Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004; Sotiriadou et al., 2008; Toma & Cross, 1998), and human resource management literature (Carroll, Smith, Oliver, & Sung, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Hartline, & Witt, 2004; Ho, Lee, & Wu, 2009). These scholars argued that recruitment and retention of players, volunteers, or employees were important factors in the survival of an organization. However, the concepts of recruitment and retention have often been studied and discussed in isolation from one another. This dissertation ties recruitment and retention concepts together within the context of a sport system.

Both Green (2005) and Sotiriadou et al. (2008) discussed sports systems and sport programs within the context of athlete development, recruitment, and

retention. These are two examples where these concepts were not discussed in isolation of one another. Sotiriadou et al. (2008) recognized this limitation and further indicated that, because each sport is different, a more comprehensive examination of organizations operating within different sport systems is needed. This dissertation addresses this limitation and extends Green's (2005) and Sotiriadou et al.'s (2008) research on recruitment and retention within the field of sport management.

Empirical Setting: The CELHDS

In general, previous research has examined Canadian sport organizations by addressing the following topics: federal government polices pertaining to sport (Harvey, 1988; MacIntosh & Whitson, 1990), Canada's sports delivery system (Thibault & Harvey, 1997), National Sports Organizations (NSOs) and Provincial Sports Organizations (PSOs; Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Edwards, Mason, & Washington, 2009; Kikulis, 2000; Slack &Hinings, 1994), and grassroots sports organizations (Stevens, 2006; Stevens & Slack, 1998). Slack and Kikulis (1989) pointed out that "despite the plethora of organizations that make up the Canadian sport delivery system, these agencies have not been the focus of a large number of theoretical or empirical studies and researchers still know little about their structure and processes" (p. 179).

Progress has been made since Slack and Kikulis (1989), primarily through the efforts of Slack and colleagues (Amis & Slack, 1996; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1992; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1995a; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1995b; Slack & Hinings, 1992). However, it is still apparent that few studies have

specifically investigated the player retention strategies, coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes, and player recruitment support mechanisms of the actors within the Canadian Sport Delivery System[6], such as local club hockey organizations, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior hockey, and Intercollegiate organizations.

The hockey industry is an important component of Canada's national identity (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Scholars have identified the connection between Canada's national identity and the sport of hockey (e.g., Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Jackson, 2001; Jackson & Ponic, 2001; Mason, 2002; Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006; Scherer & Jackson, 2004). It is apparent that scholars have recognized and research the importance that hockey plays within Canadian culture, which in and of itself provides a rationale for exploring CELHDS and Canadian minor hockey players.

Other scholars have examined CHL arena development in small to midsized cities (Mason, Buist, Edwards, & Duquette, 2007), player recruitment in large cities versus small cities (Curtis & Birch, 1987), the "development of British ice hockey and the role of Canadian migrants" (Maguire, 1996, p. 335), mechanisms for recruiting Canadian players to the British elite ice hockey league (Elliot & Maguire, 2008), the history of player migration to the NCAA from Canada (Holman, 2007), and a merger between two hockey organizations (Stevens, 2006). However, after an extensive review of the literature on hockey

[6] The Canadian Sport Delivery System encompasses those organizations that provide sport to Canadian athletes. These organizations operate at the national, provincial, and municipal levels of sport. The Hockey Organizations involved in this dissertation operate within the Canadian Sport Delivery System.

and the Canadian hockey industry, this researcher found no research conducted on the CELHDS or, more specifically, on the Hockey Organizations, which are included in the empirical domain of this study. Because of the importance of hockey in Canada, more research is needed to understand the role of the Hockey Organizations in the development of minor hockey players. As a result, this is an underdeveloped area of research by hockey scholars, and warrants further investigation that will benefit both sport management and academics.

Another rationale for this dissertation is the researcher's personal interest in the hockey industry. From the age of six, he played hockey at various levels in Ontario until moving to Edmonton in 2004. In addition, this researcher coached in Edmonton for six years at the elite level. While coaching at the Bantam Triple A level, he found that there was a lack of knowledge among parents and players as to their options for reaching higher levels of competition. This was a motivation and rationale to conduct this research. This dissertation is thus intended to help sport managers, players, parents, and coaches within the hockey industry gain a better understanding of the local youth club hockey organizations, governing hockey bodies, the CHL, CIS, and NCAA involved in the CELHDS.

Overview of the Dissertation Format

The dissertation is organized as follows. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are papers that discuss recruitment and retention of coaches and players. Chapter 2 examines the player retention strategies implemented by local club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region. Chapter 3 focuses on the coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes undertaken by management of club hockey organizations in

the Edmonton region. Chapter 4 uses an institutional approach to explore the support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA that contribute to the attraction and recruitment of Canadian players. Chapter 5 integrates the findings from the literature on recruitment and retention with the concept of professionalization. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to this dissertation and discusses the contribution this research makes to the field of sport management and to possible areas for future research.

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Chapter 2: COMMUNITY LEVEL VERSUS CLUB LEVEL HOCKEY: A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE TO RETAINING ELITE LEVEL YOUTH ATHLETES IN ALBERTA[1]

Introduction

Researchers have given limited attention to sport systems in the context of athlete retention the field of sport management. Robbins, Coulter, and Langton (2006) defined a *system* as a "set of interrelated and interdependent parts arranged in a manner that produces a unified whole" (p.39) and can be identified as either a closed or open system. A closed system can be described as a system where there are barriers to entry by external organizations, there is a lack of transparency by external constituents (e.g., possible customers), minimized environmental influences on the stability of actors within the system, and that "all consequences of action are contained within the system and all causes of action stem from within it" (Thompson, 2008, p.85). While an open system is transparent with regards to organizations involved in the system (e.g., provincial sport organizations), flexibility in terms of entering and exiting the system, and the "effects within the system may stem from action outside the system" (Thompson, 2008, p.85).

Drawing on the work of Green (2005), scholars depict a sport system in the shape of pyramid, where there are three tiers of competitive levels. These levels are, from bottom to top, mass-participation, competitive, and high-performance sport. Athletes transition from one level to the next as they move up

[1] This study was submitted to the *North American Society for Sport Management* (NASSM) student paper competition.

the pyramid. Managers of sports systems concern themselves principally with two issues. The first issue is the recruiting of athletes into the system, and the second is the retention of athletes within the system. Retention occurs within each tier as at the system level when an athlete moves from one tier to another. This study focuses on the point of transition within a sport system, as an athlete moves from the mass-participation sport tier to the first tier of competitive sport. More specifically this research focuses on those volunteer- based sport organizations that operate within Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System (CELHDS).

Local youth club hockey organizations (also known as *Rep hockey organization* or *club hockey organizations*) are the stepping stones for Canadian minor hockey players (also identified as players, minor hockey players, or hockey players) wishing to advance to higher competitive levels in hockey, such as the Canadian Hockey League (CHL or Major Junior), the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I or III, or the National Hockey League (NHL). These club hockey organizations operate in different communities throughout Canada, and are instrumental in providing elite level hockey opportunity to Canadian hockey players. A challenge that management of club hockey organizations face is that players must make the choice to transition at the Bantam level (13 to 14 years of age) from house league hockey (also identified as community hockey organizations) to club level hockey or to remain in competition in house league level hockey.

Podilchak (1983) explained that “house league emphasizes 'non serious' enjoyment, whereas the selective leagues [elite level] emphasize skill display and athletic achievement” (p.15). Thus, the challenge then for managers of club hockey organizations operating at the community level, is that players and parents can be influenced by factors that exist with moving from house league based program (also known identified as community based programs) to an elite based program. Some of those factors can include time commitment, cost, coaching, organizational leadership, and organizational reputation. These factors can be a point of contention for prospective parents and players there becomes a transitional component, where a decision needs to be made to continue and try out at the elite level or continue to play at the house league level. Management then of the club hockey organizations are challenged with making sure a transition does occur and that there are players trying out for club level hockey.

In fact, management of local club hockey organizations seek to maximize the number of players that try out in order to have the largest pool within which to identify the most talented players to comprise the club hockey organization’s teams at the Bantam AAA (henceforth, *Triple A*) and AA (henceforth, *Double A*) levels (described further below). As Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick (2008) explained:

> A condition for successful retention/transition is a successful attraction process. Once junior participants move beyond the attraction process, the pathways to retention/transition might act as an entry point for the talented juniors to move to a different level of participation. (p.262)

From the perspective of this research, this study focused on the club hockey organization's strategies to attract current house league players to try out for club level hockey; this is a retention issue for the system as the goal of the CEHLDS is to keep hockey players involved within hockey by advancing those players that have the skills to move from the community tiers to club level competition.

Research has indicated that one-third of all minor hockey players do not return to competition after one year, and the highest rate of attrition was found to occur around the Bantam level (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2010; Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988). As a representative from Hockey Canada indicated, the biggest challenge facing the Canadian hockey development system is "recruiting and retaining young players in our sport" (Personal Communication, February 22, 2011). The sport of hockey has seen an overall decline in the registration of Canadian hockey players from 2008 to 2009 (*n*= 584,679) to 2010-2011 (*n*= 572,411) (Hockey Canada [HC], 2011a). There are numerous factors that could contribute to this attrition rate, such as time commitment limits, scholastic endeavours, school sports, the amount of ice time that a player receives, leisure pursuits, limitation on opportunities to advance higher competition levels, economic factors, or even political connectivity (i.e., who a parent knows that will get their son/daughter onto a specific team).

"Organizations of all sizes and types are recognizing that they are engaged in a struggle to retain talent, and are actively trying to do something about it" (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, & Graske, 2011, p. 97). In response to this general organizational challenge, management within a local hockey club must develop

strategies and regulations that can improve player retention for those players who form the pool who are talented enough to transition from community hockey organizations to club hockey organizations at the Bantam level. Such a system, and the one that provides the empirical domain for this study, exists in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada (henceforth, Edmonton, or the Edmonton region). The study explores how the management of sport organizations involved in an elite level sport system can maximize player retention and examines the strategies that the management of club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies in the Edmonton region have implemented for the purposes of player retention.

The term *retention* "refers to each athlete's choice to continue to participate" (Green, 2005, p. 236). Management incorporates strategies "to capitalize on the identification of the most talented, retain them, and assist them to obtain the required skills to achieve high standards of performance" (Sotiriadou et al., 2008, p.262). Green (2005) asked the following questions about retention: "What, for instance, motivates an athlete to continue to participate? What kinds of reinforcers ensure continued involvement? How can we facilitate the processes by which an athlete develops commitment to his or her sport" (p. 236)? What is evident from the questions posed by Green (2005) is that athlete retention is a concept discussed at the level of ensuring that athletes remain playing the sport. However, this study presents a different perspective by exploring how organizational strategies within the context of a sport system can facilitate the

retention of players that need to make a decision regarding trying out for club level hockey or continuing with community level hockey.

There are two research questions poised for this study. First, What strategies do local club hockey organizations use to retain players in Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada? Second, How does the elite level hockey system that includes local club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies in this region play a role in facilitating player retention? The empirical domain within which this study will address these questions consists of 1) club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region of Alberta Canada, and 2) governing hockey bodies, specifically Hockey Canada [HC], Hockey Alberta [HA], and Edmonton Minor Hockey [EMHA].

Sotiriadou et al. (2008) indicated that due to the complexity and differentiation of a sport system, there is a need for researchers to explore these systems on an individual sport basis. Green (2005) identified that “attention has not been given to athlete transitions to new athlete roles as they move up, down, or horizontally in the sport system. It is a significant gap in our research literature” (p.248). This research provides a foundation for future research in filling the gap identified by Green (2005). Furthermore, the conducted research provides new insights on athlete retention, elite level sport organizations in the context of a sport system, and the transitional factors involved in athlete retention.

To answer the research questions posed for this study, this research drew on the work of Thompson (1967, 2008), according to whom, organizations can be subdivided pursuant to the environment in which they operate. This connotes that

founders design organizations in such a manner as to isolate the *technical core* from fluctuations or uncertainties as means of providing organizational stability. To understand the transitional factors that reduce the impact of fluctuations on player retention strategies, this study modifies the model created by Thompson (1967) and describes the design of an organizational structure within a system context.

Thompson's (1967) model (henceforth, "Thompson", the "Thompson model" or "Thompson's model") can be used to highlight how an organization, or, as in the case of this study, a system, can be subdivided to be able to nurture, develop, and produce the most talented athletes/players within an elite level sport system. To nurture, develop, and produce the most talented players in the context of this study is the primary goal for management of the local club hockey organizations and the governing hockey bodies. It was for this reason that this researcher selected the Thompson model for this study.

Thompson's model identified two units: the *technical core*, and *boundary spanning units*. The *technical core* refers to the part of the system that is concerned directly with the production of goods and services (Chelladurai, 2009), for example, classrooms in a school or an assembly line in a factory. This study understands the technical core to be the club hockey organizations, because they are directly concerned with the development of hockey players. S*trategies* for this study are the specific activities that the technical core undertakes and the *product* is the set of players that the club hockey organization is able to train to reach higher levels of competition. Thompson (1967) maintained, “Organizations seek

to buffer environmental influences by surrounding their technical core with input and output components" (p.20). For this study, these input and output components are the player retention strategies that club hockey organizations have implemented.

Organizations use *boundary-spanning units* to isolate or buffer the technical core from fluctuations that exist within a system. Some examples of fluctuations that can occur within this empirical setting are the current economic conditions, politics, conflict between club hockey organizations, and/or city growth. By applying policies, rules and regulations, personnel, and/or processes throughout the internal structure of the system, the boundary spanning units enable organizations to "buffer or level environmental fluctuations" (Thompson, 1967, p. 67) or other influences that can affect the organization. Examples of boundary spanning units include boards of governors and intercollegiate athletic departments. In this study, the boundary spanning units are the governing bodies—HC, HA, and EMHA—that are responsible for developing, imposing, and monitoring regulations that directly affect the activities of club hockey organizations.

Research Setting: Club Hockey Organizations and Canadian Governing Hockey Bodies

Local youth club hockey begins in the Edmonton at the Bantam level (13 to 14 years old) and remains the prominent forum for elite level competition through to the Midget level (15 to18 years old). If a player chooses to continue playing at the elite level from house league hockey at the Bantam level, the player attends a try out process with a club organization. Consider, for example, a player

at the Peewee level (11-12 years old) who lives in the west end of Edmonton and plays for the Whitemud West Hockey Organization, a local community hockey organization. In making the transition to Bantam, the player will be moving from Whitemud West (the “feeder” organization; house league organization) and will try out for the Canadian Athletic Club (a club level hockey organization).

Elite hockey offers teams at two different levels: Triple A and Double A hockey. *Triple A* hockey is the highest level, while *Double A* is the feeder and development level for the Triple A teams.Tryouts begin with Bantam Triple A, and if released player from Triple A the player moves down to Bantam Double A. The number of players trying out at the Bantam level ranges from approximately 90 to 200 players, depending on the season and the organization’s geographic location (This study addresses the impact of seasonality and geography on tryouts in later pages).

The number of roster spots that are available in specific age categories is dependent on the number of teams that the club hockey organization maintains for various age categories, with the ultimate decision left to the coach or to management. Each team has 17 to 19 players (HA, 2011). If an organization has one Bantam AAA team and three Bantam Double A teams, then the number of roster spots available would be 76 (19 per team). Because filling the roster spots is critical to the survival of the organization, player retention is an important concern for management.

Governance exists at three different levels within the Canadian hockey industry: the national level (Hockey Canada), provincial level (e.g., Hockey

Alberta), and at the municipal level (e.g., Edmonton Minor Hockey Association). The Canadian governing hockey bodies develop and enforce rules and regulations for the sport of hockey in Canada at all levels. Furthermore, the governing bodies provide coaching and referee certification, player development literature, and generally assist the hockey organizations to function within the Canadian hockey industry. Club hockey organizations are dependent upon the governing hockey bodies for guidance and support.

Retention

Researchers have often discussed the concept of retention in terms of *mobility*, meaning the ability that an individual has to choose among organizations. Previous studies have discussed player mobility in the contexts of professional sports (Drewes, 2005), the globalization of sport (Frick, 2009), and leadership in volunteer sport organizations (Theberge, 1984), as well as in the migration of Canadian professional hockey players to play British professional ice hockey (Elliot & Maguire, 2008). At the elite level of hockey, however, there is little research on the retention of athletes and players at the grassroots level.

Several sport management studies have addressed the retention of employees, volunteers, and athletes. Knoppers (1992) examined the relationship between retention and the underrepresentation of women in coaching positions, and Inglis, Danylchuk, and Pastore (1996) extended this work by investigating the retention of intercollegiate coaches and administrators in a university setting. Kim, Chelladurai, and Trail (2007) tested a number of volunteer retention models. The results indicated that volunteer-based sport organizations need to empower

their volunteers by assigning tasks that match their strengths, which assists in the retention process for volunteers. The present study uses qualitative data collection techniques to probe further into retention strategies from the perspective of the relationship between the organizations based in the Edmonton region and the player to understand the system in which facilitates player transition from house league based organizations to elite level based organizations.

Studies have discussed retention from the athlete's perspective. Le Crom, Warren, Clark, and Gerber (2009) conducted a gender-based study that examined the effects of scholarship support, gender, and sport type on student athlete retention in U.S. universities and colleges. Le Crom et al. found that gender and sport type were two factors in the retention of student athletes, and suggested that administrations at these institutions should focus their retention efforts on a particular subset of student athletes. However, the number of studies exploring player retention strategies in the context of grassroots sports is limited.

Green (2005) identified three factors that motivated an athlete's decision to remain with a particular sport: motivation, socialization, and commitment. Building on Green's findings, Sotiriadou et al. (2008) presented three frameworks representing attraction, retention/transition, and the nurturing processes used by 35 National Sport Organizations (NSOs). Both Green (2005) and Sotiriadou et al. (2008) conducted research that involved multiple sport organizations in different sports, as opposed to focusing on one specific type of organization and one specific sport. The current research will extend the current literature on player

retention by specifically exploring strategies used by club hockey organizations and governing bodies.

Methods

This research employs case study methodology (Yin, 2003), drawn from interviews with club hockey and the governing hockey bodies managers, to explore the strategies that are influential in the retention of players by club hockey organizations at the transitional point of an elite level player moving from the Peewee to the Bantam level. Case study research is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

Eisenhardt (1989) suggested that case study research could build theory. Through theory, research can recognize patterns of relationships among constructs, across cases, and within their underlying logical arguments (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, case study research can contribute to the knowledge of individual groups in organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2003), and allow for “investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2003, p. 2).

Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews and documents from local club hockey organizations and from governing bodies produced the study's data. The

researcher invited participants from six club hockey organizations located in the Edmonton region and from three hockey governing bodies. The research selected club hockey organizations from the Edmonton region for two reasons. First, the Edmonton region has produced a number of NHL players, including Jay Bouwmeester, Mark Messier, and Mike Comrie. Second, the player development strategies used in the Edmonton region have led to the draft into the CHL of a large number of players. Having players drafted into the CHL and NHL is an indication of the success of player development programs of club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region.

The CHL is the premier Major Junior hockey league in the world. The league has produced over 50% of NHL players since 1969 (Ontario Hockey League [OHL], 2010). The CHL is comprised of three sub-leagues: the Western Hockey League (WHL), the OHL, and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL). This study focuses primarily on players who are looking toward the WHL draft. In 2010, the WHL selected 234 players, of which 27 were elite level hockey players from the Edmonton region (WHL, 2010). In 2011, the WHL drafted 231 players, of whom 19 were from the Edmonton region (WHL, 2011).

With the permission of the interviewees, the research conducted and audio recorded 13 semi-structured interviews from 2009 to 2010. The interviewee group included hockey directors, vice presidents, presidents, scouts, team managers, and executive board managers from the club hockey organizations; as well as upper level management from each of the three governing bodies. The selected and participating interviewees had firsthand knowledge and experience about the

system and organization. Each was either a volunteer or an employee with two years of experience in one or more of the organizations selected for the interview process. The researcher conducted interviews with durations from 30 to 60 minutes in coffee shops, offices, and arena offices. Because of interviewee availability issues, the researcher conducted two of the interviews over the phone.

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta approved this research. The six club hockey organizations must remain anonymous. The researcher has designated these as Organization 1 through Organization 6. Similarly, the study designates the interviewees as Participant 1 (P1) through Participant 13 (P13) (see Table 2.1). A copy of the information letter and consent form that the researcher provided to each study participant in Appendices E and F. The ethics documents stipulate that to ensure anonymity the organizations and participants will not be identified; however, in the case of the governing bodies verbal consent was provided to be able to use organization's name, but the name of the specific individual would remain anonymous. All interviewees that provided consent for this study were informed as to the challenge of ensuring complete anonymity and were given the option to decline participation.

Table 2.1

Organizations and Interviewee Codes

Interviewee Code	Organization Code
P1	Organization 1
P2	Organization 1
P3	Organization 2
P4	Organization 2
P5	Organization 3
P6	Organization 3
P7	Organization 4
P8	Organization 5
P9	Organization 6
P10	Organization 6
P11	Edmonton Minor Hockey
P12	Hockey Alberta
P13	Hockey Canada

The researcher asked 20 to 25 open-ended questions (Appendix G). The researcher used these open-ended questions to encourage a smooth and free-flowing dialogue. Topics of discussion included relationships with other club organizations, organizational history, policies, organizational procedures, past accomplishments, programs, coaching, revenue sources, ice time, league rules, and, for clubs, their plans for the future. Due to the position of organizations within the operating system, the researcher employed a separate set of research questions for the interviewees who represented governing bodies (Appendix H). The topics of discussion for the representatives of these governing bodies included system boundaries, player development, coaching, goals of the governing bodies, coaching literature, player literature, player registration, communication methods, concerns with the hockey industry at the grassroots level, and the future of minor hockey in Canada.

The researcher collected additional data from the websites of the club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies as a means of validation for

the contents of the interviews. These supplemental materials also provided enhancements to the interviewees' responses. The researcher gathered such information on the organization's mission statement, vision statement, long-term goals, short-term goals, membership rates, rules and regulations, sponsorship information, contact information, and the history of the organization and its programs. The additional data contributed to the richness of the dataset for this study.

Data Analysis

The research employed an interpretive analytic approach with respect to social actions, the meanings behind those actions, and the world in which the interviewees live and work (Creswell, 2003; Outhwaite, 1975). King, Keohane, & Verba (1994) explained that the use of interpretivism, allows researchers "to explain the reasons for intentional action in relation to the whole set of concepts and practices in which they are embedded" (p.37). Based on the interpretation of the meaning behind the study participants' views and opinions, the researcher can identify *categories* and *themes* that emerge from the data (Creswell, 2003). The categories and themes were identified through data analysis as the strategies and constraints used by management of club hockey organizations in the retention of elite level hockey players. The strategies then are discussed further below.

The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim, and then reviewed and analyzed each. The researcher employed a five-stage analytic process, originating with Edwards and Skinner (2009), and Miles & Huberman (1994), to analyze the data. In stage one, *familiarization*, the researcher reviewed the audio recordings,

transcribes them, and studies notes that the researcher took during the interview process or any connection to the interviews (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). In the second stage, *thematic framework*, the researcher examined the transcriptions to extract thematic content (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). The researcher extracted themes from both the interviews and from the supplemental data primarily based upon the frequency of their occurrence in the audio and in the texts (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Specific patterns and regularities were identified as strategies. The strategies that emerged from the interview data as being the most prevalent were *Player Development*, *Facility Ownership*, *Performance-Driven Outcomes*, and *Information Sharing strategies*. Another facet of the system in which club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies operated, which has an impact on the retention of players and emerged from the data was the constraint of *residential boundary regulations.*

In the third stage, *indexing*, the researcher assigned codes using the strategies that emerged from the data. In the fourth stage, *charting*, the researcher organized the interview data into individual documents based on the indexing stage using computer software designed for the purpose (i.e., QSR International's popular NVivo8). An example, of a document that was created during this stage was called *Organizational Goals*. This document contained quotes from the interview data that was pooled together from the multiple interviews that were conducted. Thus, the organizational goals document contained all the quotes from the interviewees with regards to the policies of the different club hockey organizations or governing bodies.

In the final stage, interpretation, the researcher presented the data for interpretation in the form of a matrix which involves “the crossing of two or more main dimensions or variables to see how they interact” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 239), as Table 2.2 illustrates. In this study, first-order constructs represent the strategies and constraint that emerged from the data analysis in stage two. Second-order constructs are the technical core and boundary-spanning unit (Thompson, 1967). Also included in the matrix are quotes that correspond with the first-order constructs, and with the originating organization for each quote. Table 2.2 illustrates how the identified themes correspond with the Thompson (1967) model, and how the model provides a means of explaining the transitional factors that are influential in player retention within an elite level hockey system. The connection between the strategies found during the data analysis and Thompson’s model will be discussed further in the discussion section of this study.

Table 2.2

Examples of Interviewee Responses Identified With First and Second Order Constructs

Organization	Quotes (Examples)	First Order Construct	Second Order Construct
Governing bodies	*They don't have a whole lot of choice, because the way the hockey is organized in Edmonton is by zones. The kids that live within a zone have to come to our club to play hockey. So there is not a lot of options.* (P1 of Organization 1)	Residential Boundary Regulations	Boundary-spanning units
Club hockey organizations	*Our priorities are developing hockey players, developing coaches, and providing a framework for development and progression through the system, from establishing teams to developing of skills and the coaches.* (P8 of Organization 5)	Player Development	Technical core
	We owning our own facility we are a little bit better, because we have an upstairs where they can do dryland training; they can do classroom; the club doesn't charge for any of that. (P1of Organization 1)	Facility Ownership	Technical core
	At the AAA level it becomes a little bit more competitive; it is more about the win. Having said that though, at the AAA level we still develop; they are all still growing to the next level, right? (P10 of Organization 6)	Performance-Driven Outcomes	Technical core
	But those who [live just outside our boundaries or are undecided] and we know they're good players, there are a number of ways that you can reach out to them, either by invitation or you know of players, friends of those players and they talk to them, or parents, it's usually through those means through the informal circles. (P3 of Organization 2)	Information Sharing	Technical core

For purposes of the interpretative analysis, the research did not merge coded text extracted from documents with text extracted from interviews since this could lead to confusion and misconstruction. The researcher developed a

Microsoft Excel (2007) spreadsheet to organize data collected from documents. This spreadsheet tracked a description of contents of documents, page numbers, and assigned codes.

Findings

This study identifies player retention strategies and constraint that managers of club hockey organizations and governing bodies have developed, adopted, and implemented to enable players to reach higher levels of competition. While most of the interviewees did not use the word *retention*, it was an underlying theme in most of the interviews. The researcher has used quotes relating to this term to assist in explaining the findings of this study.

All of the interviewees from the club hockey organizations indicated that the recruitment of players as a process for acquiring players was itself an infraction of the *residential boundary regulations* enforced by the EMHA and Hockey Alberta. As P1of Organization 1explained, “They don’t have a whole lot of choice, because the way the hockey is organized in Edmonton is by zones. The kids that live within a zone have to come to our club to play hockey".

P2 said much the same thing, but went on to explain that club hockey organizations are not concerned about recruitment; rather, these organizations just want to make sure that players transition from the Peewee age category by trying out at club hockey level, and thereafter remain in competition at the elite level:

> What happens with these kids from these community leagues, they just want to play hockey this amount of time. When they go to club, they are told that they have to play this amount of time. So what they get afraid of

> is not a money issue, it is about how much time they have to spend at the rink with the other club. So they avoid going. What we said is that you attend a training camp, like a little conditioning camp. You go and see if you like it. Maybe you get told if you would make it, you are informed of the commitment level, and if you don't want to commit to it, then go back to the zone, just make sure you stay in hockey. Just go to see what the level is like, the next level. So I don't think they're afraid of coming out but they're afraid of the amount of the commitment there is to continue through with the program. That's the problem. (P2)

Thus, retention focuses on ensuring that the players continue to compete at the elite level and they will make the transition from a house league organization to a club hockey organization. If they are successful, club hockey organizations will be able fill the roster spots for their teams.

One of the retention issues faced by management of club hockey organizations and governing bodies is that players who are used to playing on the first or second line for a community hockey organization may become third or fourth line players for club hockey organizations. The fact that the "stars" on the first and second line typically get more ice time can be a deterrent for players and parents deciding whether to try out for a club hockey organization (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, and P8).

The strategic plan of Organization 1 identifies "retention of our current player base and growth of new players" as keys to success (Organization 1 data file, 2009). Interviewees mentioned various reasons that players might not

continue to compete at the elite level, including the cost of playing club hockey (P2, P4, P9, and P10), poor coaching (P13), time commitment (P2), amount of ice time allotted to third and fourth line players (P2 and P3), and the club's reputation (P1, and P2). For example, "I mean there's lots of kids who have had a certain coach in minor hockey and didn't have a good experience and all of a sudden they find that that guy is coaching the Bantam Double A team or Triple A team and they're like I'm not even trying out" (P13 of HC). In addition, "kids who played Bantam Double A their first year and did not have any fun and this and that and they decided you know what, I'm not trying out for Bantam Triple A. I'm just going to go back to community [house league] and play with my buddies that I grew up with and just have fun" (P13 of HC). These reasons provide an understanding of the strategies needed by management of club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies to achieve player retention at the club hockey level.

Based on the data analysis, this study discusses a constraint implemented by governing hockey bodies: *Residential Boundary Regulations*. Through this regulation, management of club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region used strategies to retain players: *Player Development*, *Facility Ownership*, *Performance-Driven Outcomes*, and *Information Sharing* strategies. Club hockey organizations implement player retention strategies within the constraints of residential boundary regulations imposed by the governing bodies.

Residential Boundary Regulations

In most hockey structures throughout Canada, boundary regulations restrict the recruitment of players by organizations. These regulations require minor hockey players to try out and to play for the club hockey organization closest to their primary residence, which is enforced in the Edmonton region. To provide some historical context for the residential boundary regulations in the Edmonton region, prior to 1962 local club hockey organizations could draw on players from anywhere in the region with no boundary limitations. The emphasis prior to 1962 was simply on winning provincial titles for the club hockey organizations. It was common practice to "stack" on the team with the most talented players. This created "very uneven competition, but also meant that a player often traveled across the city in order to play a game or practice on his 'home' ice. This often occurred on school night and it did not contribute to effective studies or good relations with teachers" (Edmonton Minor Hockey Association [EMHA], 2012, p. 1).

The design of this system prior to 1962 created dissatisfaction among the players and parents, and management of the club hockey organizations. As described in EMHA (2012):

> The squabbles, infighting, and dissatisfaction which resulted from the raiding of teams and general disregard for the welfare of the players which resulted from the tie-in with professional hockey and the emphasis on the winning of playoffs, finally brought hockey in Edmonton to a crisis point. (p.2)

In 1962, as a result, EMHA implemented a zoning regulations, where each member organization (i.e., club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region) are assigned to a zone within the city “giving that organization the right to use hockey players of appropriate caliber residing in that zone to the exclusion of all other hockey organizations” (EMHA, 2012, p.3).

HA and EMHA enforces and regulates the residential boundaries regulations enacted in the Edmonton region. A *boundary* is the “line, as mutually agreed upon and/or recognized by Hockey Alberta, that separates one member association [club hockey organization] from another, and defines that area from which each member association may register participants as ‘Resident’ Players” (Hockey Alberta [HA], 2011, p. 2). P11 of EMHA explained, “In Alberta there are nine zones, we’re considered zone eight. Within zone eight, we’re divided into four districts". EMHA governs the residential boundary regulation 2.1, which states,

> No player shall be allowed to register as a member of an EMHA team nor shall a player be allowed to play for or practice with an EMHA team unless that player’s parents and the player reside within the boundaries of the EMHA. Players must register within the boundaries of the districts in which they reside as defined, except as otherwise provided for within these rules of registration. A player may not establish residency for the principal purpose of playing or practicing hockey. (EMHA, 2011, p. 23)

For example, if a player lives in the south end of Edmonton, then that player is required to play for Southside Athletic Club. As P11 of EMHA further explained,

> So Atom and Peewee, there is absolutely no movement, so wherever you are, your second year novice is where you're playing hockey until you're in Bantam. The only way to get out of that is to physically change your residence from one zone district to another or quit.

Residential boundary regulations limit club hockey organizations from recruiting in and outside of the zone, which prevents the overloading of teams with top calibre players from other zones. When there are residential boundaries, the focus changes to player development within the club hockey organization, so there is less competition between organizations for players. According to P13 of HC, this is one of HC's objectives.

Another clause of the residential boundary regulations addresses release of a player from the organization once the player has not successfully made a Triple A or Double A team. A player who originally tried out for a club within the Edmonton city limits can ask for a release from the organization. The release allows the player to try out for other Edmonton clubs (P11). However, a player cannot try out for an organization elsewhere. For example, a player whom Organization 3 releases can try out for Organizations 1, 2, or 4, but not Organizations 5 or 6, which are outside the city limits. If a Triple A team releases a player, then the player can only try out for other Triple A teams within the city limits.

If a club hockey organization releases a player, the player is required to enter the city draft. P11 of EMHA explained that the draft option was implemented because some organizations had poor development programs, and

parents and players made the decision that they would like to have the option, if released from an organization, to try out for another organization. A player has 7 days at the Bantam Triple A level, or 10 days at the Midget Triple A level, to try out with different club hockey organizations (P11of EMHA). Each team may not have more than nine import players on the roster, ensuring that opportunity is being given to players within their residential boundaries (P12 of HA; HA, 2010). Placing time restrictions on a player's ability to move among the organizations helps to ensure that players return to the original club if they are not selected.

Player Development

Player development is a player retention strategy that the management of club hockey organizations uses. This strategy can be found in most organizations' mission statements, strategic plans, vision statements, organizational goals, and programs. For example,

> [Organization 5] believes that through the development of every individual player, each team benefits from their resulting depth, diversity, and cohesion. This produces a level of confidence that will bring success in a competitive hockey environment. Emphasis will be placed upon excellence, commitment, sportsmanship, discipline, personal development, skill development and team work. (Organization 5 website, 2011)

Organization 1, in its mission statement, also indicated that a primary goal of the organization was to "provide a high performance hockey development program built around our core values and supported by our long standing history, strong governance and progressive leadership". Similarly, the Organization 4 website

states, “The purpose of the program is development". In addition, all 10 interviewees from the club hockey organizations indicated that player development was a primary goal of the organization; for example, P7 stated, “We take the kids and we try and carry them to the next level".

HC and HA have an interest in the abilities that coaches develop in players at the club level, because these governing bodies also have teams that compete at the national level (e.g., Team Alberta Under 16 and Team Alberta Under 17) and at the international level (e.g., Team Canada Under 20 and Team Canada Under 18). As indicated by HC (2011b), “Canada has long been a nation renowned for producing elite hockey talent and has been the leading producer of NHL calibre players for decades” (p. 5). Player retention is thus a prominent factor, because the management of HC wants to ensure that there is a large enough talent pool to construct competitive teams at the national and international levels.

Because of their interest in player development, HA and HC have created and provided literature, videos, and other player development resources for managements of club hockey organizations. A particularly important document regarding player development is HC’s Long Term Player Development Model (LTPD). This is HC’s version of the Long Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD). This document is based on the Canadian Sport for Life framework for sport development in Canada used by NSOs, Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs), and Municipal Sport Organizations (MSOs).

The LTPD provides information pertaining to technical skill sets, and focuses on the technical skills targeted at each age level and category within the

Canadian hockey system. This document presents “an improved, more uniform system to assist in the progression and development of Canadian players within the Canadian club system” (HC, 2011b, p.5) to provide coaches and club hockey organizations with a stable curriculum for designing and implementing their development programs. HC (2011b) describes the LTPD as follows:

> [A]n eight-stage model based on the physical, mental, emotional and cognitive development of children and adolescents. Each stage reflects a different point in developing the player. The first three stages emphasize physical literacy and a broad range of sport experiences. The next five stages focus on development and competitive excellence. Active for Life encourages life-long physical activity and informed healthy lifestyle choices with participation in hockey long after the competitive years. (p. 6)

The eight stages of the model are: discover, fundamentals 1 and 2, learn to play, learn to train, train to train, train to compete, train to win, and excel. These stages focus on a player’s physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive development. Club hockey organizations focus on the later stages of the LTPD—train to train and train to compete—which players and organizations consider to be the elite stream of the model and to require a greater investment by the players and organizations.

HA has created a similar version of the HC player development model. This document, *Alberta Development Model 2010-2011* (ADM; HA, 2010), specifically targets the elite stream, which comprises Major Midget Triple A, Minor Midget Triple A, and Bantam Triple A teams. The purpose of the ADM is

to provide “Alberta players with a program that focuses on the development of the elite athlete” (p. 4).The ADM provides information pertaining to tryouts, import players, league structures, rules, and regulations. HA authors designed the ADM document to address questions that can originate from parents and from the management of club hockey organizations.

Player development has both an on-ice component and an off-ice component. The head coach creates and the coaching staffs organize on-ice practices. Components that comprise a practice plan under the LTPD model can include technical skills, individual and team tactics, team play, and team strategy drills. On- and off-ice training occurs multiple times throughout a week. For example, Triple A teams are together between five and seven times per week (P1–P10).This schedule includes one or two games per week, with the remaining time used for on- and off-ice training (e.g., practices).

The coach is responsible for the team’s training schedule, and the amount of training varies from week to week. Gaining any extra ice time becomes the responsibility of the coaches and individual team managers. The practice ice times vary for each team; for example, Organization 1 provides two to three ice times a week, ranging from 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes. Other organizations’ ice slots range from 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes, contingent on the ownership of the arena (e.g., city arenas as opposed to privately owned arenas).This is a significant time commitment for these young athletes, who also have school requirements and other interests.

Off-ice training consists of activities that assist a player's ability to perform on the ice. Coaches and management utilize classrooms, school gyms, parks, and boardrooms to perform this training, which can include team-building activities (e.g., soccer or dodgeball), nutrition seminars, video sessions, strategy seminars, or physical training (weights or cardiovascular exercise). Often, off-ice training is contingent upon the availability of the team during the week, the availability of the facility, and the overall knowledge of the coach. P9 commented, "We are getting more dry land and things in gyms and stuff like that to teach the positional play and then being able to deliver on the ice afterwards, which is because of the lack of ice that dry land becomes important". Most interviewees indicated that off-ice training was ultimately the responsibility of the coach and team management; however, all of the organizations do support this type of training.

In a given season, management measures and evaluates player development in two ways: the team's success, and individual improvement in terms of a player's skill level and advancement to higher levels of competition. P10 explained:

> There are two measurements. One is skill level. There is certainly a progression that you can see within the players from the start of the season to the end of the season. That should also follow through with where those players end up next year. The second measurement is if a kid is developed at the Double A level, let's take Bantam for instance, he has developed at the Double A level; he has been given opportunities to try different

> situations; he should be able to get the opportunity to get to the Triple A level in the next year.

The advancement of players to a higher level of competition is a primary goal of all club hockey organizations (P1, P2, P3, P7, P8, P9, and P10), whether the advancement is from Bantam Double A to Bantam Triple A or from Midget Triple A to a WHL franchise.

Another way to measure or evaluate player development is the life skills that playing club hockey inculcates. The term *life skills* refers to those skill sets that transfer to everyday life. P9 stated, "It is how they [players] have developed, how they have grown as human beings, what they are giving back, and the life lessons that they have taken out of the experience". Club hockey organizations can provide more than just a place to participate at an elite level. The sport of hockey can teach players skills in teamwork, leadership, sportsmanship, communication, commitment, and work ethic. Organization 4 has posted on its website:

> By participating in our program which provides the player an opportunity to clearly develop his or her hockey skills – situations also arise that help the young adult to learn how society works, how to deal with problems, conflict, teamwork, peer pressure, respect etc. This life-skills development is also crucial in the development of the athlete. Only a select few go onto play professional hockey, but all players require the life-skills that are developed here by players 13 to 17 years old in order to be successful in the business world. (Organization 4 website, 2012)

Managers have introduced life skills into player development because only a small percentage of club hockey players will actually make a professional team, as P3 and Organization 4's website indicate. Life skills help with player retention by promoting behaviours and environments that are aligned with players' and parents' ideals.

Player development then is used as a retention strategy by being one of the primary offerings of a club hockey organization provides to players that are able to compete at the elite level. Societal expectations are such that playing sports at the elite level will provide specific skill sets and life skills that assist a player in the future for future endeavors; whether that is playing professional hockey, getting an education using hockey, or simply entering into the work force. Based then on the findings, it becomes apparent that management of club hockey organizations then promote player development with their mission statements (as discussed earlier), the success of previous players, on- and off-ice instruction, and the use of different bodies of literature provided by the governing bodies to facilitating the expectations at competing at an elite level.

Facility Ownership

Facility ownership is a strategy relevant to both player development and retention. Two organizations within the Edmonton region each own an arena, while the rest of the organizations have to compete for city-sponsored ice, not only with each other but also with figure skating organizations, men's and women's leagues, and community hockey organizations. The benefit of having ownership of a facility was explained by P1: "We owning our own facility, we are

a little bit better, because we have an upstairs where they can do dry land training; they [teams] can do classroom; the club doesn't charge for any of that". Furthermore, the management of Organization 1 was in discussions with the city of Edmonton to increase the size of the current facility from one ice pad to four ice pads. P2 explained, "We're going to have everything. Our games are going to be there; our practices are going to be there; we're going to have a workout facility there". The majority of the interviewees identified an ice shortage in the Edmonton region. The addition of the ice surfaces would be a much-needed boost for both community and club hockey organizations, because the facility will host other league games as well.

In addition, P2 suggested that Organization 1 has a competitive advantage for player development because players are able to receive a fixed amount of ice time per week. As P2 pointed out, "The kids know when they're going to practice. They have their practice schedule for the whole year". The benefit of knowing the number of practices for a year allows parents and coaching staff to schedule other activities. If allotted practice times conflict with games or other team commitments, it is up to the coach either to sell the ice time or trade the ice slot with other coaches in the organization.

For those organizations that do not own a facility, ice time comes from the City of Edmonton and surrounding cities. P9 explained:

> We have a shortage of ice; politically it is seen as we don't have a shortage of ice. This is because there is ice available from 9am to 3 pm so there is no lack of ice. When you need the ice, there is not enough during

> prime time hours, so for me the only thing that would impact our program would be high registration and no ice to support the registration.

As a result, the teams do a lot of traveling for practices in other rural cities (P3, P4, P8, and P10). The ice-slot times that were available were often acknowledged to be less than ideal. P10 explained that some ice slots start at 4:15 p.m., but players are not finished with school until 3:30 p.m. Because some parents may not be able to get off work in time to drive their children to practices, some players may not be able to attend. In other circumstances, the ice time could be late at night. The problem with this situation is that players get home extremely late and then have to get up early for school the next day.

Ownership of an arena provides a competitive advantage for a player's development, because those organizations that own an arena can provide the necessary accessibility to ice time, and, in some cases, off-ice training for player development. For example, a Double A team with Organization 1 receives (estimated) more than 105 hours of training time over a 28-week season. The training consists of two practices (one lasting 90 minutes and one lasting 75 minutes) and one off-ice training session, typically 60 minutes, each week. These numbers increase at the Triple A level.

Club hockey organizations that do not own an arena may not receive the same amount of ice time because of reduced access to facilities, and this in turn can affect player development. To compete successfully at the elite level, Hockey Canada has suggested that a player is required to have at least 10 years of training

and this this translates into 10,000 facilities-based training hours (HC, 2011c). Thus, facility availability plays an important role in elite player development.

Performance-Driven Outcomes

The interviewees also acknowledged performance-driven outcomes as a player retention strategy, but they spoke of this strategy less favourably. Club hockey organizations build this strategy around three objectives: having a winning team, winning awards, and reaching higher competition levels. The interviewees considered the performance of both teams and players to be developmental indicators of an organization's success and point out that managers of club hockey organization communicate the details of such success to parents and players who are considering the club hockey structure. Thus performance-driven outcomes became a strategy for management to make sure they appear to have successful to prospective players and parents.

Interviewees also linked player development with winning. As P8 explained, "We believe that winning is a by-product of providing a good foundation and skill development to coaching to all players". Other interviewees expressed similar opinions (P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, and P13), for whom a successful hockey team is the result of a strong player development program. Although interviewees made the point that winning was a measure of player development, they did not provide specific examples. What was evident from the responses was that winning is an inherent objective for any game in which there are winners and losers, and, therefore, the expectation of winning is part of playing in club level hockey.

Winning, however, can also carry a negative connotation. HC (2011c) maintains that winning should not be the focus at any level. In addition, the interviewees were reluctant to use the term *winning*. This reluctance is due to negative impact created by those few coaches for whom the object of play was to win at all costs, which detracted from the focus on development. Approaches to elite level hockey based on win-at-all-cost culture is of particular concern for HC. As P13 of HC suggested, “A lot of times it’s about playing to win, and that’s a huge problem in our society as far as how we view the game of hockey. I mean, you can play a great game and lose 8–6, or you could play a bad game and win 2–1, and that 2–1 game is the one that really matters". P13 also said that even though the coaches are volunteers, they are under pressure to win; a coach whose team does not win is not likely to have his contract renewed.

Interviewees suggested that at certain levels within the club hockey organization structure, winning is a more prominent factor than for that of other teams (P9 and P10).Winning is identified as important for high-visibility teams, such as Bantam Triple A and Midget Triple A. Bantam Triple A is one of the highly visible levels because the WHL franchises drafts players from these teams, and a Bantam Triple A team that wins is likely to attract greater interest from WHL franchise scouts. At the Midget Triple A level, an elite player has aspirations of advancing to the next level (i.e., Junior A, CHL, or College), and being on a winning team can provide that exposure. In some cases, WHL franchises have drafted players who are already playing Midget AAA. These players are playing Midget Triple A for development.

An emphasis on winning overshadows player development. “You try to win ’cause kids won’t come to you if you’re a losing franchise. That’s what we’ve found” (P7). However, winning often means that the coach is concentrating on playing “star” players more often and not developing all of the players on the team. Thus, the “stars” get all the ice time while the other players sit on the bench and watch; as a result, players not receiving the ice time due to lack of skill are not being provided with an opportunity to improve. Player retention is more difficult for managements of organizations. The balance between development and winning is precarious indeed.

The second aspect of a performance-driven outcome strategy is having players move to the next level, which can also be an indication of the success of an organization:

> You know one of the biggest attractions, whether it’s a program or a school or an association have is when people start to look at the number of players who move on from that organization to higher levels. And that’s where we’re talking the elite level. And that goes a long way. I mean there are people out there that will sell their house in a certain area, buy another one in that area in order just to be part of that organization. So there are organizations that do have a very good reputation for development and the number of players that go from there on to the next level. (P13)

Jay Bouwmeester, Mike Comrie, Jarome Iginla, Deon Phaneauf, Daryl Sydor, and Cam Ward are all examples of NHL players who began their careers in the Edmonton region. In the case of Organization 3, the NHL has drafted 14 players.

All of the interviewees responded that they track the players once they have moved beyond the organizations and use the success of those players to promote the organization, often through the organization's website. By demonstrating the success of these players through the club level hockey system, managements of organizations are suggesting that prospective players can mimic the success of previous players by remaining in the club hockey system (P2, P4, P8, and P10).

Information Sharing

Information sharing strategies use player development, facility ownership, and performance-driven outcomes as information for potential players, current players, and parents. Club hockey organizations host meetings (e.g., information sessions), form partnerships with public schools, and sit in on meetings of community organizations to inform parents and players of the expectations, fees, development, structure, coaches, and opportunities that exist when playing club hockey. Sharing this information is important for promoting the organization, and allows the organization to be proactive in shaping its reputation.

Organizations 1, 2, 3, and 4 hosted information sessions in which management was able to facilitate the flow of information to prospective parents and players. For example, the management of Organization 2 hosts open houses: "Every year we have incoming Bantam open house for first year Bantams or Peewee graduates, and so we often make reference to the club tradition" (P3). Information sessions reinforce ideas pertaining to coaching, player development, mission statements, goals, procedures, philosophy about winning, and rules and regulations associated with entering the organization.

Previous players attend these information sessions on behalf of the club hockey organization to promote the club experience and answer questions. Management uses former players who have played in the NCAA, CHL, or even moved onto the NHL as a means of demonstrating the success of playing for Organization 2 (P3 and P4). Club hockey organizations also convey such information to current and potential players and parents on the organization's website (e.g., Organization 4), in the main arena where the club teams play (e.g., Organizations 3 and 5), or at the end-of-year awards banquet (e.g., Organization 1).

Another information sharing strategy used by four club hockey organizations (Organizations 1, 2, 4, and 6) was to have their board members sit in on meetings of community hockey organizations. P7 noted that Organization 4 has "developed a new portfolio in the executive where we've created a liaison position with the feeder organization. And we now sit in on the feeder groups meetings". A similar position also exists in Organization 1. Having board members attend a feeder organization's executive board meeting establishes a direct line of communication between the two organizations. At these meetings, the representatives of the club hockey organizations share information about the club hockey organization, discuss player development strategies or coaching issues, or simply offer advice. The overall goal of sitting in on the feeder organizations' meetings is to ensure that parents and players receive a consistent message.

As another information sharing strategy, the board of directors of Organization 4 formed a partnership with some of the specialized public hockey schools in Edmonton. The public education system in Edmonton allows a student to specialize in a specific activity. For example, if a student has an interest in soccer, there are specific schools that offer soccer academies. Some other areas of specialization include the arts (e.g., dramatic theatre), trades (e.g., electrician or plumber), lacrosse, or hockey. While attending the hockey program, the child has a set period of time when he or she is in the classroom and another set period of time when he or she is on the ice. This partnership was created between Organization 4 and the instructor/teachers of the hockey program to offer the instructor/teachers the chance to be coaches in Organization 4:

> We're working through the schools, more specifically the hockey schools. These schools are a huge asset in our community. We use their expertise to help us grow. We also are looking at reaching out to other schools. It's great when you can use them to communicate with potential players; we bring them aboard because they promote the hockey and encourage the kids to continue, to strive for the elite experience. (P7)

Interviewees from the other organizations indicated that some of their coaches were instructor/teachers at these academies by coincidence; however, these organizations did not use this situation as a means of communicating directly with the schools.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study explores the overall system in which club hockey organizations operate, and specifically how these operations deal with player retention. Two research questions guided the study: First, What strategies do local club hockey organizations use to retain players in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada? This study reveals that the strategy set includes player development, facility ownership, performance-driven outcomes, and information sharing. These strategies work in conjunction with the residential boundaries regulations enacted by the governing bodies.

Second, how does elite level hockey as a system play a role in facilitating player retention? The study employed Thompson's model to understand the strategies and regulations that is in place to reduce the effect on the technical core and assist in player retention. According to Thompson, the *boundary-spanning units* reduce the impact of environmental fluctuations on the *technical core*, which assists in stabilizing the technical core to ensure that players are being developed and retained.

The Club Hockey System

Thompson's model takes the view that “an organization should be subdivided into units on the basis of the segments of the environment with which they interact” (Chelladurai, 2009, p. 209). A similar approach can be applied to sports systems, such as the one in which club hockey organizations operate. To ensure player retention, the boundary spanning units (i.e., governing hockey bodies) buffer or level environmental influences such as city growth (P1, P3, P4,

and P7) and limited number of facilities (P7, P8, P9, and P10). The boundaries stabilize the technical core by ensuring that these organizations have substantial player pools for tryouts for player identification purposes. Green (2005) suggested that a sport system needs a large number of participants from which elite level sport organizations can choose so that the system can transition those athletes to a higher level of competition. By ensuring limited player mobility through residential boundary regulations, the governing bodies are providing a base for selecting players to fill vacant roster spots at the Bantam level.

With the residential boundary regulations in place, management of club hockey organizations use various strategies to retain elite level hockey players. Through this system, HA and EMHA have attempted to eliminate competition for players among the club hockey organizations, with the intended goal of working together to develop players. This would fulfill one of the goals of both HC and HA, namely, to create a system in which club hockey organizations work together to develop hockey players rather than focusing on competing for players to gain an advantage over other club hockey organizations.

Technical Core

Club hockey organizations, which are directly responsible for the development of players, comprise the *technical core*. For the technical core to operate efficiently within the environment there needs to be stability in terms of a steady flow of inputs to maximize the outputs (Chelladurai, 2009; Thompson, 1967, 2008). In this study, inputs include the LTPD model, ADM, ice time, off-ice training, player development programs, information sessions, and scheduled

practice times for an entire season. The outputs in the context of this study are the players being developed and retained. These inputs and the implementation of player retention strategies lead to the realization of the outputs, namely, the elevation of elite hockey players the next level (i.e., NHL or CHL), and retaining those players who are moving from Peewee to the Bantam level.

Boundary Spanning Units

Through their implementation of residential boundary regulation, the governing bodies (i.e., HC, HA, and EMHA) act as boundary spanning units. That is, a residential boundary regulation stabilizes the technical core by providing a buffer against environmental fluctuations such as the reputation of successful club hockey organizations or changes in the size of the city. As the Edmonton region grows, the population distribution changes. The interviewees of the club hockey organizations within the city limits expressed concerns about the current boundaries that regulate the organizations. Their enactors intended these regulations to ensure that each of the club hockey organizations has access to a talent pool that, at the Bantam level, fills the roster spots each year, which is a vital factor in club hockey organizations' ability to retain players.

An organization's reputation for having winning teams or for being successful in producing elite level hockey players may be a factor in influencing a player's decision to play with that organization. If there were no boundaries and boundary rules, organizations with better facilities or a reputation for producing successful players could lure players to play for them, with the result that less fortunate organizations might not have enough players to compete at the elite

level (P11). Thus, the residential boundary regulations, in restricting player mobility, assist in maintaining the stability of the technical core.

Conclusions Relative to Future Directions

Factors relating to player transitions change as an athlete moves from a mass-participation based organization (house league) to a more competitive based organization (club level hockey). What is especially interesting about the Edmonton region system is that it is a closed system. It is its own universe. One key consequence of a closed, self-governing hockey system is that it is relatively impervious to outside penetration by another hockey organizations. Also, it is a virtual impossibility for another organization to develop within the system without the approval of the system. A second consequence of a closed system is that the system overall is more likely to achieve retention success than would an open system. In other words, a closed system, such as the researcher found the Edmonton region to be, achieves order in what otherwise could be chaotic talent placement and transition situation.

A closed system allows one or multiple organizations to "feed" an elite level organization on an orderly basis. Factors that are involved in such transitions become the focus of strong communication ties between the house league based organization and the elite level organization. In an open system, where players are more or less free to enter and exit the system as they wish, there will be much less continuity for the athlete in terms of training and professional development. An example of an open system would where there are no boundaries regulations that exist within the Greater Toronto Hockey League (GTHL) in Toronto, Canada.

Players are able to try out for any club hockey organizations within this league, and the club hockey organizations are able to actively recruit to fill roster positions for their teams. A closed system fosters communication among organizations, which in the case of the Edmonton region means communication with respect to factors that have a positive influence on player retention. Also, a closed system also assists in bridging the gap between the mass participation-based organizations and competitive-based organizations through allowing systems to be created to facilitate player development and to prepare players for entering into club level hockey.

The challenge for management operating in a closed system is that elite level sport organizations in the technical core rely on and must adapt to the governing bodies' policies and regulations for the sake of maintaining organizational stability. Closed systems restrict mobility with elite level organizations. From a retention standpoint, restricting the mobility of a player/athlete through a closed system can be a greater deterrent for not continuing to pursue competing at the elite level. This can be a deterrent if the strategies implemented by management of the elite sport organization are not match with expectations of the athlete/player and parent for development.

Another deterrent for players and parents is that if the organization has not experienced a high level of success (e.g., wins by the team/coach, or getting players to the next level) then the players or parents will be less likely to want to actively pursue playing club level hockey. The question for parents and players becomes, “If a player is unable to try out for a successful organization that will

provide an opportunity to develop as a player, then why play and pay for elite level hockey when the house league organization allows a player to play with friends at less of a cost"? There is a great deal known about the “social and psychological parameters of sport participation” (Green, 2005, p. 249); however, there is a limited amount of information regarding sport systems, their actors, and the strategies involved by management to optimize athlete retention during the transition from the mass-participation level to the competitive level. This study represents a start in this direction.

Based on the design of Thompson’s model within the context of this study it can be suggested that the design of the hockey system in the Edmonton region is such that it has similar characteristics to that of a professional based sport system. In a professional based system there are “feeder” organizations that develop athletes where professional sport organizations can draw from a talent pool to make up teams with the most talented athletes, and there is exclusivity in membership where only those with the talent to play for the sport organization are selected. Evidence of professional systems is Major League Baseball and the “Farm” Leagues, and the NHL and American Hockey League.

In the case of Edmonton’s closed hockey system at the elite level, management draw on a talent pool from house league based organizations to make up their teams at the club level. There is a reliance on the house league based organizations to develop players and promote trying out for club level hockey. Exclusivity originates within Edmonton’s closed system through the fact that minor hockey players must try out for elite level hockey and in theory those

players selected have the talent level to compete at the elite level. Based on these comparisons, some questions that can be poised are: Is Canadian minor hockey system at the elite level moved to having professional characteristics that can classify the system as professional?; If so, what impact does this have on youth minor hockey players and parents?; and, Are other sports (e.g., baseball, football, basketball, or soccer) and their systems designed in a similar manner at the youth elite level? The answer to these questions warrants future research.

Limited research in the field of sport management has explored the connection that exists between sport systems and player retention. This study has made a contribution to the sport systems research in the field of sport management, by discussing retention in the context of keeping athletes within a system as there is a transition by athletes/players from a mass-participation base to more competitive levels. As this transitional point is a challenge for management of club hockey organizations, it becomes critical that sport managers have strong communication links with prospective athletes and parents in order to promote elite level sport. Thus, athlete retention is a critical facet of any elite level sport organization, what is identified from the findings from this study is that the success or lack of success of athlete retention can be dictated by design of the sport system. This is important for sport managers to consider when developing and implementing strategies for their elite level sport organizations.

To further the explore retention issues within sport systems, future research should investigate the retention strategies that may be found to exist within open sport systems. What are the similarities, differences and overlaps that

distinguish open and closed systems? How do variations in residential boundary regulations in open versus closed systems influence player retention and development? How do answers to such questions bear on larger organization theoretic issues? For example, does Thompson's model stand up equally well for open systems as it appears to for closed systems.

In sum, this study, relating as it does to understanding retention strategies within organizations operating in closed systems, opens the door to research necessity and opportunity in two general areas. The first area is the comparison between open and closed systems with regard to retention strategies. The second is the question of how organization theory is further illuminated by the findings of organizational investigations into both types of system.

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Chapter 3: RECRUITING, HIRING, AND RETAINING HOCKEY COACHES: THE IMPACT OF COACHING ON CLUB HOCKEY ORGANIZATIONS IN ALBERTA, CANADA [1]

Introduction

Canadian sport organizations at the grassroots level are often non-profit, volunteer organizations, with volunteers serving as members, executive board members, and, most importantly, coaches. According to Bouchet & Lehe (2010), coaches are the *lifeblood* of a youth sport organization, and are pivotal in the administration and implementation of athlete development programs and strategies (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). The recruitment and retention of volunteers is a primary concern for community- based organizations, particularly for those organizations with volunteer coaches (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010). This is all the more important since the number of qualified coaches able to coach at the elite grassroots level is limited and volunteer coaches are imperative for the development of athletes and to represent the sport organization to attract prospective athletes at the elite level.

Having the most qualified coach represent a non-profit and volunteer-driven elite level sport organization to the public can make the difference in the decision an athlete makes to compete for the particular organization at the elite level. Not being able to recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches, therefore, threatens the stability of elite level sport organizations. Stability is understood to

[1]A version of this study has been coauthored by Dr. Marvin Washington and has been submitted to the special issue on volunteerism for the *European Journal of Sport Management Quarterly*.

be based on using a qualified coach to attract a youth athletes to try out for an elite level sport organization. The recruitment, hiring, and retention of qualified coaches constitute critical imperatives for the management of sport organizations (Busser & Carruthers, 2010; Sotiriadou et al., 2008).

Local elite club hockey organizations (also known as rep hockey organizations) in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada (henceforth, Edmonton region), exemplify a specific type of a volunteer-based sport organization in which coaches is an essential resource but which struggle constantly to find qualified coaches. Coaches for these organizations are volunteers, which makes it challenging for managers (who are also volunteers in most cases) to find individuals who not only have the qualifications but who are willing to spend the time and resources that it takes to serve as a coach.

Local elite hockey club organizations (also identified as club hockey organizations) provide Canadian minor hockey players (also identified as players, or hockey players) with the opportunity to reach higher levels of competition, such as the National Hockey League (NHL) or the Canadian Hockey League (CHL). The elite level of club hockey competition in the Edmonton region reveals two levels of organization: AAA (the highest level; henceforth, *Triple A*) and AA (henceforth, *Double A*). Double A is a feeder league for Triple A level (Hockey Alberta, 2012). Club level hockey for most organizations in the Edmonton region starts at the Bantam (13 to 14 years old) and continues to the Midget (15 to 17 years old) level. These categories are considered pivotal for players as they

represent the age ranges that determine if a player is able to advance to a higher level of competition.

In the Edmonton region, coaches are very important in the design of the overall system. Coaches are important because they develop hockey players and represent the club hockey organization. Elite level hockey does not start until the Bantam level (Hockey Alberta [HA], 2010). Prior to Bantam, minor hockey players in the Edmonton region will compete in an inclusive house league-based program within a community based organization. A house league-based program "emphasizes 'non serious' enjoyment, whereas the selective leagues [elite level] emphasize skill display and athletic achievement" (Podilchak, 1983, p.15). Minor hockey players will compete in community-based organizations until Bantam at which level a player transitions from the Peewee level (11 to 12 years old) to the Bantam level. At this point, the player decides either to try out for club level hockey organization or to continue playing for a community-based organization.

Coaches are the "public face" of the organization. Their actions and experiences as coaches can be influential for players and parents when they decide to play club hockey. As the only truly public faces of their organizations, volunteer coaches occupy a unique and vital role within the club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region. In this position coaches are essentially the middle management of an organization where their responsibilities include player development, communicating with the parents of players, managing team functions, implementing initiatives set out by the club hockey organization, reporting the executive board of the club hockey organization, and ensuring that a

quality product (i.e., teams and players are achieving success) being produced; while being the "public face" of the organization to attract minor hockey players and their parents to transition and try out for club level hockey.

Because of the importance of coaches at the elite level and because of the struggle to find qualified coaches, this research raised the two questions: First, how do local club hockey organizations recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches as a strategy for maintaining the perception that such organizations are successful in the Edmonton region? Second, why are recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches so important to club hockey organizations? Cuskelly et al. (2006) suggested, "There has been no empirical evidence on the impact of volunteer management practices within community sport organizations…" (p.142). This research speaks to Cuskelly et al. (2006) by exploring club hockey organizations' recruiting, hiring, and retention practices, processes, and policies. This study is part of a broader study that explores organizations operating within Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System (CELHDS).

Since coaches represent the club hockey organization in public perception, this study employed the theoretical construct of *reputation* to understand importance of the recruitment, hiring, and retention of the most qualified coaches by club hockey organizations. As pointed out by Deephouse and Suchman (2008), reputation is a "generalized expectation about a firm's future behaviour or performance based on collective perceptions (either direct or, more often, vicarious) of past behaviour or performance" (p. 60). This study maintains that the more qualified the coach, the better the reputation of a club hockey organization.

A positive reputation helps sport organizations to recruit and to retain elite level athletes. To the extent that coaches contribute to a positive reputation, organizations will have better chances of finding themselves with the players they need. Attributes of reputation are *rivalry* and *differentiation (*Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Because there is a lack of qualified coaches, competition exists between club hockey organizations to recruit, hire, and retain the most qualified coaches. Differentiation is a necessary attribute for a club hockey organization to attract the most qualified coaches. Differentiation is understood to be the means through which an organization is different – through an organization's polices, strategies, operations, procedures, or structure – in comparison with another organization operating in the same system.

Understanding the Concepts: Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

Thomas and Wise (1999) suggested that recruiting potential job applicants is critical to the survival of an organization. According to Breaugh (1992), "Employee recruitment involves those organizational activities that (1) influence the number and/or types of applicants who apply for a position and/or (2) affect whether a job offer is accepted" (p. 4). This definition was simplified by Barber (1998), who stated that recruitment is "those practices and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees" (p. 5). This study understands recruitment processes to be those activities that facilitate the solicitation of coaches by management for the purpose of representing the interests of the club hockey organization.

Hiring follows upon the identification of a coach by a club hockey organization. Following Taylor and Giannantonio (1993), Barber (1998) suggested that the "recruitment and selection [i.e., hiring] processes occur simultaneously, and it is inevitable that one influences the other" (p.3). Chelladurai (2009) informs that the term *hiring* is used when a candidate has been selected and the time has come to offer a position to that individual within the organization. In general, those hiring-related activities include interviews, selection of a coach by the hiring committee, the presentation of the coach's name and credentials to the executive board of the club hockey organization, and, upon approval of the executive board, the offering of a coaching position to the selected coach within the club hockey organization.

Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, and Peterson (1999) found that a qualified coach is a critical factor in the perceived success of an organization. Retention can be understood first in terms of the factors that motivate an individual to continue involvement in coaching, and second in terms of the factors that the management of club hockey organization creates to ensure that a coach remains within the club hockey organization. Retention within the context of this study is the set of those actions, evaluations, and other strategies that club hockey organizations use to ensure that the coach does not leave the organization. Coaches are vital for the development of players, and coach retention is, because it enhances an organization's reputation, an important process for the organization's management. This researcher suggests that when an elite level organization is perceived as successful, players are more likely to continue

playing at that level, and are more likely to focus on hockey rather than the pursuit of other interests.

Manley, Greenlees, Thelwell, and Smith (2010) argued that the reputation and gender of the coach influences an athlete's expectation of coaching competency. Further, they argue, this expectation has implications for the coach–athlete relationship. Sotiriadou et al. (2008) believes that the teaching of a coach is based upon that coach's own training and experience is a key ingredient in player development. Manley et al. (2010) maintained that expectancies "represent the processes of utilizing observable cues, past experience and knowledge in order to predict specific outcomes and develop a set of rules about the world" (p. 517). Based on this understanding of expectancies, parents of players competing at the elite level expect that management and coaches are able to develop their son or daughter to reach the next level of hockey.

In club level hockey, parents have an expectation that their son or daughter will contribute to the long list of former Edmontonians who have played in the NHL (e.g., Jay Bouwmeester, Randy Gregg, Mark Messier, Rob Brown, Geoff Sanderson, and Cam Ward). This researcher argues that recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches is a reflection of the club hockey organization and constitutes a component of the club hockey organization's reputation. Both (i.e., the expectations of a coach, and the reputation of the club hockey organization), this research argues, are influential in players and parents' decisions regarding playing for a club hockey organization.

The Coaching and Hockey Literature as it Pertains to This Study

Previous literature within the field of sport management and coaching has focused on a number of different areas, including coaching certification (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009), coach reputation (Manley et al., 2010), coach motivation (Busser & Carruthers, 2010), coach hiring (Friend & LeUnes, 1989), coach retention processes (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010; Dixon & Warner, 2010), and volunteerism (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Existing research, however, "has almost exclusively focused on the *HRM* [Human Resource Management] of employees working in large for-profit organizations, with non-profit and volunteer-dependent organizations receiving scant attention" (Cuskelly et al., 2006, p. 142). Although little research has been conducted to examine the recruitment, hiring, and retention of coaches at the grassroots elite level, certain areas warrant research attention. Thus, this study explores an organizational view of management's processes for the recruitment, hiring, and retention of the most qualified coaches by club hockey organizations.

The previous literature does not contain a single study that addresses all three of the coach acquisition processes together (i.e., recruitment, hiring, and retention). Works discussing a single concept (either recruitment or retention) include Barber (1998), Friend and LeUnes (1989), Inglis et al. (1996), Knoppers (1992), and Manley et al. (2010). Curtis and Birch (1987) and Elliot and Maguire (2008) discussed player recruitment. The Curtis and Birch study explored whether North American professional ice hockey players are disproportionately recruited from rural and small communities. The Elliot and Maguire study focused on the

recruitment of Canadian ice hockey players to play for British professional teams. This study extends the recruitment research through its examination of all three. It attempts thereby to provide a more holistic overview of human resources processes that exist in volunteer-based sport organizations.

Although there has been extensive research on the sport of hockey (Curtis & Birch, 1987; Elliot & Maguire, 2008; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Holman, 2007; Mason, 2002; Mason, Buist, Edwards, & Duquette, 2007; Stevens, 2006), only a few studies have focused on hockey organizations at the grassroots elite level. Stevens (2006) discussed the change that occurred through the merger of two grassroots governing bodies, i.e., the merger of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) and Hockey Canada (HC) to form the Canadian Hockey Association (CHA). However, Stevens did not address the issue of coaching at this level. The fact that more than 500,000 young players per season participate in hockey organizations across Canada (Hockey Canada, 2011a) conveys the extreme popularity of the sport in Canada, and its importance within Canadian culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). This research extends the hockey research by exploring grassroots local club hockey organizations and coaching, and provides a new perspective on the role of the volunteer coach within an elite level hockey setting.

Methods

This study used case study methodology (Yin, 2003) to develop an understanding of the real-life accounts pertaining to management's recruitment, hiring, and retention of coaches. Participants were recruited from six club hockey

organizations located in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada, and three governing hockey bodies. The governing hockey bodies were Edmonton Minor Hockey Association (EMHA), Hockey Alberta (HA), and Hockey Canada (HC). Due to ethical considerations, the six club hockey organizations must remain anonymous and will be designated herein with numbers 1 through 6. Organizations 1, 2, 3, and 4 operate within the city of Edmonton, while Organizations 5 and 6 operate outside the city limits. The researcher selected these organizations because both CHL and NHL franchises draft their players from this region on a consistent basis.

Semi-structured interviews with 13 interviewees were conducted and audio recorded. The interviewees' professional identifications included hockey director, vice president, president, scout, team manager, and executive board manager, as well as upper level management from each of the club hockey organizations and the three governing bodies. The interviewees representing club hockey organizations held volunteer positions, while those associated with governing bodies held paid positions. All interviewees had firsthand knowledge, experience, and employment within the club hockey system and specifically within the operations of the club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region.

To preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the researcher used the designations P1 through to P13. Interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes at locations that included coffee shops, offices, and arena offices. In two cases, the interviewees requested that the interviews be conducted over the phone.

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. A copy of the information letter and consent form that the researcher provided to each study participant can be found in Appendices E and F. These documents stipulate that, in order to insure anonymity, neither the research nor the study itself will identify the interviewees. Because of the limited number organizations that exist within the Edmonton region and the limited number of governing bodies, the research informed the interviewees that completed anonymity could not be guaranteed but that the researcher would strive to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of organizations and interviewees at every level of the research. At this point, the researcher provided the interviewees with the option to consent or to withdraw from the study. In every instance, the interviewees provided verbal consent and the interview process continued.

The researcher used open-ended questions to facilitate dialog between interviewer and interviewee (Patton, 2002). The researcher asked 20 to 25 questions (see Appendix G and H). Topics for the representatives from the club hockey organizations included relationships with other club organizations, organizational history, policies, organizational procedures, past accomplishments, programs, coaching, revenues, ice time, league rules, and the club's view of the future. For participants representing governing bodies, the topics included system boundaries, player development, coaching, goals of the governing bodies, coaching literature, player literature, player registration, communication methods, concerns with the hockey industry at the grassroots level, and the future of hockey. For all interviewees, the number of questions was the same (n = 25).

To validate and augment the interviewees' responses, the research collected additional data from websites of the clubs and governing bodies; such data included the organization's mission statement, vision statement, long-term goals, short-term goals, membership rates, rules and regulations, sponsorship information, contact information, and the history of the organization and programs. These data sources contributed to the richness of the dataset for this study, and served to corroborate interviewee's responses.

Data Analysis

The research employed an interpretative approach to analyze multiple datasets to comprehend social actions, the meanings behind those actions, and the world in which the interviewees live and work (Creswell, 2003; Outhwaite, 1975). Furthermore, *interpretivism* allows for researchers "to explain the reasons for intentional action in relation to the whole set of concepts and practices in which they are embedded" (King, Keohane, &Verba, 1994, p.37).The concepts and practices (also identified as activities and practices) that are embedded within the context of this study were identified with the recruitment, hiring, and retention processes of coaches by club hockey organizations. The researcher assigned codes to these processes, which is based on themes in the interview data.

The researcher transcribed verbatim, reviewed and analyzed each interview. The researcher based conclusions on the codes that emerged from the findings (Trochim, 2006). The analysis had five stages, pursuant to the work of Edwards and Skinner (2009), and Miles and Huberman, (1994). In stage one, *familiarization*, the researcher became familiar with the data by reviewing the

audio recordings of interviews, transcribing the interviews, and studying the notes taken at the time of the interview. In the second stage, *thematic framework*, the researcher examined the data, line by line, for themes (e.g., *website advertising*). Some example of themes that were identified included coach's qualifications, word of mouth advertising, and mentorship. The researcher determined the themes relevant to the study according to the frequency of their occurrence in the responses and through inductive reasoning. As stated earlier, many themes were consistent with the recruitment, hiring, and retention processes of coaches by club hockey organizations. Some of the themes that emerged included website advertising, coach training, honoraria, parents versus nonparent coaching, and mentorship. The researcher then organized the discovered themes according to their relevance to the three processes under study.

In the third stage, *indexing*, the researcher applied codes to corresponding quotes and information from all data sources. Codes originated from stage two of the data analysis; an example of a code would be WA, which stands for website advertising. Coding consisted of manually reviewing each transcript and applying a corresponding code to each quote. In the fourth stage, *charting*, the researcher used QSR's NVivo 8, a computer software program that helped to isolate the code-quote correspondences to form a single document containing and presenting all of the interviewee responses in relation to a specific code. For example, interview data was accumulated by multiple interviewees on policies and pooled together to form one document called *Policies*.

The final stage, *interpretation*, called for the charting of results. In the interpretation stage, the researcher developed a matrix that would link interview and thematic variables with the processes for recruiting, hiring, and retaining coaches in the club hockey system. As an aid to interpretation, the researcher created a matrix display. A matrix involves "the crossing of two or more main dimensions or variables to see how they interact" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 239), as exemplified in Table 3.1. The first order constructs listed in the table represent those activities and practices implemented by the club hockey organizations and governing bodies. The second order constructs are used to classify the activities and practices under one of three headings: recruitment, hiring, and retention processes.

Table 3.1

First Order (Themes) and Second Order (Processes) Constructs

First Order Construct	Second Order Construct
Website advertising	Recruiting Processes
Mass media outlets	
Internal recruiting	
Word of mouth advertising	
Scouting	
Former players to coaches	
Partnerships with local school programs	
Future Leaders Development Program	
Submission of resume and application	Hiring Processes
Qualifications	
Training	
Coaching experience	
Playing experience	
Coaching staff	
Past performance as a coach	
Interviews	
Name of successful applicant to executive board for approval	
Hiring	
Parent versus nonparent coaching	
Coach's evaluations	
Honorariums	Retention Processes
Funding coach training	
Mentorship	
NCCP	
Other training	
Speak Out	
Body contact course	

Throughout the interview process, the research simultaneously collected material from the organizations' websites to validate the interviewee responses. The researcher read, analyzed, and coded each document, line by line, using the same codes identified in the interview data. The method did not merge the coded additional data with the interview data. Rather an Excel 2007 spreadsheet served as the repository for such information. This information includes the page number of the coded information along with a brief description of the associated contents.

Findings

The position of head coach is a complex, high-paced, and demanding assignment that involves recruiting, administrative duties, and teaching responsibilities (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). The findings support the essentiality of the coaching position within a club hockey organization: “Coach selection . . . that is our number one” (P10). P7 echoed this sentiment by stating. “in actuality coaches are it, besides the players. Like, I mean, coaches have the role of teacher, manager, and organizer. That is a big responsibility, on top of representing the organization and meeting our expectations. So it is big…” Coaches develop players and shape the reputation of the organization (P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, and P10). In the words of P1, “Coaches are an extension of the organization; they basically shape the reputation of the organization through their direct contact with the players". Because coaching shapes reputation, it is critical for management to recruit, hire, and retain the most qualified coaches.

Recruiting Processes

Recruiting, hiring, and retaining coaches are an issue for the interviewees. P2 indicated that “trying to find qualified coaches right now is a struggle". These were also the sentiments of P3, P4, P5, P9, and P10. P13 pointed out “there are probably about 100,000 active coaches in Canada”, and these coaches are needed to ensure that player development occurs within the CELHDS; thus, a coach is the *lifeblood* of a club hockey organization (P13). Positions at the Triple A levels typically attract elite level coaches and the highest number of applications (P4, P7, P9, and P10). The challenge for most organizations is to find coaches willing

to coach at the Double A level. Qualified coaches prefer to coach at the Triple A level since there is greater opportunity there to move on to higher levels of competition.

To recruit coaches, management of club hockey organizations use the following activities and methods: advertising on the organization's website, advertising in mass media outlets, recruiting through the internal structure of the club hockey organization, word of mouth advertising, scouting, reaching out to former players, and developing partnerships with local public school programs. Organizations 1 through 6 all engage in website advertising for vacant coaching positions. Another method for recruiting applicants for coaching positions is mass media advertising: "If we run short some years we try and put in a free announcement in the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Edmonton Sun* [newspapers in the Edmonton region] and try and get the word out one way or the other; I mean the word seems to get out for the most part" (P3).

Internal recruiting involves selecting a coach from a lower level within the organizational structure and having that individual move to a different team at a higher level of competition. Another means of internal recruiting can occur at lower levels within the system. This means that coaches may be recruited who are coaching in the community levels at the Peewee (11 to 12 years old) and lower levels, and who are experiencing successful seasons. All of the study participants indicated this to be a potential source for coach recruitment.

Some of the interviewees indicated that if presented with the opportunity to recruit from within their organization the management are likely to do so. The

rational lies in the inherent advantage of retaining coaches who have already been trained, coached, are familiar organizational structure or system (P1, P3, P5, P9, and P10). The interviewees assumed that a coach recruited from within the club or community organization knows the inner workings of the organization. This in turn would mean that less time is required for the organization to explain try out methods, policies, organization rules, and communication procedures.

All of the organizations employ word of mouth advertising regarding coaching positions though parents of players, executive directors, board members, and other coaches. For example, P10 indicated that management of the organization advertises “through word of mouth, and through the scouting coaches. We promote our program and try to get coaches to apply. So that is probably the biggest way that we recruit coaches and some within our own ranks as well". P3 echoed P10's statement by informing, “We get the word out, word of mouth, I think we’ve been fortunate that they come to us, I think the majority of the time they come to us. I think we have a bit of a reputation".

Another way that management uses word of mouth advertising is through coaches who learn of successful teams within organizations and who actively approach parents and other representatives of the organization to inquire about the availability of positions with the club hockey organization. This was the case with Organization 2, since the teams have the reputation of winning; this often attracts coaches to apply for vacant positions within their organization. A major advantage of word of mouth advertising is its low cost and low demand on time (P10).

The recruiting and scouting of coaches begins at the end of November and continues into April or May, when the organization selects the coaches. P1, P3, P4, and P5 indicated that at their organizations' games against other clubs, management and board members do not hesitate to approach the coaches of the opposing team and discuss the prospects of coaching for their organization. This is certainly the case when the coach and coaching staff of the opposing team are experiencing a winning season. P1 and P3 reported two important considerations for approaching a coach at the end of a hockey game: the reputation of the coach and the success of a coach in terms of wins and losses. Recruiting and scouting of coaches is conducted by current and former parents, executive board members, and employees of the organization.

Interviewees P2, P3, P4, and P7 indicated that management of club hockey organizations also recruits former players who have played for the organization and have achieved a high level of success—that is, who have played hockey at the club level or in the CHL, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), Alberta Junior Hockey League (AJHL), or even the National Hockey League (NHL). P4 also noted that former players are given roles as assistant coaches and mentored by a head coach, with the intention that the former player develops into a head coach. For example, Organization 2's head coach of a Bantam Triple A team was a former player, and had been coaching for that organization for four years. The logic that accompanies having former players become coaches is that former players will 1) have a strong knowledge base regarding components of the

game of hockey, which makes it easier to train other players, and 2) will understand the structure of competing at the club level.

Management of Organization 4 has adopted a different recruiting approach by recruiting instructor/teachers from public school hockey programs. Student/players in Edmonton's public school system have the option to participate in a hockey program. Public schools with hockey programs within the geographic radius of the club can become the intentional focus for recruiting coaches, since these schools have players who could compete for the organization, and who could be influenced by their the instructors/teachers to play for a particular organization. If a club hockey organization coach is also an instructor/teacher, the coach can shape the message that student/players receive concerning a particular organization. With regard to the importance of coaches promoting the club, P1 remarked, "If you are not going to promote who you are working for, then why would you have them".

These specialized public school programs in the Edmonton region are designed so that students can choose to have a hockey component in their education. Such components typically focus more on skill development than on team play. The instructor/teachers instruct the players during the day and then coaches them during the evenings. As a result, there is continuity between what the player is being taught during school hours and later during a player's time with the club team. Other interviewees have indicated that they do not actively pursue this strategy to the same extent as Organization 4, although some coaches are also teachers/instructors within the public school system (P1, P4, P5, P8, and P10).

To help club hockey organizations increase the number of qualified coaches, Hockey Alberta (the provincial governing hockey body for Alberta) developed the Future Leaders Development Program. The purpose of this program is "to provide Hockey Alberta with a platform to develop and train individuals in hockey to be effective on-ice instructors and leaders" (Hockey Alberta [HA], 2012, p. 1). This program focuses on postsecondary students who wish to remain involved in hockey, but not necessarily play. This is a course-based program, in which the student training involves mentoring on ice as well as off-ice in a classroom setting. The topics of these sessions include designing practice drills, communication tactics, leadership, and self- and team-building strategies (HA, 2012). This program is used to engage young coaches within the hockey industry, with the intention that individuals will become interested in coaching and remain as active coaches over the long term, while receiving the necessary qualification to coach at all grassroots levels.

Coach Hiring Processes

The coach hiring process for club hockey organizations begins with the submission of coaching resumes and applications prior to late March or April. Selected applicants then go through an interview process, as indicated by P1 through P10. Depending on the organization's policies, procedures, and availability of individuals to conduct an interview, the process can involve the entire board of directors or a select few individuals. For example, the executive board of Organization 2 conducts a panel interview, whereas in some of the other organizations, the interview committee consists of two to three of the executive

board members. Upon completion of the interview process, the interviewers make recommendations to the executive board of the club hockey organization. Typically, the board endorses a recommended applicant and votes in favor of offering a position.

According to study participants, important coaching qualifications include training, coaching experience, past playing experience, availability of a coaching staff, and past coaching performance. P1 stated, “The knowledge, past performances, where did they come from, communications skills, those would be the top ones in selecting a coach". Another qualification is coaching philosophy, which should be consistent with the club hockey organization’s philosophy and goals: “Coaches are imperative for our organization. They develop our hockey players and represent the philosophy and goals of our organization” (P10). Alignment of the coach and organization’s philosophies provides a greater opportunity for coach and players to achieve success (P1, P2, P3, and P10).

A potential applicant is more highly valued to the extent that this applicant has, or can identify and attract a coaching staff. Such value added stems from the fact that executive board members will not have to spend additional time and resources recruiting coaches to support the head coach. A coaching staff can consist of assistant coaches, a team manager, or trainers. P1, P2, and P5 identified that having a coaching staff was an important factor in considering a coach’s application. It was not as important for executive board members of Organization 2; however, their interviewers do raise the subject.

Club hockey organizations make their final coaching decisions by the end of April or the beginning of May. Because of the scarcity of qualified coaches, club hockey organizations compete with one another to hire the strongest candidates for their organization. It becomes a race between organizations for who will be the first to offer a position to the most qualified individual. Time is a critical factor. Early decisions result in a competitive edge for one organization over another.

Another coach selection issue, on which the organizations vary considerably, is whether an organization allows parents to be coaches. Three of the six organizations do not allow parent coaching, and all of the organizations confirmed that parents of team members could not coach at the Midget Triple A level. Parents tend to favor their own children with extra ice time, as hockey executives and directors observed. For players, ice time is a critical factor in gaining exposure to CHL scouts and scouts from other leagues. In the words of P2 of Organization 1, “The parent coach syndrome is favoritism". P2 explained that in some cases, the coach’s children are given extra ice time that they did not earn or do not deserve, and that such favoritism results in animosity between other parents, other coaches, and team management.

To alleviate this problem, organizations have generally come to the realization that the best course of action is to have a policy regarding parent versus nonparent coaches. Notwithstanding any such policy, management still sees the principle challenge as finding ways to attracting non-parent coaches

using incentives that include fully funded elite level coaching education, and honoraria for head coaches and their coaching staff.

Club hockey organizations have expectations of coaches. Clubs deliver these expectations at the time of hire through verbal and written communications. The written communication is often a manual. The club hockey organization also hosts a meeting with the coach to discuss expectations verbally. These information sessions include all of the coaches and management within an organization. Management conducts them so that coaches can meet other coaches, organize tryouts, get contact information for other coaches and coach mentors, and gather general information about the club. These information sessions set out for coaches the management's expectations for the upcoming season.

Clubs evaluate coaches throughout the season on their abilities to meet the expectations of the organization and parents. In the case of Organization 1, management asks both parents and players fill out a coach and organization evaluation form twice during the season. The midseason evaluation provides the coach with feedback about whether he or she is meeting parents and players' expectations (P1). Expectations of the club hockey organization itself include the number of wins versus losses, the development of players, the coach's ability to execute a coaching plan, or the ability of the coach to meet the goals of the organization. Each organization monitors its expectations and conducts interviews with coaches in order to provide necessary feedback.

Coach Retention Processes

The analysis of the study's data reveals a theme relating to the retention of coaches. Almost all interviewees remarked on the high turnover rates among coaches. P6 indicated there is a “very high turnover in coaching. The most is three years that I’ve had the same coach. It really is a challenge then for the Organization to keep coaches. I hear about it all the time with other organizations". Other interviewees indicated that coaching turnover occurs every one to three years. P9 noted, “Volunteers in general are falling out of favor; people feel that they don’t have the time, or they feel that they don’t want to expose themselves to the rigors of volunteerism". P10 went onto explain that keeping a coach is a challenge because of cost, availability of time, parent's and management’s pressure for success, and opportunities that are available for coaches to advance to higher levels of competition.

Another particular challenge for management is the retention of non-parent coaches because a poor season or difficult social challenges leave the non-parent coach with little reason to carry on. This is less a problem in the case of parent coaches because of this coach's obvious stake in the success of his team. Those club hockey organizations that do not allow parent coaches are relatively more challenged in finding methods “to ensure that the benefits of volunteering continue to outweigh the costs” (Hockey Canada [HC], 2011c, p. 25).

P4 stated that “generally speaking about three years is about the average. Coaches like to move on. They like to move up". Organizations provide coaches the opportunity to advance to higher levels of competition, which is the case for

all of the interviewees who participated in this study. For example, at the Bantam AA level, coaches look to move up to Bantam Triple A or higher. If the coach's current organization cannot provide this opportunity, the coach may be more inclined to move between organizations, as suggested by P2, P3, P8, P9, and P10. It is common to find that coaches have coached for multiple club hockey organizations.

Given the high rate of turnover, management has implemented a number of different activities and practices to ensure that coaches remains with the organization:

> When volunteer initiatives are well managed and individuals are matched to service opportunities that are mutually beneficial to the association and the volunteer, your recruitment job becomes much easier. Satisfied volunteer coaches can be strong advocates for your organization's mission and persuasive partners on your volunteer recruitment team. (HC, 2011c, p. 25)

The activities and practices that club hockey organizations use to retain coaches include providing coach honoraria, coach training; and opportunities for coaches to coach at higher levels.

Because coaches in the Edmonton region are volunteers, club hockey organizations must provide incentives to retain coaches. P4 stated,

> Well, most of the clubs give them some kind of an honorarium. And it's starting to become that way with hockey, our honoraria are creeping up,

> up, and some clubs are paying . . . full salary. Not a huge salary but it's still significant amount of money.

P4 further explained, "we need to remain competitive with our honoraria with other clubs; that is also how we retain coaches". Similar sentiments were echoed by P2, who further explained that honoraria are provided by all of the club hockey organizations. Honoraria are allotted to the head coaches and their coaching staff for their work and travel time. P5 indicated that they approach other club level organizations to inquire as to what is being allotted as an honoraria by other organizations, as a means of insuring that his club is paying similar amounts as are other clubs.

Honoraria ranged from $1,000 to $2,500 per month. Funding amounts are contingent upon the caliber of the league (i.e., Triple A versus Double A). In most cases the head coach is responsible for the allocation of funds to the remainder of the coaching staff. Club managements make the coach accountable to the coaching staff regarding the distribution of funding amounts.

P13 suggested, "it's going to get to the point where they'll be getting paid to coach". P13 was alluding to the fact that honoraria can lead to a coach's being on the payroll rather than in a volunteer position. A reason for paying coaches is that:

> People are willing to pay for better coaching, better instruction, and it is being seen at the Minor Hockey Association [club hockey organization] level. There's a lot of associations now that are hiring, not an administrator, but a technical director or a head coach who works with all

> the coaches to make all the coaches better and teach them how to teach the skills and that type of thing. So professionalism is really coming into play. (P13)

This is an apparent concern for the governing bodies, because a paid coaching staff increases the likely emphasis on winning as opposed to player development. This could mean that certain players may not play at certain times in the game because of their relative lack of skill and because of the heightened motivation on the part of team "stars" to win the game.

Club hockey organizations fund coaching development. The theory is that by training coaches, coaches will become able to develop elite level hockey players, thereby preserving Canada's ranking as the primary world producer and developer of hockey players to professional organizations (e.g., NHL). This concept guides all governing bodies to educate coaches within CELHDS.

Coaches often seek the training opportunities necessary to coach reach higher levels. Management of club hockey organizations provides incentives for the coaches to remain with the organization through the provision of funds for such training for coaches.

> One of the things that we want to do is develop coaches. We are doing that by offering the courses for them. We always set that up, make sure they have the right qualifications and the right courses that they have taken for the level that they are coaching at so that they remain with the organization. (P10)

With training as the first element of coach development, the second is support by the club hockey organization. Management of the club hockey organizations typically utilizes two support resources, namely, the team director and the coach mentor. Club hockey organization's management assigns team directors to a team or group of teams to act as the liaison between the team, the coach, and the organization. For example, P9 and P10 indicated that because of a lack of volunteers, one director is responsible for multiple teams. In contrast, P1 and P2 indicated that one director is assigned per team. A director who looks after multiple teams is less likely to be able to meet the needs of all the teams. Both P9 and P10 stated that they were switching to a one director – one team approach.

Mentorship is the second form of support that club hockey organizations can provide for new coaches, struggling coaches, or coaches who need assistance. Coaching mentorship strategies can be found in a document called the *National Coach Mentorship Program* (NCMP), which was developed by Hockey Canada (the national governing hockey body for Canada). The NCMP describes mentorship as "a relationship between a guide (mentor) and a coach, which enables the coach to become more successful in all aspects of his/her coaching skills" (HC, 2011d, p. 1). The implementation of the program was the result of an evaluation conducted by the Coaching Association of Canada's (CAC's) National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), which determined that coaches at all levels need to experience mentoring for the future growth of coaching in Canada. The NCMP goal is "improved athlete development through the establishment of a national coach mentoring program" (HC, 2011d, p. 1).

Typically, coach mentors are former coaches who have been with a club hockey organization for a number of years as a coach, have coached at a high level (e.g., AJHL or CHL), or are former NHL players. These mentors pass on their knowledge and discuss their experiences with the head and assistant coaches of the club hockey organization's teams as a means of providing guidance. The specific responsibilities of coach mentors are to assist the coaching staff in operations, player skill tactics, and management of their players. Each club organization has a different expectation of the coach mentors. Often, these expectations include the attendance of team practices and games, host coaching seminars, and direct interaction with the coaches.

Organization 2 has four individuals classified as coach development mentors, while Organizations 1 and 3 each have one coach mentor. P5 explained, "Our Major Midget Triple A coach leads up the mentorship program. He also doles out the philosophy, so our coaching philosophy is handed down from Midget Triple all the way down. . . . All the coaches follow the philosophy". This board feels that the coach at the Midget Triple A level is the most qualified coach within the organization, and thus is the most qualified person to mentor other coaches within the organization. In other organizations, however, mentors do not have dual roles.

Coach training is often the responsibility of the individual club hockey organizations. Coaches are required by Hockey Canada (HC) to take specific certification-based training for the category and age level at which they are coaching. The HC mandates such training. The basis for this training is the

NCCP, which is a competency-based training program that is the "national standard for coach training and certification for 65 sports in Canada since 1974" (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009, p. 234). The NCCP is administered via through workshops. Its curriculum addresses skills at all level, "from the first-time coach to the head coach of a national team" (p. 234). Hockey Alberta (HA) and the Edmonton Minor Hockey Association (EMHA), the two Alberta, Canada hockey governing bodies, are responsible for ensuring that coaches meet the necessary certification requirements to coach at the elite level.

To accommodate the club hockey organizations, specialized clinics (as provided by EMHA and HA) are developed to train coaches in teaching techniques associated with skill development, game tactics, bench, and team management. These clinics for coaches lead to NCCP certification. The NCCP allows coaches to acquire the necessary tools and knowledge to enable them to work effectively with their players, parents, and organization (HC, 2011e). In order to be certified to coach within the CELHDS, coaches are required by the governing hockey bodies to take courses and fulfill certain requirements, such as passing tests, writing essays, and creating practice plans. Club hockey organizations fund most of the required training. Such funding provides an incentive for a coach to remain with the organization, or to apply for the position the coach now holds in the first place.

Coach training and certification consists of three training streams. These are 1) Coach, 2) Development, and 3) High Performance (HC, 2011e). This discussion focuses on the Development and High Performance streams since the

coach stream is not applicable to this research setting. The HC bases all three programs on its Long Term Player Development (LTPD) model. This is HC's version of the Long Term Athlete Development Model, which in turn is based on the Canadian Sport for Life framework for sport development in Canada. The LTPD model "is an eight-stage model based on the physical, mental, emotional and cognitive development of children and adolescents" (HC, 2011b, p. 6).

Each training stream is designated for coaching a specific category and age level of competition. The Development stream is required for coaches at the club hockey level (Double A or Triple A levels), Junior B levels, or for provincial or regional teams. The Development stream has two sub-streams: Development 1 and Development 2. Both sub-streams require 2-day training clinics (a total of 16 hours), where training occurs in a classroom setting (HC, 2011e). In some cases, training clinics have an on-ice component, contingent upon the availability of ice time and the location of the clinic.

The High Performance stream trains coaches who wish to coach at a national (i.e., Midget Triple A, Major Junior A, and university teams) or at the international level (i.e., national and minor professional teams). The High Performance stream comprises two sub-streams: High Performance 1 and High Performance 2. High Performance 1 is for the national level of competition, while High Performance 2 is for the international level of competition. In general, the High Performance streams are heavily time-intensive. In fact, the training for this stream is implemented over six days in conjunction with U-16 Team Alberta tryouts. Coaches apply to HA, and must demonstrate for admission that they have

been and will continue to be coaching at the elite hockey level. This stream has both on-ice and off-ice training components (HC, 2011e).

In addition to the three training streams, HC provides supplementary compulsory courses. Speak Out was designed by HC in 1997 and is used by the governing hockey bodies to "educate and prevent bullying, harassment and abuse in hockey across Canada" (HC, 2011f, p. 1). A body-checking course is mandatory for coaches of organizations where body contact is legal (age 12 and older). The purpose of this course is to ensure that coaches teach players proper body contact techniques, so that hockey in Canada at the elite level will sustain fewer injuries attributable to body contact.

Discussion

This study set out to answer two research questions. The first question focused on how local club hockey organizations recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches as a strategy for maintaining the perception that such organizations are successful in the Edmonton region. The findings indicated that organizations engage in a variety of activities and practices to achieve this goal. These activities and practices were considered by club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies to be imperative for the coaching position as well as for ensuring stability for volunteer- based club hockey organizations.

The second research question dealt with why recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches are so important to club hockey organizations. Organizations view coaches as extensions of the organization (P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, and P10), and see them as key in forming the reputation of the organization.

By successfully recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches, club organizations establish a reputation for the organization and its successes in the coaching area. A club hockey organization's past ability to recruit and retain qualified coaches serves as evidence for potential players and parents as measures for the success of the development program. This then creates the perception that opportunities for advancement exist for players competing at the elite level, thereby making the organization attractive to players and parents who are considering entering into the club hockey system.

Coaches provide the connection among the organization, the athlete, and the parent (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010; Manley et al., 2010; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). As a result, sport managers want their coaches' teaching practices, experience and training to reflect the organization's goals and philosophies. Manley et al. (2010), in their study of the coach–athlete relationship, found that the expectations formed by players and parents can be based on a coach's reputation, and that employing qualified coaches enhances the level of expectation that parents will have regarding their child's avenue for reaching the next level of competence.

A coach's training is often contingent upon the organization's willingness to fund the training to new and existing coaches. Paraphrasing Wells and Arthur-Banning (2008), Busser and Caruthers (2010) stated, "coaches must be trained to intentionally structure their interactions with youth, as well as the sport environment, to produce positive outcomes" (p. 129). Within the context of this study, those positive outcomes can be a reflection of the extensive coach training

certification processes provided by HC, HA, EMHA, and local club hockey organizations.

Management of organizations engages in activities, development strategies, or the implementation of policies and procedures in an effort to gain a desired result that shapes the reputation of the organization (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, & Sever, 2005). This desired result can come in the form of monetary or nonmonetary rewards, where the rewards are contingent upon the performance of the organization (Washington & Zajac, 2005). The common goal of club hockey organizations is to get the player to the next level of competition. Coaches are the ones who develop the players, providing the necessary skill sets to advance players to higher levels such as the CHL, NCAA, or NHL. By ensuring that coaches receive the proper training and have the credentials to coach at the elite level, management is attempting not only to retain the coach, but also to ensure that HC's player development standards remain at a consistently high level. Essentially, management can influence the reputation of the club hockey organization by controlling the training that a coach receives.

Coaches are teachers, role models, and leaders (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012; Misener & Danylchuk, 2009). They play a critical role in the development of players, and it is the coach's training and experience that enable an organization to produce a *quality product*. Rindova et al. (2005) identified the production of a quality product as a dimension of reputation. In this instance, the coach produces the quality product in the form of a quality player. The coach

achieves this during the process of developing that player's skill set to the point that the player is able to play at the next level (P1, P2, P3, and P7). Having a player reach the next level is a reflection of management's ability to recruit, hire, and retain the most qualified coaches, thereby enhancing the reputation of the organization.

Organizational scholars have found that reputation is a valuable asset in reducing perceived uncertainties associated with an organization (Rindova et al., 2005; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). High coaching turnover can lead to uncertainty on the part of parents and players regarding player development. Coaching retention, eliminating variability in coaching quality from one year to the next, is a means through which management of club hockey organizations can alleviate uncertainty for aspiring elite level hockey players. Hence, the ability to retain coaches from year to year contributes to the reputation of the organization and reduces a key uncertainty concerning the organization.

Conclusion and Contributions

The availability of qualified coaches at the elite grassroots level is limited. This situation is of growing concern in the volunteer-driven component of the sport industry, where coaches constitute the foundations upon which player development programs are built. Therefore, the specific research questions posed for this study were as follows: First, how do local club hockey organizations recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches as a strategy for maintaining the perception that such organizations are successful in the Edmonton region? Second, why are recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches so important to

club hockey organizations? Based on the findings, it was determined that the recruitment, hiring, and retention of the most qualified coaches is an imperative facet of the club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region.

For volunteer-driven club hockey organizations, the competition for coaches is fierce. The scarcity of coaches in the Edmonton region drives each organization to be as creative as possible, so that the benefits of coaching as a volunteer outweigh the associated costs (HC, 2011c). Management attempts to gain a competitive advantage over other organizations by targeting successful coaches wherever and however possible. Management needs to communicate offerings effectively, such as honoraria and funded training for coaches. Wherever possible, management must target coaches with prior experience, as, for example, from the ranks of public school instructor/teachers who coach hockey in those schools.

In addition, the findings also indicated that management of club hockey organizations could reduce uncertainty regarding player development and, at the same time, enhance the reputation of the organization by recruiting, hiring, and retaining coaches and by developing programs to accomplish this. Having a highly qualified coach who can represent the organization becomes a major organizational resource for attracting and retaining players at the elite level and for maintaining organizational stability. Attracting and retaining players ensures that there is a substantial base for try outs from which the most talented players are able to be selected to represent the club hockey organization.

Contributions

The study contributes to the field of sport management. Sport managers are faced with the challenge of recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches while competing with other organizations for the same resources. This study highlights the processes and resources available to sport managers for recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches within the grassroots hockey industry in Canada. It also reveals the importance that coaching positions within a volunteer-based sport organization can have in shaping the reputation of the organization at the elite level. Management of volunteer-based organizations can use the coaching position to assist in managing the organization's reputation. By achieving such a goal, management provides itself with a key resource for retaining elite level hockey players. In addition, this study contributes to the literature on recruitment, hiring, and retention by applying these concepts to a grassroots elite level sport and to coaching. This is an underdeveloped research area of sport management that deserves more attention.

A perhaps inevitable outcome of the competition for the limited number of qualified coaches is the appearance of paid positions. P13 of HC indicated that this was a growing trend in CELHDS. This could result in the appearance on the empirical domain of bidding wars, with the resulting professionalization of coaching at the grassroots level. This means that the coaching position within club hockey organizations at the grassroots level is moving to a paid position, which is based on the qualifications needed for coaching (e.g., training, experiences, or coaching staff), and the expectations. What is doubtful under such circumstances

is whether the balance between winning and player development can be survive unscathed. This researcher believes that the introduction of paid positions will increase the pressure on coaches to win to the detriment of player development. This area warrants further consideration and reflection.

Sport management scholars have primarily discussed coaching in terms of volunteerism (Busser, & Carruthers, 2010; Cuskelly et al., 2006), and in terms of elements of a sport system (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou et al., 2008). Coaching is an underdeveloped research area of sport management. This study highlights the importance of the position of coach within an organization operating at the elite level of sport. The importance of this pivotal figure suggested to this researcher that sport management scholars should find an important research opportunity to exist with regard to coaches and coaching. This study establishes a framework and a basis for such a future study.

Furthermore, what is also evident from this study is that position of coach within a sport organization is essentially a middle manager where the coach is responsible for managing players and aspects of the team, producing a quality product (i.e., athlete/player development), reporting to the executive board, implementing the club hockey organizations goals, and enhancing the reputation of the organization for player retention purposes. In previous sport management research, the focus of the research has been on the volunteer executives that control the operations of the sport organization. This study brings to fruition the importance of the position of coach within a sport organizations, and then based on this recognized importance and the responsibilities of a coach as a middle

manager it becomes apparent that there needs to be more research conducted on the coaching position within the field of sport management.

The reputation is a valuable intangible resource that managers struggle to manage. Rindova et al. (2005) suggested that a dimension of reputation is to produce a quality product that represents the organization and producing a quality product is a signal to constituents (e.g., stakeholder, customers, or in the case of this study – minor hockey players and parents) as to the future production of the product, as Deephouse and Suchman (2008) would suggest by their definition of reputation. In an environment where most of the organizations are similar in structure, differentiation needs to occur at some level to attract individuals to represent the organization and have management of the organization to set itself apart from other organizations operating within the same environment.

Based on this study, reputation can be a tangible resource for an organization when linked with an individual, making it easier for managers of organizations to manage, while enabling an organization to differentiate itself from other organizations operating in the same environment. Thus reputation then can be used in the recruitment and retention practices for individuals representing an organization. The contribution then that this study then makes is to making the connection between organizational reputation, recruitment, hiring, and retention of individuals to represent an organization.

In hiring an individual, management need to be cognizant of how the individual is going to represent the organization, can this individual be a positive signal for constituents about producing a quality product, and this individual can

be a differentiating factor for organizations to utilize when recruiting, hiring, and retaining individuals to represent their organization. Thus, a suggestion is to incorporate reputation and reputation-based questions can be incorporated into the recruitment, hiring, and retention processes of an organization.

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Chapter 4: CHOOSE ME, CHOOSE ME!: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR CANADIAN ELITE LEVEL HOCKEY PLAYERS [1]

Introduction

Canadian elite level hockey players (also known as players, minor hockey players, or hockey players) and their parents are faced with the decision at a young age (14 to 16 years old) as to which hockey institutions will provide the greatest opportunity to progress from club level hockey (i.e., community-based organizations) to an institution that will increase the player's chances of playing in the National Hockey League (NHL) or at a post-secondary school (e.g., Boston College, Harvard, or the University of Alberta). There are primarily three institutions, comprised of member organizations, that can serve as stepping stones to make this transition: the Canadian Hockey League (CHL; also referred to as Major Junior), Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (also referred to as NCAA).

Canadian players are often recruited from club hockey organizations at minor hockey league level (i.e., grassroots) by the CHL, CIS, or NCAA member organizations. The CHL and CIS are primarily Canadian-based institutions; NCAA Division I is a US -based option that Canadian minor hockey players may pursue. Thus, the Canadian hockey system is unique in that young Canadian minor hockey players have a number of options in the form of the CHL, CIS, or NCAA hockey available to meet the elite level player's goals and objectives.

[1] A version of this study has been coauthored by Dr. Marvin Washington and has been submitted to the *Journal of Sport Management*.

What is interesting, however, is that young boys and their parents are making decisions well before they (or the organization recruiting them) can accurately access their potential. In addition, as the age at which a player is recruited into the CHL occurs so early (as early as 14 years old to 16 years old depending on the geographic location of the CHL franchise), and once a player plays in the CHL they are prohibited from playing in the NCAA, the decisions made at the age of 14 has lasting and irrevocable consequences.

From a management perspective, member organizations (i.e., CHL franchises, universities, and colleges) of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA are challenged with attracting and recruiting the most talented hockey players, because there are multiple organizations competing for a limited number of the most talented elite level Canadian minor hockey players. The goal of this study is to examine how the three different hockey institutions (CHL, CIS, and NCAA) provide support for their member organizations (CHL franchises, universities, and colleges) in the recruitment of Canadian hockey players. To examine this issue, I adopt an institutional theory framework.

An institutional framework refers to the notion that organizations are "generally understood to be systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundary-spanning exchanges" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.340). Institutions are a "natural product of social needs and pressure – a responsive, adaptive organism" (Selznick, 1957, p. 5) that "represents a social order or pattern that has attained a

certain state or property" (Jepperson, 1991, p.145). Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, and Suddaby (2008) understood institutions to be,

> more-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order. (p.5)

Jepperson (1991) categorized institutions in two ways: 1) a *physical entity* (i.e., Governing sport body) where an organization is identified as an institution, or 2) a *process* such as marriage or racism where there is no physical structure. The CHL, CIS, and NCAA hockey organizations as physical entities are representative of institutions.

Scholars in the field of sport management have conducted extensive research using institutional theory as a theoretical foundation for sport research (Amis et al., 2004; Edwards, Mason, & Washington, 2009; O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Slack & Hinings, 1994). Sport management studies have focused on understanding concepts such as isomorphism, legitimacy, institutionalization, organizational fields, and organizational homogeneity (Amis et al., 2004; Kikulis, 2000; O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Silk & Amis, 2000; Slack & Hinings, 1994). In addition, scholars have devoted a significant amount of attention to understanding the sport of hockey. Some of the research areas includes Canada's national identity (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Mason, 2002; Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006), the development of hockey arenas in the CHL (Mason, Buist, Edwards, & Duquette,

2007), player recruitment (Curtis & Birch, 1987; Elliot & Maguire, 2008), and the migration of Canadian hockey players to the NCAA (Holman, 2007).

Research that has used institutional theory to understand the availability support mechanisms to member organizations of institutions is limited. Thus, there are two relevant questions poised for this study. First, what types of policies and practices have been developed by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to facilitate the recruitment of Canadian hockey players by CHL franchises, universities, and colleges? Policies can consist of regulations that are affect both the Canadian minor hockey players decision to pursue the CHL, CIS, or NCAA, or the management of the member organizations of the CHL,CIS, or NCAA ability to attract the most talented prospective hockey players. While practices are understood to be the different activities that can be utilized by member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to attract Canadian players and be influential in the decision-making process about the options available that will meet their future goals and objectives (i.e., playing professional hockey, or pursuing an education).

Second, how do the outcomes of these support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA actually contribute to the recruitment of Canadian players by member organizations? The term support mechanisms are used in reference to the policies and practices that were found in the first research question. The policies and practices that are being explored are in actuality *support mechanisms* for the member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to utilize during the recruitment process of Canadian minor hockey players. In other words, because of

these support mechanisms the member organizations of CHL, CIS, and NCAA are more of an attractive option for prospective Canadian minor hockey players to consider as a potential pathway to pursue.

In answering these two research questions, this study provides a foundation for understanding the influence that these support mechanisms could play in a Canadian minor hockey player's decision to transition from club level hockey to playing in the CHL, CIS, or NCAA. Thus, the CHL, CIS, or the NCAA then are critical for Canadian minor hockey players in pursuing their future hockey endeavors, such as reaching the NHL or receiving a university or college education from an academic institution in Canada or the United States.

Research Setting: CHL, CIS, and NCAA

CHL

Canadian minor hockey players are drafted by CHL franchises between the ages of 14 to 16 years old depending on the geographic region. The CHL is responsible for the governance of the leagues, including the enforcement of rules, regulations, policies, and the development of programs that CHL franchises are required to implement. Canadian elite level hockey players are drafted from club hockey organizations to one of three leagues that comprise the CHL and these leagues collectively include 59 franchises (Appendix B). The leagues are the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), the Western Hockey League (WHL), and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL).The draft age is different for each league; in the WHL players are drafted at the age of 14, the OHL players are drafted age of 15, while in the QMJHL players are drafted at the age of 16.

Scouting potential players can start as early as 12 years old for some CHL franchises (Hockey Canada, 2012).

Players are drafted by the individual franchises that comprise the leagues, and that franchise holds the playing rights for the player and restricts the player from playing for other CHL franchises. When a hockey player is drafted, the player will attend a tryout camp where the individual is evaluated by the coaching staff of the CHL franchise and it is determined whether the player is able to be on the roster of for the opening game of the season. In a number of cases the player that is drafted is not likely from the city that the CHL is franchise is located in, and upon successfully making the team that player will move to that city where the CHL franchise will supply a billet family for the duration of the season. Currently, there are over 1,200 players between the ages of 16 and 21 representing the CHL.

CHL franchises have a strong history of developing hockey players who go on to play in the NHL. For example, the OHL has supplied more than 50% of all NHL players since 1969 (Ontario Hockey League [OHL], 2010a). Sidney Crosby is a current league player, for example, who chose the CHL pathway and is playing in the NHL. Crosby played major junior hockey in the QJMHL with the Rimouski Océanic and was drafted first overall by the Pittsburgh Penguins, where he is the current team captain. Canadian minor hockey players who do not make it to the NHL or other professional leagues will likely play in the CHL to the age of 21 and then will move onto endeavors, such as possibly playing in the CIS for a Canadian university.

CIS

The CIS is a multisport governing body that develops policies (i.e., eligibility standards for student athletes, membership rates, general rules for sports, and scholarships) for university sports across Canada. Thirty-four universities (Appendix C) across the following four regions of Canada compete for a national championship in hockey. These regions consist of Atlantic University Sport (AUS), Canada West, and the Ontario University Athletics (OUA). The CIS directly recruits the majority of its players from the CHL. A presentation delivered to potential players by CHL representatives reported that 74% of players in the 2009-2010 season were CHL graduates (OHL, 2010a). Because CHL graduates comprise the majority of CIS teams, the typical age of the players is often over the age of 21. For 2009-2010, the CIS reported that 868 student players participated on CIS hockey teams (CIS, 2011) and the student players are over the age of 18.

The number of CIS players that advanced to the NHL is limited. One exception is Steve Rucchin, a Canadian-born elite level hockey player who played for the University of Western Ontario and then went on to play in the NHL. While the number of players that advance from the CIS to the NHL is limited, the CIS still plays a critical role within the Canadian hockey industry by providing an avenue for Canadian players, while receiving a university education, to compete in a national championship at an elite level. Canadian colleges do not offer the same opportunity and this research excludes them for this reason.

NCAA

Similar to the CIS, the NCAA is a multisport governing body that oversees intercollegiate sport for United States colleges and universities. The development and implementation of university level recruitment policies and procedures are among the primary responsibilities of the NCAA. With fifty-nine schools in six conferences, Division I men's hockey provided opportunity to 1,596 hockey players in 2010-2011 (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2011a). The conferences are Atlantic Hockey, CCHA, ECAC Hockey, Independents, Hockey East, and the WCHA (Appendix D). Canadian players are recruited by member NCAA universities and colleges at the age of 18 years old, typically from Junior A and B leagues found within Canada. As noted by Holman (2007), the NCAA Division I has attracted Canadian hockey players to play for NCAA Division I schools since at least 1947. Jonathan Toews is an example of a Canadian-born hockey player who attended an NCAA school. Toews played for the University of North Dakota and is currently the team captain for the Chicago Blackhawks of the NHL.

Theoretical Framework

This research examines the CHL, CIS, and NCAA's institutional support mechanisms that are present for member organizations to be perceived as viable options for Canadian elite level players. Institutional scholars have recognized from management research that there is a relationship between organizations, institutions, and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001). A seminal study by Suchman (1995) defined legitimacy as "a

generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (p. 574). Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) noted that "legitimacy provides a basis for decision-making" (p. 416), and that "Most of the time, people do not have clear and complete evidence that a given action is the best or the only way to accomplish a goal, or that one goal is better than another" (p.146). Due to the competition for resources that exists between member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA, there are rules and requirements that member organizations must conform to "if they are to receive support and legitimacy…" (Scott & Meyer, 1983, p.149).

Scholars who have used institutional theory have noted that organizations conform to expectations, regulations, and policies as a means of establishing or maintaining legitimacy (Edwards et al., 2009; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001). As Suchman (1995) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) indicated, often the best way to gain or maintain legitimacy is to conform to the expectations and pressures associated with the environment. As a result, organizations become similar as a means of survival within the environment in which they operate by adopting similar processes and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). This is seemingly more prevalent in an environment where there is a dependency for a specific resource, for example hockey players in this study. Thus, organizations adopt similar practices and organizational features as a means of being perceived as legitimate to access

resources, which contributes to the organizations becoming more homogenous or similar within their environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Being perceived as a legitimate organization enhances the trustworthiness of organizations in an institutional environment (Suchman, 1995). Trustworthiness is established and maintained through the actions or mechanisms of an organization, which point to the credibility of the organization (Suchman, 1995). In addition, Jepperson (1991) explained that credibility can also be used as a rationale for explaining "what the organization is doing and why" (paraphrased in Suchman, 1995, 575). In a study by Fisher, Ilgen, and Hoyer (1979), these researchers recognized Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1953) to have identified three determinants of source credibility: *trust*, *experience*, and *whether the individual has a liking for the source of information about the organization*. *Source credibility* is a term used in reference to the credibility of a source from which an individual can evaluate the organization for the purpose of possible membership.

Trust as a determinant of credibility is a reference to the information that is provided about the organization. Fisher et al. (1979) indicated that, "An individual whose motives are trusted is more likely to be accepted as credible than an individual who is clearly trying to persuade or influence" (p.95). The second determinant of credibility is *expertise*. An individual is more likely to perceive an organization as credible as the expertise becomes apparent in the actions that management implements.

The final determinant of credibility is whether the individual has a *liking for the source of information about the organization*. This determinant is a

reference to the source of the information. For example, Fisher et al. (1979) suggested that for a job applicant this may mean that friends or favorite professors are credible sources of information about the organization. This research applies the determinants identified by Fisher et al. (1979) to address the second research question, namely, how do the outcomes of the support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA actually contribute to the recruitment of Canadian players?

The Concept of Recruitment in Relation to This Study

Thomas and Wise (1999) argued that recruitment is a critical factor in the survival of any type of organization. Researchers have defined the term *recruitment* in various ways. According to Breaugh (1992), "Employee recruitment involves those organizational activities that (1) influence the number and/or types of applicants who apply for a position and/or (2) affect whether a job offer is accepted" (p. 4). In the context of this study, the potential job applicants are players in the process of deciding which route they would like to pursue (e.g., CHL, CIS, or NCAA) who are actively being sought out by member organizations through recruitment practices.

Further, Barber (1998) defined recruitment as "those practices and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees" (p. 5). Chelladurai (2006) presented another way of understanding of recruitment:

> This step is similar to how one goes about buying a car, a suit, or a computer. Take the case of buying a car. After deciding on the type of car he or she wants, an individual visits more than one car dealer to ensure

> that he or she has a selection of that particular type of car from which to choose. In a similar manner, an organization in search of employees [or athletes] also must reach out to many different types of future employees. (p. 169)

Thus, management employs recruitment strategies to "increase the number or to change the characteristics of individuals who are willing to consider applying for or accepting a job" (Rynes & Barber, 1990, p. 287). This study understands recruitment to be the solicitation of the most talented Canadian elite level hockey players by management of CHL franchises, CIS universities, or NCAA Division I universities and colleges.

The recruitment literature discusses the concept of *attraction*. Scholars (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lauthenschlager, 1993; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998) have suggested that organizations themselves create the mechanisms that result in attraction. The development and implementation of support mechanisms by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA then can be theoretically attractive features that can motivate a Canadian hockey player to join CHL franchises, universities, and colleges during the recruitment process. As a result, this researcher believes these support mechanisms to be influential in a player's decision to pursue playing in the CHL, CIS, or NCAA.

The amount of research focusing on recruitment has increased over the past 30 years (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). As noted by Rynes (1991), research has primarily concentrated on recruitment sources (Curtis & Birch, 1987; Rynes &

Barber, 1990; Windolf, 1986), recruiters (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Thomas & Wise, 1999), and realistic job previews (Breaugh & Billings, 1988; McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Wanous, 1973). However, the number of studies that have discussed the concept of recruitment within the theoretical construct of legitimacy is slim, one of the few being Williamson (2000).

Williamson (2000), in his study of how small businesses recruit potential job applicants, expanded on the recruitment research by incorporating the concept of legitimacy within recruitment practices. Williamson argued that an organization's size and growth orientation, along with the extent of the management team's experience, help determine how much influence the environment can have on the organization. He found that small businesses could mimic other organizations that have experienced success and could adopt similar recruitment practices to gain maximum legitimacy. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) discuss this concept extensively.

Suchman (1995) understands legitimacy to derive from evaluation of the activities or characteristics of an organization. One bases this evaluation on societal comparisons of an organization's practices or activities where culturally sanctioned practices or activities are more desirable and better understood by constituents (Meyer & Scott, 1983; Suchman, 1995; Williamson, 2000). The key constituents within the context of this study are Canadian parents, players, and those professional organizations that exist at a higher level of competition (i.e., the NHL). The reason that the Canadian parents, players, and organizations

operating at a higher competition level are key constituents is that these actors have a potential vested interest in the institution through player development.

A constituent's legitimacy evaluation is based on those organizational practices and activities that are able to satisfy the constituent's goals and objectives by the organization or institution (Suchman, 1995). Canadian players who find credibility in the recruitment practices employed by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA through member organizations are likely to view these activities as proper and appropriate. Thus, these players are likely to view the CHL, CIS, and NCAA as legitimate options for their development.

In the context of sports, there have been a number of studies that have focused on intercollegiate recruiting of football or basketball players (Brown 1994; Dumond, Lynch, & Platania, 2008; Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Langelett, 2003) and other student athletes (Baxter et al., 1996; Judson et al., 2004). Few studies, however, have explored the attraction and recruitment of players by hockey organizations. Of this small number, Curtis and Birch (1987) found that organizations recruited North American professional ice hockey players disproportionately from rural and small communities. Holman (2007) conducted a study that provided a historical overview of the gravitation of elite level hockey players from Canada between 1947 and 1980 toward the NCAA. A more recent study by Elliot and Maguire (2008) examined the recruitment of Canadian hockey players to play British professional ice hockey. The fact of the paucity of research in the recruitment of Canadian hockey players creates both the opportunity and the need for the current empirical study. The recruitment of

Canadian hockey players at the institutional level is a domain that is largely without research or documentation.

The current study broadens the scope of all prior research by discussing both amateur (NCAA) and professional (CHL and CIS) hockey institutions, all of which compete in the same environment for the same resources. Therefore, by dealing with the theoretical intersection of legitimacy and recruitment, the present study contributes not only to the sports management literature, but also to research on legitimacy at the institutional level.

Method

This research employed qualitative research methods, in particular a case study methodology, to explore the support mechanisms offered by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. This type of methodology is useful for "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Furthermore, researchers use case studies to develop an understanding of individuals' accounts of real-life events that occur in organizations (Yin, 2003). By taking a case study approach, the researcher was able to gather firsthand accounts of what support mechanisms are available and how do the outcomes of these support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA actually contribute to the recruitment of Canadian players by member organizations.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data through phone interviews. The researcher conducted interviews with individuals who had firsthand knowledge, experience, and who enjoyed employment within the empirical setting. Some of the position that these individuals held within their respective organizations included presidents, scouts, player development directors, chairs of coaching committees, directors, and executive board members. In total, the researcher conducted 10 interviews with representatives from four different organizations. These organizations included the CHL, CIS, NCAA, and Hockey Canada (the governing hockey body for all of Canada).

Ethical and privacy considerations led the researcher to devise a coding system in which Participant 1 (P1) through Participant 10 (P10) represented the 10 subjects who would participate as interviewees. Participation was voluntary. The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta approved the methods used in this research and a copy of the original information letter and consent form could be found in Appendices I and J. It is important to note that anonymity could not be ensured due to the limited number of experts with firsthand knowledge and the number of organizations within the empirical setting. As a result, the researcher acquired through verbal consent to a waiver of anonymity; where the organization could be identified but the interviewees name remained anonymous.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, which in turn allowed for focused, two-way conversational

communication (Shank, 2002). Questions posed to the interviewee's explored rules, policies, procedures, human resources, and communications (Appendix K). Interviews ranged in duration between 40 and 60 minutes. The duration of the interviews was contingent upon the scope of the answers provided by the interviewees. With interviewee consent, the researcher audio recorded all interviews.

To augment the interview data, the researcher collected additional data from websites, documents, and newspaper and magazine articles. The researcher used these supplemental data sources for verification purposes, and to provide clarification for some of the interviewee's responses. This dataset consisted of information regarding the mission statement, vision statement, long-term goals, short-term goals, rules (e.g., hockey game rules) and regulations (e.g., recruitment and eligibility regulations), history of the organization, and articles that generally discuss the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. This information helped the researcher to qualify the interviewees' responses once the interview process was complete.

Data Analysis

The researcher took an interpretative approach to the analysis of the dataset (both interview transcripts and supplemental information). *Interpretivism* is used to comprehend social actions and the meanings behind those actions as well as to better understand the world in which interviewees live and work (Creswell, 2003; Outhwaite, 1975). Furthermore, King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) explained that researchers that use interpretivism to "seek to explain the reasons for intentional action in relation to the whole set of concepts and practices

in which they are embedded" (p.37). It is through these meanings that *categories* and *themes*, which are based on the participants' views and opinions, are identified and developed (Creswell, 2003). These themes and categories were identified within the context of this study as the support mechanisms implemented by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA.

The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim, resulting in more than 80 pages of interview data. The researcher then reviewed and analyzed each interview individually. Data analysis consisted of five stages (Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first was a familiarization stage during which the researcher became familiar with the data by reviewing the recorded interviews, by transcribing the interview data, and by studying notes taken by the researcher in connection with the interviews.

The second stage consisted of identifying a thematic framework from the data. The researcher examined interview transcripts line by line for themes. Themes are understood to be an identifiable concept that is consistently discussed. Themes originated from real-life examples that the interviewees provided in their transcribed interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The researcher coded specific text patterns, and regularities to support the development of conclusions (Trochim, 2006). The frequencies of the responses were a determinant for which themes were relevant. Of the themes identified *College Hockey Inc.*, *Scholarship Programs*, and *Strategic Alliances* were the most prevalent.

In the third stage, themes were indexed through applying codes to corresponding quotes and information collected from all data sources. The fourth

stage witnessed the charting and organization of the data using a computer program called QSR NVivo 8. This software organizes datasets into documents based on coding. One document, for example, was titled *Communication.* This document contained information from the datasets comprising interview quotations from each of the interviewees that were linked with communication. The software identified each quotation by organization and participant number. Such a mapping proved extremely helpful in managing and further processing the large amount of information that the study collected.

The fifth was the interpretive stage, which involved the categorization of the data with respect to the constructs of support mechanisms, and attributes of credibility. This was accomplished by using an instrument known as a matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which is "the crossing of two or more main dimensions or variables to see how they interact" (p. 239). This process led to the construction of a matrix that allowed specific quotes to be linked 1) to the institution to which the quotation applied and 2) to support mechanisms and attributes of credibility, as shown in Table 4.1. The matrix contained quotes that corresponded with each construct. There was no formal guide on how to correlate the constructs together; which meant that the research relied on the interview data, additional data, and the literature on recruitment and credibility to develop an understanding of how the constructs found within Table 4.1 correlated with one another.

Table 4.1

Examples of Interviewees Responses That Identify With First and Second Order Constructs

Institution	Quotes (examples)	First Order Construct	Second Order Construct
CHL	*The CHL provides a safety net for those guys who don't play pro hockey, which is the scholarship program.* (P6 of the CHL)	Scholarships Programs	Trust
	I think it's shown that at 16, 17, 18 and 19 the best players are playing major junior in Canada and then from there they can develop and go on to higher levels of hockey [i.e., NHL]. (P3 of the CHL)	Strategic Alliances	Expertise
CIS	*The CIS has a got a great partnership with the CHL… because of the scholarship program that they've created to attract top quality Canadian kids to stay in Canada.* (P9 of the CIS)	Strategic Alliances	Trust
NCAA	*College Hockey Inc. can be an informational resource for elite young players and their parents that are interested in the college route whether it be to Americans, Canadians, or to a lesser extent, Europeans.* (P10 of the NCAA)	College Hockey Inc.	Trust
	The NCAA hockey is producing more and more NHL players. So if your goal is to play in the NHL, why not do it through the college route. (P10 of the NCAA)	Strategic Alliances	Expertise

Findings

The researcher posed two questions for exploration for this dissertation research. The first research question asked was what types of policies and practices have been developed by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to facilitate the recruitment of Canadian hockey players by CHL franchises, universities, and colleges? The second research question posed was how the institutional outcomes of these support mechanisms contribute to the recruitment of Canadian players by

member organizations. After the data analysis, this researcher found these support mechanisms to be *College Hockey Inc.*, *Scholarship Programs*, and *Strategic Alliances*.

College Hockey Inc.

Canadian hockey players and their parents face a considerable challenge in educating themselves on the different pathways available for their development as hockey players and as educated persons. The NCAA is one option for Canadian hockey players. However, there are two kinds of regulations that affect whether a player will compete in the NCAA or in the CHL or CIS. One type of regulation addresses player eligibility; the other regulates the rules of recruitment for coaches and representatives of member organizations. Interviewees acknowledged the importance of these two as having particular impact on the recruitment practices of their member organizations (P5 and P10 of the NCAA).

Eligibility Regulations. In accordance with athlete eligibility and amateur status requirements, NCAA eligibility regulations deem a player ineligible to play for a Division I member organization if the player does any one or any combination of the following:

- Uses athletic skills (directly or indirectly) to receive payment from the sport.
- Accepts a promise of pay even if the pay is to be received following completion of intercollegiate athletics participation.
- Signs a contract or commitment of any kind to play professional athletics.

- Receives, directly or indirectly, a salary, reimbursement of expenses, or any other form of financial assistance from a professional sports organization.
- Competes on any professional athletics team.
- After initial full-time enrollment, enters into a professional draft.
- Enters into an agreement with an agent (NCAA, 2010).

Additionaly, there is a try out stipulation for NCAA players, which states:

> In men's ice hockey and skiing, a student-athlete remains eligible in a sport even though, prior to enrollment in a collegiate institution, the student-athlete may have tried out with a professional athletics team in a sport or received not more than one expense-paid visit from each professional team (or a combine including that team), provided such a visit did not exceed 48 hours and any payment or compensation in connection with the visit was not in excess of actual and necessary expenses. The 48-hour try out period begins at the time the individual arrives at the try out location. At the completion of the 48-hour period, the individual must depart the location of the try out immediately in order to receive return transportation expenses. A try out may extend beyond 48 hours if the individual self-finances additional expenses, including return transportation. A self-financed try out may be for any length of time. A violation of either of these regulations results in the player's ineligibility to play NCAA Division I hockey. (NCAA, 2010, p. 70)

The CHL is regarded as having professional hockey players playing in its leagues, and, therefore, one may classify the CHL as having professional teams with professional players. NCAA Regulation 12.2.3.2.4, which states, "Major Junior A Ice Hockey. Ice hockey teams in the United States and Canada, classified by the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association as Major Junior A teams, are considered professional teams under NCAA legislation" (NCAA, 2010, p. 72) confirms the classification. P10 of the NCAA further explained:

> The NCAA is all about the amateurism and the thing is about Major Junior hockey is that there are kids that are considered to be professionals. I think Brayden Schenn would be a perfect example. He signed an NHL contract, so in the eyes of the NCAA he's now a professional hockey player and since he signed an NHL contract and has been returned to his junior team, that junior team is now viewed as a professional team and that league is now viewed as a professional league. And I mean there's the little stipend, I mean WHL players do make a weekly contract or a monthly contract and although it may not be a lot, there are guys on their rosters that have signed NHL contracts.

Canadian minor hockey players are limited in their choices because of the NCAA player eligibility regulations. Specifically, Canadian hockey players and parents must accept the necessity of deciding between playing for a CHL franchise or for a NCAA Division I university or college. Eligibility regulations prevent Canadian hockey players from competing for both institutions (i.e., CHL, or NCAA). This

affects NCAA member schools by limiting the size of the Canadian player pool from which NCAA coaches and scouts can recruit.

In comparison, the CIS eligibility regulations are not as stringent. P2 of the CIS stated:

> The CIS doesn't consider junior hockey participation at any level to be subject to professional participation rules… The CIS has had former NHL players participate in the CIS provided they still had eligibility remaining. So, if someone plays professionally or even semi-professionally, like in the East Coast Hockey League, every year that they play there, they lose one of their five years of CIS eligibility.

In paraphrasing P2 of the CIS, Canadian players are able to explore professional avenues and then return to the CIS, which is a fairly attractive career options for Canadian players.

Recruitment Regulations. The second type of regulation consists of the recruitment rules to which coaches, coaching staff, and representatives of organizational members (e.g., scouts, and athletic directors) must subscribe. A coach may not contact a player through email or phone prior to June 15 of the player's Grade 10 year (P10 of the NCAA). This regulation presents a challenge for coaches at member organizations, because NCAA coaches "are often hamstrung by NCAA rules aimed primarily at basketball and football" (Kennedy, 2011, p. 12). NCAA coaches in the sport of hockey are hamstrung because they are not able to talk to Canadian players until June 15th of their Grade 10 year;

while there are currently no regulations that govern the contact of players by the CHL and CIS. This is an important fact to consider because:

> The critical "decision points" for parents and players usually occur when Junior level scouts, coaches, and team administrators begin taking special interest in players as early as the Pee Wee (12 years old) and Bantam (13 and 14 years old) levels of hockey. (Hockey Canada, 2012, p. 2)

By enforcing recruitment regulations, the CHL has a competitive advantage over the NCAA member organizations. The CHL does not impose any regulations that dictate when a CHL coach or scout can approach a potential player. For example, in the WHL, coaches and scouts routinely contact players when they are 13 to 14 years old, because the draft age in the WHL is 14 to 15 years old, depending on the player's birthday (P6 of the CHL). Because representatives of an NCAA member organization cannot contact a player until June 15 of the player's Grade 10 year, the earlier initial contact period provides the CHL coach and scouts a greater opportunity to influence a player to remain in Canada. However, an important point to consider is that players can approach NCAA coaches at any time to get more information about playing at a Division I university or college. P10 of the NCAA indicated that parents and players often do not know they can do this or how to go about doing it.

As a result of the regulations enacted by the NCAA, the Hockey Commissioners Association – the Hockey Commissioners Association is comprised of the commissioners of the six NCAA hockey conferences – endorsed a company called College Hockey Inc. to make presentations to prospective

hockey players on behalf of the 59 NCAA Division I coaches of the universities and colleges (P10 of the NCAA). Due to the recruitment restrictions, NCAA Division I coaches were finding that Canadian players had already signed contracts with CHL franchises prior to the time when NCAA coaches were permitted to approach a potential player. This meant that these players became ineligible to play in the NCAA before the coaches ever had a chance to talk to them (P10 of the NCAA). P5 of the NCAA explained that,

> college coaches are not permitted to initiate contact with a prospective student athlete until after June 15th of the sophomore year of high school. That's a problem in our sport because they're drafting them in the Western Hockey League at age 14 and these kids are being heavily recruited at age 14 and 15 and it puts the colleges at a disadvantage and so College Hockey Inc. are able to go where the coaches themselves can't go. College Hockey Inc. are able to go talk to elite groups of kids at younger ages and give them information about NCAA option and hopefully convince them to hang on to their eligibility so that they at least have a chance to talk to some of these colleges that might be interested in recruiting them.

P10 of the NCAA also explained that the funding for College Hockey Inc. was a result of the development fee to both Hockey Canada and USA Hockey by the NHL and part of the money that the NHL gives to USA Hockey is then given from USA Hockey to College Hockey Inc.

College Hockey Inc. is a resource for American, Canadian, and to a lesser extent, European players and their parents. As P10 of the NCAA explained:

> College Hockey Inc. are an informational resource that helps players and parents navigate the waters of NCAA recruiting and eligibility regulations. . . . A lot of Canadian kids aren't familiar with the NCAA route because unfortunately it's not on TV a lot up there, so College Hockey Inc. introduces them to NCAA Division I hockey. Due to the different rules and regulations, there are unfortunately a bunch of them, and sometimes it can be a little hairy and the next thing you know you're ineligible and representatives of College Hockey Inc. just try and educate them on that entire process.

Some of the other responsibilities of College Hockey Inc. are promoting hockey in the U.S. market, coming up with special events that promote the U.S. college game, and "to get college hockey more into the mainstream, whether it be TV time or Internet or advertising and just trying to grow and build the game" (P10 of the NCAA).

One of the ways in which representatives of College Hockey Inc. provide advice and information to Canadian players is through Collegiate Hockey Summits held in different cities across Canada. For example,

> College Hockey Inc. gathered the top 70 in 1994 and 1995 birthdates in the greater Toronto area and did a presentation for them as well as two on-ice sessions. Two little scrimmages were held, where representatives from College Hockey Inc. split them up into four teams and had over 25 Division I college coaches there to scout them, watch them, and just introduce them to the NCAA as a viable option and route you know that

> they're not necessarily familiar with, you know a lot of those kids have just heard only about the OHL and Major Junior and College Hockey Inc. just wants to let them know that college hockey is a great route as well. (P10 of the NCAA)

By having College Hockey Inc. represent the NCAA schools, NCAA coaches are able to provide information indirectly to Canadian players and not violate any of the recruitment regulations enforced by the NCAA. This allows NCAA member organizations to penetrate the Canadian hockey industry and remain competitive with both the CHL and CIS.

Scholarship Programs

In 2007, the average cost of a four-year education at an NCAA Division I university or college without a scholarship was estimated at $187,936.00, whereas four years of tuition, books, residence, and travel expenses at a CIS school has an estimated cost of $53,610.00 (Krukowska et al., 2007). Scholarships are an important consideration for those student players considering the pursuit of academics along with playing hockey. As P4 of the CHL explained:

> It's tough to get in the NHL, the NHL is 30 teams, 20 players, it's 600 players out of around the world, let's say I don't know, it's 50,000 guys that are right there at the doorstep to the NHL, so they won't all make it obviously, so you need another option.

Consequently, scholarship programs are a significant support mechanism offered by the CHL as a means of providing additional options for players who do not reach higher competitive levels.

Historically, the NCAA and member organizations were the first to offer scholarships to athletes/players. Each NCAA member organization is responsible for awarding and administering scholarships to its players. The NCAA member organizations offer over $2 billion in scholarships annually to more than 145,000 student athletes in various sports. The NCAA regulates and monitors the distribution of funds to players to ensure there are no violations of policies and regulations (NCAA, 2011b).

Hockey is one of the sports at the Division I level for which players are eligible to receive scholarships. Scholarships provided to players from all of the Division I hockey programs amount to $30 million dollars (College Hockey Inc., 2011a). If a player is “good enough to earn a Division I scholarship; essentially what you’re getting is a free, world class education at the value of $250,000 where you don’t have to pay a dime out of your pocket” (P10 of the NCAA). This can be an attractive feature for Canadian players considering the NCAA during the recruitment process.

By comparison, the CHL offers a school package to every player for each year that a player plays in the CHL (P1 of the CHL and P2 of the CIS). Unlike NCAA scholarships, the CHL package exists at the institutions level. For example, the OHL offers a scholarship for a player who plays for four years. That player earns a scholarship worth $7,000 per year for four years, notes (P1 of the CHL). The relationship that exists between major “junior hockey and CIS hockey is a unique one particularly as it relates to the school package that the junior

leagues have adopted and have grown over the years" (P2 of the CIS). P9 of the CIS elaborated on this relationship:

> At the age of 16, 17 you can play major junior hockey and continue your education while you're playing and then if you're not successful in signing an NHL contract then the years that you've played junior hockey will add up in terms of from a financial perspective, that the leagues will cover the cost of your education at the university level or college level when you're graduated from junior hockey. From the university's perspective it's a great lead-in for the CIS to get top quality players that have played at the highest levels across the country and are academically inclined and still have that dream of moving forward with their hockey careers.

Scholarship programs are an important consideration point for Canadian players and parents, as P2 of the CIS explained, "So if you're a junior hockey player for four years, a player will receive four years of fees and books; I can't remember the total value of a school package but they get that… for a junior player that makes staying in Canada and proceeding on to the CIS after their junior career fairly attractive."

In 2009–2010, the CHL provided $4.5 million in scholarships to players, and CHL players accounted for 74% (n = 482) of the players on CIS teams (OHL, 2010a). The source of players for a given CIS university is contingent upon the discretion of the coach; not all coaches may want to have CHL graduates or former CHL players may not want to join a particular CIS university. WHL franchises have provided over 3,000 scholarships worth in excess of $9 million to

players since 1993 (Western Hockey League [WHL], 2011), and the QMJHL provides $400,000 in scholarships annually (Quebec Major Junior Hockey League [QMJHL], 2011). Information concerning the extent of scholarship funding for players in the OHL was not accessible to this researcher. A player does not have to be playing hockey for a CIS team to receive a scholarship from the CHL. However, most players on CHL scholarships do play hockey for their university team.

Strategic Alliances

Strategic alliances or partnerships constitute a support mechanism used by CIS to ensure that member organization are able to benefit from a high talent level, by offering an attractive environment for prospective Canadian elite level hockey players. Dacin, Oliver, and Roy (2007) defined strategic alliances as:

> short or long term voluntary relations between organizations concerning one or more areas—such as market entry, skill acquisition, or technology exchange—in which both parties regulate future conduct *ex ante* by means of mutual forbearance and more or less formally specific contractual mechanisms. (p. 170)

The CIS and the CHL have forged one such alliance. This mechanism facilitates information sharing and resources between the allied institutions. P8 of the CIS explained that the CIS member organizations struggle to recruit Canadian players, that:

> the CIS is always fighting to get good information into the hands of high school student athletes and their coaches when they are making decisions

> about where to go to pursue their university education. So that is a challenge for the CIS.

In many cases, the CHL has overshadowed the success of the CIS in producing NHL hockey players, or the recognizability of the NCAA "brand" throughout North America, both of which serve to attract Canadian hockey players to the CHL or the NCAA (P8 of the CIS). By creating and maintaining a relationship with the CHL, the CIS is establishing and maintaining resources in the form of players for the universities. From a broader perspective, the interviewees conveyed the recurring underlying theme as to the importance for Canadian players to remain in Canada and not pursue other options, such as the NCAA, because interviewees felt that player development was stronger in Canada than in the United States (e.g., P1, P3, and P6 of the CHL; P2, P8, and P9 of the CIS; P7 of Hockey Canada).

The benefit of the CIS-CHL strategic alliance is that it ensures a standard in terms of the level of competition in the CIS, an attractive feature that tends to keep Canadian players in Canada (P9 of the CIS). CHL graduates play on the majority of CIS teams, and thus the CIS maintains its relationship with the primary development league for NHL talent (OHL, 2010a). The high number of CHL graduates in the CIS also helps the latter to maintain a high competitive level. "The CIS is the best kept secret in hockey, and the credibility of the league comes from the relationship that exists between the CIS and the franchises of the CHL" (P2 of the CIS).

Because of the strength of the relationship between the CIS and CHL, the NCAA does not pose a threat to the CIS's recruitment of Canadian players:

> The CIS is looking to bring in as many major junior players as the CIS can and, from a Canadian perspective, [the NCAA is] looking to take players from every other junior league but the CHL, just because of the way that their rules dictate. (P9)

Other alliances may be in place between various institutions (e.g., Hockey Canada, or Hockey Alberta), or organizations (e.g., Club hockey organizations), However, the alliance between the CIS and the CHL is most relevant to this study because of this study's focus on Canadian hockey players' pathways and options.

Another strategic alliance has linked the NHL and CHL. The CHL's ability to mimic the NHL experience, as identified by P6 of the CHL, is the basis for this alliance. The relationship between the NHL and CHL dates to 1969, when NHL franchises sponsored CHL franchises (Mason, Duquette, & Scherer, 2005). From 1969 to 2010, 50% of the players who were successful in NHL franchise drafts originated as CHL players (OHL, 2010a). Furthermore, players also receive coaching from individuals with NHL and other professional experiences (OHL, 2010a). As a result, many consider the CHL to be the number one junior development league for the NHL.

Of the 817 players competing in the NHL in 2010, 447 were graduates of the CHL, 213 were from the NCAA, and only one came from the CIS (OHL, 2010b). The reason for the relatively weak showing of the CIS is that the CIS typically recruits older players than do both the CHL and NCAA. These are

players that may have been already been drafted into the NHL or at the age of 18 did not have the talent to be drafted into the NHL. Table 4.2 shows the number of NHL players drafted from the CHL, CIS, and NCAA between 2000 and 2010.These statistics highlight the importance of these institutions for prospective players who are striving to reach the NHL.

Table 4.2

Sources of Talent From 2000 to 2010 in the NHL Draft From All Rounds

Year	CHL	Other[a]	NCAA
2010	107	33	9
2009	99	44	7
2008	110	37	9
2007	97	56	8
2006	78	35	18
2005	109	40	13
2004	113	44	28
2003	123	43	23
2002	101	32	41
2001	112	26	24
2000	101	27	35

Note. Adapted from *Players Drafted in All Rounds* [Data file], by Canadian Hockey League, 2010, Toronto, ON: OHL.
[a] This category includes the CIS. However, it is important to note that the players playing for a CIS school are typically older and have previously played in the CHL.

The CHL interviewees discussed a strategy that involves mimicking the NHL experience. This is accomplished by the CHL and CHL franchises developing a

> routine that is the closest to the NHL in terms of the number of games and the number of practices every day. So hockey-wise I think the CHL has a great program with the best players available in Canada. Sixty-eight games, that is close to the NHL schedule. . . (P4 of the CHL)

P1 and P3 of the CHL voiced similar sentiments. For example, P1 of the CHL stated, “The second part of the player environment side is creating that professional feel, that smaller version of the National Hockey League. . . . So it’s important to create that feel for our league.” In other words, by creating an environment that is similar to the NHL, a player’s transition from the CHL to the NHL is more likely to be a smooth one.

Most CIS players who move to the NHL have already been drafted by NHL teams prior to playing in the CIS and this is more the exception than the norm (P8 of the CIS). The CIS is seemingly a league for players who are looking to continue to play hockey at a high competition level but are unlikely to make the NHL. P9 from the CIS, further suggested that making the NHL is not as common as making the CIS. Players who finish their careers with the CIS often continue to play professionally in European leagues or elsewhere.

In the CHL and NCAA, the NHL has a presence linked directly with game rule changes implemented by the NHL, which in some cases are adopted by the CHL or the NCAA for the purpose of creating continuity for players. For example, in a presentation to prospective players, the OHL acknowledged that a player would experience “NHL playing rules” (OHL, 2010a). P5 of the NCAA indicated that:

> When the hockey rules committee [of the NCAA] meets each year to review proposed rules changes, an official from hockey operations at the NHL sits in and participates at the meeting. Participants always solicit

> input from the NHL with respect to proposed rules changes. (P5 of the NCAA)

As P5 further elaborated by explaining, “They’ll never be an exact parallel to the NHL but on most issues, on 90, 95% of the actual on ice product the game in fact mirror images the NHL game and the rules changes are mirror images to the NHL and in fact in many instances the language of the rules in college hockey parallel and are taken from the NHL rule book.”

This is not true for the CIS:

> Management of the CIS thinks that the university game is governed well enough that management don’t [*sic*] need to do that from that rule perspective… But any of the other rules that management feel have significant impact on bettering and improving the game management certainly look at those on an annual basis. (P9 of the CIS)

Conversely, NCAA hockey is a proven route to the NHL and the influence of the NHL on the college game is growing. In fact, a hockey player taking the college hockey route to the NHL is just as likely to be selected in the NHL draft as a player in Major Junior. In 2010-11, 30% of all NHL players were former college hockey players. This number represents growth from 34% from 10 years earlier (College Hockey Inc., 2011b, p. 1). This would suggest that the NCAA is becoming a viable option for players to reach the NHL.

Discussion

In the management literature, legitimacy is recognized as an important attribute for an organization operating within an institutional environment

(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Edwards et al., 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Legitimacy can be also influential in the successful recruiting of potential job applicants for an organization (Williamson, 2000) or in the case of this study the recruiting of Canadian hockey players by the member organizations of the CHL, CIS, or NCAA. The CHL, CIS, and NCAA have implemented support mechanisms that allow the member organizations them to remain competitive with one another for the recruitment of Canadian players.

The findings of this study indicate that the support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA establish credibility for the members of these institutions. In turn, credibility creates trusts between 14 year olds, their parents and the institutions. This dimension provides management with continuing access to the most talented Canadian elite level hockey players. By maintaining legitimacy, organizations, or, in the instance of this research, the CHL, CIS, and NCAA, create the perception of viability for Canadian players. Interviewees in this study did not directly reference credibility and legitimacy. These are underlying themes, however, that emerge consistently from the interviews.

Credibility

Jepperson (1991) and Suchman (1995) suggested that credibility helps explain the actions of organizations and institutions. By taking actions that establish credibility, management is able to create the perception of legitimacy within the operating environment. Hovland et al. (1953) identified three determinants of credibility. Fisher et al. (1979) subsequently discussed these. These determinants were *trust*, *expertise*, and *whether the individual has a liking*

for the source of information about the organization. Based on the findings of this study, two of these determinants, namely, trust and expertise, deserve further discussion. The third determinant is in applicable since it applies at the individual but not at the institutional level.

Trust as a determinant of credibility has been established as a link between Canadian players and parents with the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. The CIS member organizations recruit players directly out of the CHL, and, thereby, maintain a constant, high level of player quality and competition. As suggested in the findings, players that choose the CHL will have an NHL experience and, therefore, will have previously played at the professional level. This then establishes trust between the CIS and CHL graduate that the offerings of calibre of play within the league are conducive to that of which they are used too.

As discussed earlier, the NCAA eligibility and recruitment regulations restrict their member organizations' ability to recruit the most talented Canadian players. As a result, these organizations have focused mainly on Canadian players whom CHL franchises may have missed. Since the creation of College Hockey Inc., however, the recruitment equilibrium has shifted somewhat. Through the dissemination of information to Canadian players at an earlier age than NCAA eligibility rules would have allowed regarding the benefits of playing at NCAA Division I schools, College Hockey Inc. has allowed the NCAA to compete for talent more effectively against the CHL. This shift, by removing the information barriers that could prevent Canadian players from attending and playing at NCAA Division I school, has created new legitimacy for NCAA member organizations.

Trust, if it is to be established at all through strategic alliances and College Hockey Inc., needs to be established at the time when Canadian players and parents are gathering information as to their options. As Fisher et al. (1979) explained, “It is commonly accepted that the more positive the information, the more likely it is that the applicant will view the organization favorably and accept a position with it” (p.95). Trust is, therefore, important for two reasons. First, trust, which leads to a rapport, helps to ensure that representatives of the organizations can present information in the most positive light. Second, the timing with which trusting relationships between players, parents and institutional representatives develops can help to inform these representatives as to when players and parents are likely to be most receptive to the information they are disseminating.

Because the CHL and NCAA are rivals for talented Canadian hockey players, the CHL established a scholarship program that rivals the offerings of member organizations of the NCAA. This provides competitive balance between the two institutions, and allows the CHL to establish credibility for those players who are not able to reach the NHL. Without a scholarship program, the CHL can appear as a one-dimensional organization that focuses only on those players who can thrive in the NHL. By offering scholarship programs, the CHL provides incentives for prospective players who are unable to qualify for the NHL, but who wish to receive an education at a Canadian institution as a second option and can be a source of trust for prospective Canadian players and their parents.

Fisher et al. (1979) and Hovland et al., (1953) identified *expertise* as a determinant of credibility. The strategic alliance was found to the recruitment strategy that was consistent with expertise. DiMaggio (1983) suggested that the more centralized the resources for organizations or institutions, the likelihood that organizations or institutions will communicate increases. Thus, institutions competing for centralized resources, such as Canadian hockey players, are more likely to establish and maintain strategic alliances with other institutions. As credibility is established and maintained through the formation of strategic alliances between institutions, theoretically become more attractive to prospective players.

Credibility for the CHL originates from the CHL mimicking the NHL experience, accomplished by mirroring the number of games, and travelling (as suggested by P3 and P4). In offering similar environmental conditions, the CHL and member franchises establish credibility through the preparation and development of players with the necessary tangible and intangible skill sets to play in the NHL, the CHL is providing an opportunity for players to be successful at the NHL level; thus, credibility is established as players advance to the NHL. The CHL is the number one junior hockey league in the world for producing NHL talent.

The CHL's mandate is to produce and develop NHL hockey players (P1, P3 and P6 of the CHL). Duquette and Mason (2004) identified the historical relationship that has existed between the CHL and NHL, where, at one time, the CHL franchises were *farm teams* for NHL franchises. The CHL moved away

from this model and now operates on a more autonomous basis (Duquette & Mason, 2004). Trust between prospective Canadian players and their parents becomes virtually inevitable since CHL franchises are the most prominent producer of NHL talent through a long history of are arguable experts when it comes to producing NHL talent.

From the NCAA perspective, expertise is garnered from through the strategic alliance formed between the NHL and the NCAA as a league. Similar logic applies in the case of the NCAA to that of the CHL, however more recently, have become a viable option for Canadian players to reach the NHL that have been looked over by CHL franchises. As indicated by P5 and P10, the NCAA is able to offer an education at a Division I school and an opportunity to be scouted by the NHL. While certainly the second offering is not guaranteed, there has been an increase from 10 years prior in the number of players in from the NCAA who are in the NHL (College Hockey Inc., 2011b). Furthermore, expertise is established through the fact that the hockey rules committee of the NCAA allow for the NHL representatives to be involved in the establishment of rules decisions within NCAA hockey, which resulted in 90% to 95% similar rules to that of NHL (as indicated by P5 of the NCAA). Players then have an expertise playing by the same rules as the NHL and indication to prospective players that the NCAA is a viable option for Canadian players.

Legitimacy

The management teams of organizations or institutions drive themselves to acquire and maintain legitimacy within an institutional environment because

this attribute allows managements to gain the benefits, support, and resources of key constituents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Edwards et al., 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001). The evaluation of legitimacy then within the context of this study then becomes which one of the CHL, CIS, or NCAA has been able to establish credibility as a means of meeting the goals and objectives of the constituents or Canadian elite level hockey players and their parents. Prospective Canadian players recognize institutions and member organizations as more desirable and socially acceptable when they perceive that these organizations are legitimate. This thought is consistent with Meyer and Scott (1983), Suchman (1995), and Williamson (2000).

Scholars have suggested that those organizations operating within institutional environments will conform to the rules, regulations, and norms as a means of establishing legitimacy and, thereby, ensuring the survival of the organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Edwards et al., 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001). In an institutional environment, organizations will tend to reflect similarity in their operations and approaches due to desire of management to establish and maintain legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Edwards et al., 2009). Notwithstanding, this research shows that within the institutional environment, the CHL, CIS, and NCAA provide different support mechanisms in an effort to help facilitate the recruitment process of prospective Canadian hockey players by member organizations.

Conclusions and Contributions

The goal of this study is to examine how the three different hockey institutions (CHL, CIS, and NCAA) provide support for their member organizations (CHL franchises, universities, and colleges) in the recruitment of Canadian hockey players. To establish this framework, the research posed two questions for study. The first question dealt with the identification of the types of support mechanisms that the CHL, CIS, and NCAA have developed to facilitate the recruitment of Canadian hockey players. The second question was concerned with how the institutional outcomes of these support mechanisms actually contribute to the recruitment of process by member organizations. The research on the first question identified three mechanisms, namely, 1) *College Hockey Inc.*, 2) *Scholarship Programs,* and 3) *Strategic Alliances*. Research on the second question identified two enabling outcome attributes, namely, 1) *Credibility*, and 2) *Legitimacy*.

Since CHL franchises, CIS universities and NCAA universities and colleges compete for the same pool of Canadian talent, the findings of this study are extremely important. CHL, CIS and NCAA managements task themselves to create an environment conducive to establishing the perception of both outcome attributes. In doing so, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), it would be expected that the CHL, CIS, and NCAA become homogenous. However, this is not the case within this empirical setting, what was found was that it is important that management of CHL, CIS, and NCAA to establish and maintain legitimacy, while facilitating ways for their member organizations to find ways to

differentiate themselves. This is suggested to occur through the support mechanisms that are provided by the CHL, CIS, and the NCAA.

Management teams constantly challenge themselves to find new ways of supporting their member organizations, of communicating with prospective Canadian hockey players, and of differentiating their organization from other organizations, all the while conforming to the rules, regulations, and norms that exist within the institutional operating environment of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. The CHL, CIS, and NCAA's ability to establish and maintain legitimacy, while providing the necessary support mechanism for their member organizations to differentiate themselves can be a factor in the success or lack thereof in recruiting Canadian talent. This study limited by not determining the relative effectiveness of the noted support mechanisms. Such a question warrants future research. Certainly, a component of such research would be to gauge the perceived effectiveness of the institutional support mechanisms from the perspective of the Canadian elite players and their parents.

Contributions

This study focused on hockey institutions as its empirical setting as opposed to member organizations or players themselves. A search for relevant studies revealed that no other research examined the CIS, CHL, and NCAA in the same context. The importance of this study then is that it highlights the viable options that are available for prospective Canadian players and parents. Canadian players are arguably subjected at a young age to the recruitment practices by CHL franchises in the geographic area in which they reside. The visibility of CHL

within Canada due to the strategic alliance with the NHL and the success of producing NHL calibre players can often overshadow other viable options for Canadian players, such as the CIS and NCAA universities and colleges.

As a result, the ability of the CHL institution and franchise owners to promote “their players in their host communities as examples of young Canadians chasing the dream of playing professionally” (Mason et al., 2005, p.256) contributes to a linear focus by players and parents. It is apparent by the findings from this study that dynamic is starting to change as the incorporation of support mechanisms, such as *College Hockey Inc.*, *Scholarship Programs,* and *Strategic Alliances*, where there is more information is available and that there are more viable and legitimate options for young Canadian elite level hockey players. Future research is needed to explore if this occurs in industries, such as the basketball or the football industry.

In addition, this study has identified that the credibility of the relevant institutions (i.e., the CHL, CIS, or NCAA) can be a means through which constituents, such as parents, players and professional organizations can assess the institutions' legitimacy. It becomes essential that sport managers in a sporting context are able to establish trust and have a level expertise that facilitates the sport organizations as a viable option for elite level athletes. This apparent in an environment such as the CHL, CIS, and NCAA where member organizations of these institutions are competing for the most talented Canadian elite level players. Then a contribution that this study makes is to the literature that discusses

legitimacy by providing a means through which legitimacy can be evaluated by constituents.

The final contribution that this study makes, is that this study speaks to sport managers need to be think more deeply about the policies and practices that they have created that enables the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to appear legitimate; while at the same time developing support mechanisms that allow for member organizations to differentiate themselves from other franchises, colleges, or universities. Thus, the results of this study are compelling in that the support mechanisms – *College Hockey Inc.*, *Scholarship Programs*, and *Strategic Alliances* – can be influential at two levels within this empirical setting. First, as suggested in this study at the institutional level, the support mechanisms found are a means through which credibility contribute to maintaining the appearance of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA legitimacy.

Second, at the member organization level, the support mechanisms could also enhance the reputation of the sport organization. Based on the finding from this study, it we would suggest that there is a link between legitimacy, reputation, and the support mechanisms. However, future research is needed to explore the relationship that exists between organizational reputation and the support mechanisms to understand how legitimacy and reputation can be influential in player recruitment and can or is being utilized by sport managers of the member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA.

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Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

The empirical domain of this dissertation is comprised of local youth hockey clubs in the Edmonton region (also identified as *club hockey organizations*, or *elite level hockey*); Canadian governing hockey bodies (also identified as *Hockey Canada* [HC], *Hockey Alberta* [HA], and *Edmonton Minor Hockey Association* [EMHA]); Major Junior (also identified as *Canadian Hockey League* [CHL]); and Intercollegiate organizations (also identified as *Canadian Interuniversity Sport* [CIS], or *National Collegiate Athletic Association* [NCAA]) in Canada and United States (henceforth, *Hockey Organizations*). The dissertation's purpose, relative to these actors, has been to understand the player retention strategies (henceforth, strategies), coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes (henceforth, processes), and player recruitment support mechanisms (henceforth, support mechanisms) with respect to the recruitment and retention of the most talented Canadian elite level minor hockey players (also identified as *players*, *minor hockey players*, or *hockey players*) in Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System (CELHDS).

By implementing the Hockey Organization's strategies, processes, and support mechanisms the managers of these organizations have taken a professionalized approach to the recruitment and retention of Canada's minor hockey players. The application of professionalization within the context of this dissertation was based on the findings, and was not originally part of the purpose of this research. A professional approach to the implementation of strategies, processes, and support mechanisms is influential in attracting the 13 to 16 year

old Canadian minor hockey player and parents to elite level hockey. Between the ages 13 to 16 players and their parents are required to make decisions regarding future hockey endeavours. Further explaining the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms found within Studies 1, 2, and 3 from the perspective of professionalization, the three studies researched for this dissertation employed two analytical categories, namely *specialization*, and *formalization*, identified in Thibault, Slack, and Hinings (1991).

Following Daft (1983), Thibault et al. (1991) identified three analytical categories for determining the impact of professionals on a sport organization's structure: *specialization*, *formalization*, and *centralization*. In Thibault et al., professionals are those paid employees that were hired by Canada's National Sport Organizations, which had been and remain primarily volunteer-based sport organizations. Initially, this researcher considered all three analytic categories for use in examining the player retention strategies, coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes, and player recruitment support mechanisms.

Table 5.1 is a matrix that depicts the first and second order constructs as they relate to one another. This matrix that consists of four columns, that begins with identifying the organizations involved in this dissertation from Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Next, the second column identifies the specific actions, activities, policies, and practices that originated from the findings from Chapter 2, 3, and 4. The third column lists the specific first order constructs that identifies findings as player retention strategies, coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes, and support mechanisms. The second order constructs are used to classify the

strategies, processes, and support mechanisms found two of three analytical categories: specialization, and formalization.

Table 5.1

The Findings from Chapter 2, 3, and 4 in Relation to Three Analytical Categories

Organizations	Findings from Chapter 2, 3,and 4	First Order Constructs	Second Order Constructs
Club Hockey Organizations	Player Development	Player Retention Strategies	Specialization
	Facility Ownership	Player Retention Strategies	Specialization
	Performance-Driven Outcomes	Player Retention Strategies	Specialization
	Information Sharing	Player Retention Strategies	Specialization
Governing Hockey Bodies	Residential Boundary Regulations, and Coaching Certification Regulations	Regulations/ Constraints	Formalization
Club Hockey Organizations	Website advertising, mass media outlets, internal recruiting, word of mouth advertising, scouting, former players to coaches, partnerships with local school programs, and *Future Leaders Development Program*	Coach Recruitment Processes	Specialization
	Submission of resume and application, qualifications, interviews, approval of successful applicant, hiring, and coach's evaluations	Coach Hiring Processes	Specialization
	Honorariums, funding coach training, mentorship, NCCP, and other training	Retention Processes	Specialization
CHL	Provides scholarship opportunities with CIS	Scholarship Program	Formalization
	Strategic alliance with the NHL	Strategic Alliances	Formalization
CIS	Recruits directly out of the CHL	Strategic Alliances	Formalization
NCAA	College Hockey Inc.	Eligibility and Recruitment Regulations	Formalization
	Strategic alliance with the NHL	Strategic Alliance	Formalization

Although this dissertation did not specifically search for or examine issues of professionalization, this concept did emerge as an overarching framework for understanding how the Hockey Organizations attract hockey players to compete in elite level hockey. Throughout the interviews that provided information regarding the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms for the recruitment and retention of minor hockey players and coaches, professionalism emerged as a theme. In a review of the literature on professionalization, professionalism proved to be influential in the structuring and the operations of sport organizations (Thibault et al., 1991). In general, a sport organization that appears professionalized will be more attractive to prospective athletes, an observation that this dissertation certainly confirms.

Specialization

Specialization refers to those activities that are narrow in scope and require a specific skill set or knowledge base to be performed (Chelladurai, 2009; Daft, 1998; Thibault et al., 1991). Based on the fact that the activities are specialized, the theoretical premise then is that those individuals, who are considered to be professional, with specific training and expertise, are able to perform the activities. The findings from Studies 1 and 2 portray the retention of players as specialized through management's implementation of actions (i.e., strategies) and a systematic group of activities (i.e., processes). Based on this understanding, management of the club hockey organizations take a professional approach to the implementation of different specialized strategies and processes

as means of retaining minor hockey players for transitioning from house league hockey to club hockey at the Bantam level.

The managers of club hockey organizations implement specialized strategies, mainly through a delegation of responsibilities among coaches, management, and an executive board. Player development and performance-driven outcomes are the responsibility of the coach. Effective performance depends not only on the coach's knowledge (gained through training and experience), but also on the coach's ability to implement the appropriate strategies effectively. Facility ownership, information sharing, and the recruitment, hiring, and retention of coaches are primarily the responsibility of management and executive board members. In a closed system, which is present in the Edmonton region, the strategies and processes implemented by management of local club hockey organizations can be influential in the decision process of minor hockey players and parents.

The facilities needed for player development exemplify specialization. The interviewees in Study 1 pointed out that availability of facilities was a problem for some of the teams to the point where coaches and team managers took on the burden of finding other facilities in other cities in which to conduct practices. Coaches and managers considered this to be an extra, time consuming burden. Coaches and managers are volunteer positions where more than likely these individuals have jobs outside of the club hockey team. They hardly have time to dedicate to finding available facilities for practices in a lot of cases.

Two of the Edmonton region club hockey organizations owned their own arenas and were seeking to expand these facilities. Ownership of a facility gives a club hockey organization a distinct competitive advantage over other organizations operating in the same environment. For these two club hockey organizations, the uniqueness of owning their facility is specialized in that other four club hockey organizations do not have the same resources available.

Sotiriadou, Shilbury, and Quick (2008) suggested that "recreational and training facilities assist the delivery of player development programs and, in particular, the preparation of the elite athletes to perform successfully, as well as encourage the increase of membership/participation numbers" (p. 257). Based on Sotiriadou et al.'s (2008) suggestion and the findings from Study 1, ownership of a facility is a specialized component for two club hockey organizations, and this particular specialization gives these organizations a distinct competitive advantage in player development.

Because player development entails the acquisition of certain skill sets, the management of local club hockey organizations is accountable to parents for providing, through coaching, specialized training to their sons and daughters so that they can progress to higher levels of competition. As Sotiriadou et al. (2008) explained "coaches facilitate the process by training, motivating and assisting junior athletes [minor hockey players] in skill development with the ultimate goal to be successful at the competitions in which they participate" (p.263).The specialized skill sets gained through player development at the club level become critical for providing an opportunity for players to advance to higher levels.

Following Hage and Aiken (1967), Thibault et al. (1991) explained that management of an organization is responsible for providing information about the implementation and development of specialized activities. Thus, it is important that the management of club hockey organizations has information sharing strategies for communicating effectively with prospective parents and players. Such communications strategies exemplify another aspect of management's professionalism towards shaping the perceptions of prospective minor hockey players and parents.

Club hockey organization enhances their reputation through the recruiting, hiring, and retaining the most qualified coaches. Coaching is obviously a specialized position, in that it requires specialized certification (Development 1 training) at the elite level, experience (past playing career at a high level, or coaching experience), honoraria from a volunteer based organization, and have the necessary skills to teach the Long Term Player Development (LTPD) model for player development. Management's overall approach to recruiting, hiring, and retaining coaches is an orderly and businesslike process, with specialized components designed to shape the reputation of the organization. Observing professionalism in the actions of club hockey management, minor hockey players, with parents' consent, are more likely to try out for the club hockey organizations. By filling their rosters from impressed young hockey players, the organizations achieve stability.

Abbott (1991) suggested that "knowledge permits effective practice and may help legitimate professional authority" (p. 363). Study 2 saw a coaches'

knowledge as a form of technical expertise that was important in shaping the reputation of the local club hockey organization. Furthermore, Taylor and Garratt (2010) indicated that

> The contemporary coach needs to be "professional" in terms of the acquisition of new forms of knowledge and training, "capable" in terms of forging new professional networks and relationships, and morally "compliant" with the imperative towards community responsibility, bestowed by the state. (p. 125)

Knowledge—or in the case of Study 2, technical expertise—is a critical attribute for a coach. Not surprisingly, the management of club hockey organizations has specified technical expertise as a hiring qualification for coaches. Recognition of technical expertise in coaches by young hockey players being recruited for elite level hockey organizations leads to better recruiting results which, in turn, further contribute to organizational stability.

A coach's expertise originates in training received through Hockey Canada's certification courses, and from experience as either a player or coach. Abbott (1988) stated that "knowledge is the currency for competition" (p. 102). It became evident that qualified coaches possess technical expertise in varying degrees, thus creating a competition for the most expert coaches. Not only is there a shortage of individuals who have the necessary qualifications, availability of time, and money to cover the costs of coaching, but some organizations at the elite level also have limited resources (e.g., facilities and financial compensation) to offer potential coaches. It is for this reason that coaches who possess these

specialized characteristics are highly sought after by club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region.

A specialized strategy used by local club hockey management to retain the most qualified coaches is the *honorarium*. Honoraria are a growing concern for the management of Hockey Canada, since the use of honoraria sets a precedent for club hockey organizations. The feared result is a fundamental alteration in the position of a coach as a volunteer to being a paid employee. The main objection to such a trend is that coaches will focus on earning a paycheck based on performance (i.e., winning), rather than on the development of hockey players. Additionally, from management's perspective, the competition for a limited number of qualified coaches could result in an escalation of the amounts paid to coaches.

Honoraria, however, can also be positive, since they reimburse volunteer coaches for their inevitable expenses and can be a motivating factor in ensuring that the coach returns for another season. Reimbursement of expenses, in the form of an honorarium, can also play a significant role for non-parent coaches who are essentially not obligated to coach. As Hockey Canada (2011) suggested, "Once you've successfully secured a volunteer's support, it's important to ensure that the benefits of volunteering continue to outweigh the costs" (p. 25). Management can use honoraria as a resource and motivating element in the quest to engage a non-parent coach to take a vested interest in coaching. Thus, "Satisfied volunteer coaches can be strong advocates for your organization's [club hockey

organizations] mission and persuasive partners on your volunteer recruitment team [for other volunteer coaches]" (Hockey Canada, 2011, p.25).

The end result of organizational professionalism is organizational stability. In this context, stability implies the retention of those players contemplating transitioning from a house league based organization to a local club hockey organization in the Edmonton region. This process allows the organization to achieve year-to-year consistency and a deserved reputation for excellence.

Formalization

Formalization is the extent to which strategies and processes, or, in the case of this dissertation, *residential boundary regulation* (from Study 1), and *support mechanisms* (from Study 3), are implemented in a systematic manner (Daft, 1998). The formalization of policies and practices assists the member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to define roles within the context of the institution (i.e., CHL, CIS, or NCAA). Formalization establishes the expectations, is a source of information, organizational parameters, and the controls for member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. Abbott (1988) suggested that formalization is a means through which professional jurisdiction can be established and maintained. In a competitive environment, such as the recruitment of players by member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA, norms are established that enable the member organizations of these institutions to be responsibly competitive with and among one another for the most talented Canadian minor hockey players.

Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, and Turner (1968); Child (1973); and Thibault et al. (1991) maintained that the more specialized activities and practices are incorporated into an organization, the more management relies on formalized rules, policies, and procedures. This is the case in Studies 1 and 2, where the governing hockey bodies implemented constraints based on their specific jurisdiction at the federal, provincial, or municipal level. Each governing body also has formalized responsibilities with regard to implementation and enforcement of rules, policies, and procedures for the governance of elite level minor hockey organizations. For example, Hockey Canada is responsible for developing the literature pertaining to coach certification. Hockey Alberta then administers and organizes the seminars at which coaches receive either their Development or High Performance training for meeting the certification requirements of Hockey Canada.

Residential boundary regulations in the Edmonton region are another example of formalization that has occurred with the context of this empirical study. Lawrence's (1999) study of the forensic accounting industry examined inclusionary and exclusionary membership strategies in a professionalized setting. Drawing on the work of Abbott (1991) and Richardson (1987), Lawrence maintained that professions base their membership on specific characteristics or rules for inclusion and exclusion. Hall (1968) pointed out that "professional organizations may be divisive and thus inhibit professionalization through multiple standards for entrance and through varied regulative norms" (p. 94). The residential boundary regulations are a constraint placed on both players and

management of club hockey organizations to restrict player mobility and alleviate the competition for players between and among hockey organizations.

Specifically, these residential boundary regulations restrict players' choices as to which organization they can try out for at the elite level. For management of the club hockey organizations, these formalized residential boundary regulations are an attempt to maximize for each club the number of players trying out for a club hockey organization by restricting a player's mobility to move to organizations lying outside of that player's residential boundaries. Residential boundary regulations then provide stability to the club hockey organization. It also means that management of the club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region cannot "stack their teams" through the recruitment of the most talent players.

The support mechanisms (*College Hockey Inc.*, *Scholarship Programs*, and *Strategic Alliances*) created by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA (Study 3) are categorized as formalization. Support mechanisms were found to help maintain legitimacy for the CHL, CIS, and NCAA, while at the same time setting the inclusionary and exclusionary boundaries for entry into the member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. For example, the CHL scholarship program and the NCAA's endorsement of College Hockey Inc. are two support mechanisms that have become formalized norms within the empirical domain. In the formalization of scholarship programs, the CHL is diversifying its membership base. The CHL is a recognized institution for developing hockey players for the NHL and other professional leagues. However, by offering scholarships to players who wish to

take an academic route, the CHL accommodates a larger potential membership base. In turn, the CIS, by having a strategic alliance with the CHL through the scholarship program, is able to access the membership base of the CHL.

In the case of the NCAA, eligibility and recruitment regulations are used to maintain amateur status within the NCAA and to attract a specific type of membership. The eligibility and recruitment regulations are formalized regulations that are used to ensure that amateur status is maintained with the NCAA. As a result of these formalized regulations, College Hockey Inc. was formed as a support mechanism for coaches and managers of member organizations, such as U.S. colleges and universities. Comparatively, management of CHL franchises drafts minor hockey players primarily from club hockey organizations at the Triple A level of competition, and there are no regulations regarding amateur status in the CHL, as the CHL is considered to be a professional organization.

Lawrence (1999) indicated that “conformity with standards of practice in an organizational field works to reproduce those standards: producing a product that meets customer expectations or collaborating with suppliers in the expected fashion is likely to be rewarded by customers/suppliers and simultaneously reproduce those expectations” (p.166). College Hockey Inc. is a professional company that, as a third party, facilitates the flow of information to Canadian, United States, and some European players regarding the benefits of playing NCAA Division I hockey. The Hockey Commissioners Association of the NCAA Division I uses College Hockey Inc. to circumvent the formalized recruitment

regulations of the NCAA to become a trusted informational resource to prospective Canadian elite level hockey players.

Professionalization in the Implementation of Strategies, Processes, and Support Mechanisms

Professionalization is a concept that moves beyond the classification of an individual who receives financial remuneration for services rendered, as suggested by scholars Abbott (1991), Lawrence (1999), and Thibault et al. (1991). This dissertation research expands the understanding of professionalization. Based on the findings, the professional approach by management to the recruitment and retention of Canadian minor hockey players through implementation of strategies, processes, and support mechanism can be a means for the establishment of organizational stability for the Hockey Organizations.

Wilensky (1964) pointed out that occupations become professionalized through the formation of associations and organizations. Through such activities, the tasks that accompany specific occupational titles become specialized and formalized, and individuals who do not have the requisite expertise and experience are forced from their positions. This is seemingly the case in the Canadian Sport System (Whitson & Macintosh, 1989) as the sport organizations involved are becoming more professionalized and businesslike (Houlihan, 1988; Kikulis et al., 1992; Kikulis, Slack, &Hinings, 1995; Thibault et al., 1991). The volunteer driven sport organizations the comprise Canadian Sport System are taking on a professional approach with specialized and formalized activities and practices that is resulting in the hiring of paid professional staff members.

Arguably, the specialization and formalization of the strategies, processes and support mechanisms elements can be suggested to have a similar impact on the Hockey Organizations. The impact that the Hockey Organizations will encounter is that individuals in positions of management and coaching will need to be paid to render the services of these individuals. Having paid staff members in positions of management and coaching at the club level has more of an impact than at the CHL, CIS, and NCAA, as the club hockey organizations are volunteer-based organizations with limited financial resources.

The Canadian hockey industry anticipates that the professionalization of hockey will grow at the grassroots level. In the words of an individual who is directly involved with Hockey Canada,

> I think, big-picture-wise, hockey is going more to a professionalized sort of state. We're going to start to see more and more hockey associations who have paid head coaches. We're going to see more and more programs where [parents] are willing to pay money to have a professional coach or a highly educated or skilled coach. (Personal Communication, January 20, 2010)

This anticipation is justified, and may have already come to fruition, as evidenced by the management professionalism that is becoming evident in the recruitment and retention of Canadian minor hockey players by the Hockey Organizations.

The implementation of strategies, processes, and support mechanisms by the Hockey Organizations creates a standard by which the organizations are perceived and judged by prospective players and parents. The relationship

between standards and professionalism is a common theme in the professionalization literature (Abbott, 1988, 1991; Hall, 1968; Lawrence, 1999; Wilensky, 1964). In the context of this dissertation, Hockey Organizations create standards in order to shape their reputations and maintain their legitimacy.

Prospective parents, players, volunteers, and coaches are attracted to organizations that they perceive to be professional. They perceive a linkage between professionalism and a higher set of standards. In the case of this dissertation, these higher set of standards originate in conjunction with the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms, such as coaching certification requirements, performance-driven outcomes (i.e., winning), player development, scholarships, membership regulations (i.e., eligibility and recruitment regulations), College Hockey Inc., and strategic alliances.

Possible Outcomes of Management's Professionalized Approach in the CELHDS

The professionalized approach taken by the management of Hockey Organizations in this dissertation can result in different outcomes. Several possible outcomes are actually negative outcomes, but most outcomes are positive. The outcomes of a professionalized approach discussed here are those that have an impact on the minor hockey players and parents, the Hockey Organizations, and the CELHDS.

Negative Outcomes of a Professionalized Approach. Professionalization of sports can result in a shift of focus from enjoyment of the sport to an overemphasis on winning (Brower, 1979). Paraphrasing Webb (1969), Visek and Watson (2005) stated that "the professionalization of athletes' attitudes toward

play can be characterized as the extent to which they place increasing importance on winning at the expense of skill acquisition and fair play" (p. 179). Hockey Canada recognizes that professionalization can result in such shifts, with concomitant pressure on coaches to ensure not only that players are being developed and are able to reach higher levels, but that their teams bring credit to the organization by winning. Coaches who do not obtain the desired results are not likely to be asked to return for another season with the organization, even though their players may have an enhanced love for the game.

Professionalism brings higher parental expectations for skill progression, and it brings higher costs. Knoppers (1985) suggested that in sport in general, the "emphasis is placed on success, attained by skillful performance, under equitable conditions" (p. 92). However, at the elite level, where "intense competition rarely looks like 'fun', the underlying incentive for participation is grounded in play-like features characterized by intrinsic motivations such as skill mastery . . ." (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011, p. 109). Professionalization tends to increase the costs of playing at the elite level. Professionalization inevitably contributes to higher costs associated with participation at the elite level, which could deter less affluent players from trying out. At the house league level a player would typically pay $500 to $900 to play depending on the tier and team commitments (e.g., tournaments, or team apparel); whereas at the club hockey level the cost of playing is anywhere from $3000 to $5000 depending on the level of competition (Triple A versus Double A).

For some parents, that increase in cost could mean that their children would continue to play at the community level as opposed to at the club hockey level. In a boundary-regulated environment, having more players choose to play at the community level would mean that club hockey organizations have fewer (and possibly less talented) players to choose from. This situation in turn would affect the decision of CHL franchises and NCAA and CIS schools to draft or recruit out of club hockey organizations. In short, if talented players were to opt out of elite level tryouts for financial reasons, which could potentially destabilize the entire hockey system above the community level.

Positive Outcomes of a Professionalized Approach. There are a number of potential positive outcomes that a professional approach by management can produce. First, a professional approach improves the stability of Hockey Organizations. For example, some representatives of the club hockey organizations forecast the talent levels that are going to be entering into the club system over a five-year period. They base their estimates on the registration numbers of the community organizations for a given year. Based the number of players registered, management determines whether a given year will be “weak” or “strong” year for talent. The lower the registration numbers, the weaker is the year likely to be, and conversely.

In a “weak” year, it is less likely that teams will experience success because of the talent levels of the players. As a result, players may not continue on at the elite level and choose to remain at the house league level. However, by establishing professionalized player development strategies in conjunction

recruiting, hiring, and retaining the most qualified coaches, management has maximized the opportunity their players will have to transition to elite level hockey, regardless of the team's success. Management professionalization increase opportunities for minor hockey players. At the club level, the specialized training received from qualified coaches makes the teams and players of the organization more attractive to scouts of the CHL franchises and the NCAA Division I schools. In theory and in practice, a professionally managed club hockey organization will be perceived as a reliable resource of talent for CHL franchises and NCAA Division I schools.

Second, when organizations' develop players to the standards established by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA and their member organizations, the likelihood of success for these players at the higher level is increased. The same logic applies for CHL, CIS, and NCAA players in their efforts to play at professional levels (e.g., the NHL). In general, the professionalized approach at the institutional level that has produced such effective support mechanisms as College Hockey Inc., scholarship programs, and strategic alliances has and will continue to attract and motivate young Canadian elite level minor players to choose to play for a member organization of one of these CHL, CIS, and NCAA.

Finally, a professional approach taken the by managements of the Hockey Organizations could be a contributing factor in the success that Canada has had in the global arena. Some of the accomplishments that team Canada has enjoyed are gold medals in the 2002 and 2010 Olympics, and gold medals in the International

Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Under 20 championships[1] from 2005 to 2009. By taking a professional approach to player development through qualified coaching and the experiences offered to players by CHL franchises, and NCAA Division I schools, it can be argued that Canadian minor hockey players experience success on a global scale because of the strategies, processes, and mechanisms are in place within the CELHDS.

[1] The IIHF world hockey championship is a high profile hockey tournament where countries from around the world send players under the age of 20, to compete for a world title. The tournament garners a large amount of media exposure. In many cases, such exposure facilitates transitions to the NHL or other professional leagues.

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Chapter 6: CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Hockey in Canada has been recognized as part of Canada's national identity (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Jackson, 2001; Jackson & Ponic, 2001; Mason, 2002; Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006; Scherer & Jackson, 2004). The Canadian hockey industry is comprised of over 500,000 registered minor hockey players and over 100,000 active coaches (Hockey Canada [HC], 2011). Hockey in Canada maintains itself through Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System (CELHDS), which develops hockey players so that they are able to reach higher levels of competition.

To compete at the elite level in CELHDS, players experience two pivotal transitional points. The first is at the ages of 12 to 13, when players and parents make a decision as to whether to attempt a transition from house league-based hockey programs to club level hockey programs. The second pivotal transition point comes at the ages of 14 to 16, when minor elite level hockey players and parents much decide on a pathway to pursue higher goals in hockey. Such goals may include a career in professional hockey in the NHL or to use hockey as a vehicle for obtaining a scholarship for post-secondary education.

Various organizations play a critical role at these transition points. These organizations are local club hockey organizations, Canada's governing hockey bodies, the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I hockey in Canada and the United States (henceforth, Hockey Organizations). The Hockey Organizations are important actors in the CELHDS, as they create the

opportunity for Canada's minor hockey players to reach their highest aspirations either in terms of professional competition or post-secondary education.

This dissertation has explored the player retention strategies (henceforth, strategies), coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes (henceforth, processes), and player recruitment support mechanism (henceforth, support mechanisms) implemented by local youth hockey clubs, Canadian governing hockey bodies, Major Junior and Intercollegiate hockey organizations in Canada and United States with respect to the recruitment and retention of the most talented elite level hockey players in CELHDS. In three separate studies, the research considered six basic questions, which were:

- What strategies do local club hockey organizations use to retain players in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada? (Study 1)
- How does the elite level hockey system that includes local club hockey organizations and governing hockey bodies in this region play a role in facilitating player retention? (Study 1)
- How do local club hockey organizations recruit, hire, and retain qualified coaches as a strategy for maintaining the perception that such organizations are successful in the Edmonton region? (Study 2)
- Why are recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified coaches so important to club hockey organizations? (Study 2)
- What types of policies and practices have been developed by the CHL, CIS, and NCAA to facilitate the recruitment of Canadian hockey players by CHL franchises, universities, and colleges? (Study 3)

- How do the outcomes of these support mechanisms of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA actually contribute to the recruitment of Canadian players by member organizations? (Study 3)

A number of conclusions, discussed below, have been drawn from this investigation.

The first study (Chapter 2) explored the player retention strategies (Player Development, Facility Ownership, Performance- Driven Outcomes, and Information Sharing) adopted by the managements of the local club hockey organizations in the Edmonton region of Alberta, Canada (henceforth, Edmonton region), all operating within a residential boundary-regulated environment. Based on these findings and the application of Thompson's (1967) environmental decoupling model, managers of the club hockey organizations implement these strategies within a closed system. Thus, the technical core (i.e., club hockey organizations) is buffered from the external environmental fluctuations through the policies and practices of the boundary-spanning units (i.e., governing bodies). The buffering of the technical core assists in stabilizing the club hockey organizations' player retention strategies. A closed system achieves order in what otherwise could be chaotic talent placement and transition.

Volunteer coaches play an integral role in the development of minor hockey players at the elite level. The second study (Chapter 3) explored the coach recruitment, hiring, and retention processes used by club hockey organizations at the elite level in the Edmonton region, when there are a limited number of qualified coaches. This limitation poses a challenge that local management must

face. This problem is also of growing concern for the Canadian hockey industry at the elite level. Not surprisingly, since there are a limited number of qualified coaches able to coach at the elite level, there is vigorous competition between and among club hockey organizations to acquire the services of these individuals.

Coaches hold a major position in the club hockey organization. This is due to the fact that ccoaches are a public reflection of the organization and contribute to shaping the reputation of the organizations. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining the most qualified coach is an important objective for a club hockey organization, because a qualified coach can reduce the uncertainty for prospective players and parents concerning transitioning to club level hockey. Coaches also allow club hockey organization to differentiate themselves. The achievement of success in coaching attracts and helps retain elite level minor hockey players.

The third study (Chapter 4) examined three institutions – the CHL, CIS, and NCAA – to understand the means by which their respective member organizations receive support from the institutions in the recruitment of Canadian minor hockey players. This study found such support in the form of *College Hockey Inc.*, *Scholarship Programs*, and *Strategic Alliances*. Based on the institutional theory, through the support mechanisms management of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA are able to maintain legitimacy and to differentiate their respective organization's members from each other. Such legitimacy indicates to prospective recruits that the CHL, CIS, and NCAA and their member organizations are viable options to pursue.

Management of the Hockey Organizations takes on an increasingly professional approach to the implementation of strategies, processes, and support mechanism. These strategies, processes, and support mechanisms can be categorized in terms of the constructs of *specialization* (e.g., player development, coaching training, and/or information sharing) and *formalization* (e.g., eligibility and recruitment regulations, scholarship programs, and/or strategic alliances).

Contributions

The challenge to which this dissertation has addressed itself is the lack of information on the CELHDS. Very little research has been conducted in this area. As a result, this dissertation research becomes one of the foundation pieces in the field of sport management. Specifically, this dissertation research makes contributions to three areas of the field of sport management: player and coach recruitment and retention, the sport of hockey, and professionalism at the management level of sport organizations**.**

Player and Coach Recruitment and Retention. This research has contributed to the literature on recruitment and retention of players and coaches, and to the field of sport management generally. The first contribution is to the literature on recruitment and retention. Barber (1998) and Taylor and Giannantonio (1993) indicated that limited research has been conducted from the organization's perspective. As suggested in Chapter 1, there has been little research into athlete retention in the academic field of sport management. Furthermore, an extensive review of the existing research revealed that few studies have identified or investigated the strategies, processes, and support

mechanisms that contribute to the recruitment and retention of the most talented athletes This dissertation has created a base of structured information concerning these strategies, processes, and support mechanisms that has not heretofore existed and that will serve future inquiry into the CELHDS from a management/organization perspective.

One of the fundamental issues associated with the club hockey system is that there is a lack of qualified coaches at the club hockey level. As a result, it is critical that managers of club hockey organizations actively recruit and retain the most qualified coaches to represent their organization. Management increasingly achieves this goal by converting volunteer coaching positions into remunerated coaching positions. This is especially apparent at the elite level where the competition for excellent coaching is more vigorous than at the house level.

The importance of strong and qualified coaches is two-fold; first, having qualified coaches establishes a club's reputation, which in turn assists in the recruitment of young hockey players, and second, having such coaches forms the basis of player retention strategies. The application of this logic can go beyond club hockey organizations and be applied in other sports, where management at the grassroots elite level can use the recruitment, hiring, and retention of the most qualified coaches as a signal to prospective athletes and parents during specific transition points within a sport system.

Having paid coaches is not uncommon within the sport industry. However, this dissertation has discovered that club hockey organizations do not consider their coaches to be paid. Rather, coaches are viewed as the recipients of honoraria,

such honoraria ostensibly satisfying the need for coaches' expenses to be reimbursed. Honoraria are a concern for Hockey Canada 1) because they tend to increase annually, 2) they set precedents and 3) they cause coaches to think less in terms of player development and more in terms of winning. Nonetheless, the growth in the practice of awarding honoraria seems unavoidable as these honoraria are a means for both recruiting new coaches and retaining existing coaches.

Green (2005) and Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick (2008) discussed sport systems by illustrating the importance of athlete recruitment and retention in a sport system. However what was lacking in this discussion was attention to the points of transition for hockey players within the system. A key contribution that this dissertation has made is its illumination of how strategies, processes, and support mechanisms relate to life-decisions that young hockey players and parents must make at certain ages. While there are external factors that influence these decisions (e.g., culture, parental expectations, or family values) that are out of the control of management of the Hockey Organizations, there were strategies, processes, and support mechanisms through a professional approach the management attempt to control as a means of recruiting and retaining the Canadian minor hockey players.

Green (2005) discussed sport systems within the context of a pyramid, where there are essentially three different levels – mass-participation, competition, and elite level. Building on the idea of the pyramid by Green (2005), this dissertation research highlights the transitions between levels of the pyramid

and the operation of recruitment and retention strategies at these points of transition. Drawing on this research, managers of sport organizations can formulate business plans that consider these items:

- Determining the major transition points for athletes within the sport system
- Determining the effectiveness of recruiting and retention strategies
- Developing and implementing strategies, processes, and support mechanisms that will be effective in attracting prospective elite level athletes.

These considerations will assist sport managers to establish and implement policies and practices that can lead to the successful recruitment and retention of the most talented athletes to represent their sport organizations. When they achieve these results, the goal of the sport organization to have attracted, recruited and retained the most talented athletes will have been fulfilled.

This dissertation has contributed to the literature concerning the importance of *feeder* organizations and their connection with elite level organizations. Feeder organizations, conceptualized based upon Green's (2005) player development pyramid, are the organizations at each level of the pyramid from which players aspire to reach the next higher level. This study has pointed to the importance of strategies that will allow communication across levels, notably from higher to lower, that give feeder organizations the opportunity to benefit from information relevant to players' attainment of the next higher level. For example, house league based organizations are the feeder organizations for the

club hockey organizations, and the club hockey organizations are the feeder organizations for the CHL, CIS, and NCAA (see Appendix A). This is arguably the basis for most sport systems, as a player transitions from one level to the next within a system the competition level increases. Thus, this dissertation research has expanded on Green's (2005) discussion on the recruitment and retention of players by specially examining the strategies, processes, and support mechanisms that exist between the levels of a sport system from an organization perspective.

The Sport of Hockey. As noted in Chapter 1, there is a substantial amount of research concerning the idea that the sport of hockey has a connection with Canada's national identity (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Mason, 2002; Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006). While neither hockey nor Canada's national identity were in the focus of this dissertation's research, hockey as an attribute of Canadian national identity certain provides a context in which this research is important. Hockey's cultural significance becomes apparent at the elite level in the degree to which emphasis is placed on player development, scouting, the opportunities a hockey organization can provide, and the time commitment that is expected from volunteers within the club hockey organizations.

In other team sports, where there is little or no connection with national identity, this fact in and of itself could be a reason for the lack of competitive success on the international stage, or for the lack of local participation in the sport. For example, the popularity of hockey in the United States lags for lack of a cultural connection with the sport, in contrast to football and baseball, both of which have rich traditions and history within American culture. This dissertation

has extended knowledge in an area that is very close to the nation's heart and senses of being and purpose. It has asserted, in effect, that the complexity of the current CELHDS cannot be taken for granted, but must be studied and understood if this cultural element is to be enhanced and preserved.

Previous studies have focused on CHL arenas (Mason, Buist, Edwards, & Duquette, 2007), player recruitment (Curtis & Birch, 1987; Elliot & Maguire, 2008), player attraction (Holman, 2007), and a merger between two hockey organizations (Stevens, 2006). The present work has contributed to the hockey literature by exploring strategies, processes, and support mechanisms implemented by managers of the Hockey Organizations for minor hockey players at the ages of 12 to 13 and 14 to 16 during the two pivotal points of transition in their hockey lives. Research in this area is almost non-existent and has benefited significantly from the research of this dissertation.

Sotiriadou et al. (2008) suggested that sport management researchers need to look at individual sport systems from an individual sport perspective. Sport systems operate differently with different sports and arguably at different levels (e.g., elite level versus community level). The dissertation, in its exploration of the CELHDS and the organizations involved in this system, has answered this call.

Across Canada, hockey systems are either *open* or *closed*. In an open system (e.g., the Greater Toronto Hockey League [GTHL]), players are allowed to move freely from one organization to another by choice, and sport managers are able to recruit players from any geographic location. For example, in an open

system a player can be recruited from anywhere in a geographic radius; whereas in a closed system player management are unable to recruit because players that reside within a specific boundary can only try out for that club hockey organization. Open systems have attracted little attention from scholars, and constitute a subject that deserves further exploration. The dissertation research, however, has sought to lay a foundation for understanding closed systems, where player movement is heavily restricted by rules governing residential boundaries.

Because of the relative scarcity of qualified coaches within the hockey system, coaches inevitably move from one organization to another. This *recycling* of coaches means that coaches are continuing being released from one club hockey organization and subsequently hired by another club hockey organization. This recycling of coaches is common to many professional sports, such as the National Basketball League (NBA), NHL, National Football League (NFL), and Major League Baseball (MLB). For example, Ken Hitchcock coached for four teams in the NHL before his most recent assignment as the coach of the St. Louis Blues of the NHL. Recycling coaches is a challenging process at the grassroots elite level. For management, it is a never-ending process. This lack of job stability is a deterrent for new qualified coaches seeking to get involved in coaching at the elite level. Second, if one organization encounters specific problems with a particular coach, it is possible that a new organization may encounter the same problems. The hockey literature has benefited from this dissertation's investigation of this issue.

A Professionalized Approach by the Management of Sport Organizations. This dissertation has offered a new perspective on the concept of professionalization in sport management by focusing on professionalization as a means for sport organizations to ensure organizational stability within their operating domains. Slack and his colleagues focused primarily on organizational changes occurring within Canada's sport development system at the national level (Houlihan, 1988; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1992; Slack & Kikulis, 1989; Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991). This dissertation has contributed to the growing body of research on organizational change with its conclusion that the club hockey's recruiting and retention systems for the most talented athletes and qualified coaches are increasingly professionalized.

Because of the professionalized approach taken by management, this research has suggested that the position of manager within a club hockey organization requires specialized training and expertise to the point where executive board members need to consider transitioning this usually volunteer position to a paid position. The knowledge base required of a manager has expanded dramatically and, because of this, club hockey more and more requires the services of a trained and experienced professional executive. This dissertation research has highlighted the extent of the skill set that is required of club hockey managers and has explained why this field of endeavor is witnessing increasing professionalization.

Management professionalism at the elite level contributes to smoother transitions between levels of the sport system for players whose ambition it is to

compete for a professional sport organization. Management's approach to professionalization also contributes to enhancing a sport organization's reputation, an important attribute of legitimacy. As this dissertation has contributed, the trend toward management professionalization can determine the prospects of a player seeking advancement to higher competitive levels. It is for this reason that grassroots elite level managements are mimicking the organizational attributes of higher levels.

Professionalization breeds competition among sport organizations beyond the game itself. This is seen in the competition for players between feeder organizations, (i.e., community-based organizations, or house league based organizations) and elite level sport organizations. This ultimately becomes problematical for the overall system since feeder organizations are often competing for the same athletes at the pivotal transition points in their lives. In other words, the elite level sport organizations need the sufficient try out numbers to identify the most talented athletes/players to represent the organizations, while community-based sport organizations need to have enough players fill roster positions for all of the teams that the house league based organization offers. This can be a challenge for management of the elite level sport organizations, as there is a reliance on these players to comprise their teams. Thus, this competition then can widen the gap between elite level sport and community sport based organizations, which is the reason why management of elite level sport organizations contributes the resources and effort into having a strong communication links with the feeder sport organizations.

From this research, readers can see that strategies such as information-sharing through information sessions, sitting on the boards of the community-based organizations, or having third-party (i.e., *College Hockey Inc.*) representation of information to prospective athletes and parents, have become increasingly essential. The development of such strategies is a professional function to be performed by the new class of management professionals. These professionals are sensitive to the need for organizational stability, visibility and reputation, have come to focus great attention on creating and maintaining relationships with lower level feeder organizations. This dissertation has argued that professional management is becoming increasingly prevalent within the hockey system overall and, as competition for players and the desire to retain players becomes more intense, is likely to see no change in inertia any time soon.

Future Research Agenda

This research has provided a foundation for understanding local club hockey organizations, governing hockey bodies, and the major junior and intercollegiate organizations of the CELHDS. During the data collection process, a number of areas emerged that have yet to be explored. The first of these is simply an exploration of the recruitment and retention practices of the member organizations of the CHL, CIS, and NCAA. Second, a number of interviewees mentioned the emergence of private hockey schools and academies. Future research could identify how these organizations can fit within the CELHDS. As stated earlier, open systems have not been explored in the literature and it could be important to understand the dynamics of systems in which there are no

residential boundaries to limit recruiting. Finally, comparative studies could be undertaken to determine whether hockey in Canada is unique or whether similar findings would result from the investigation of other sports in matters of recruitment and retention, both for players and coaches. Hockey, although unique in many ways, is nonetheless an empirical setting that can inform sport managers generally and can provide ideas for ensuring the stability of their respective sport organizations where talented players within a Canadian context represent the critical resource.

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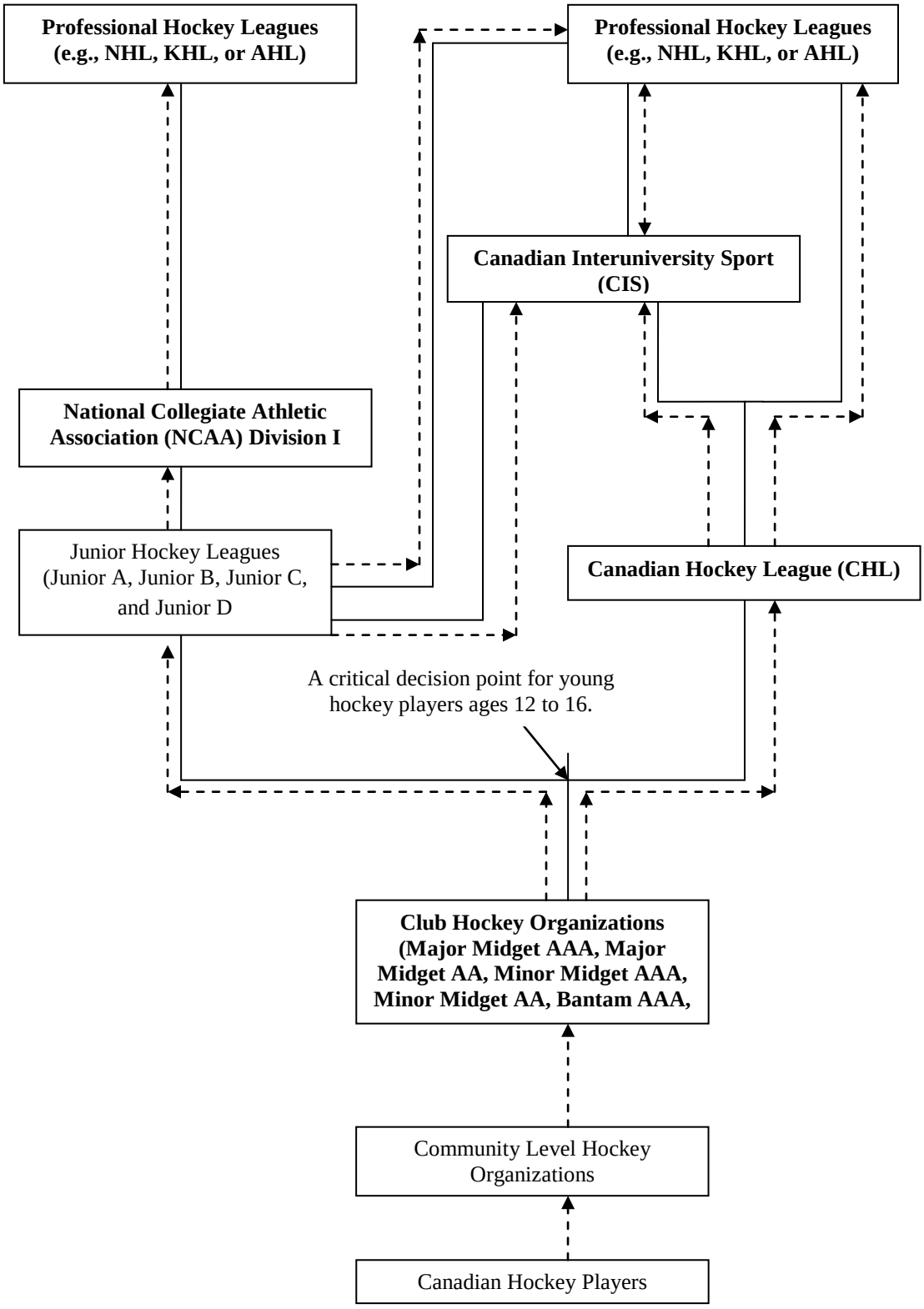
APPENDIX A: Player Pathways to being a Professional Hockey Player and the Organizations Involved the CELHDS



APPENDIX B: Franchises that Comprise Three Leagues of the CHL

QMJHL	OHL	WHL
Acadie-Bathurst Titans	Kitchener Rangers	Edmonton Oil Kings
Cape Breton Screaming Eagles	Sarnia Sting	Red Deer Rebels
Halifax Mooseheads	Oshawa Generals	Calgary Hitman
Blainville-Boisbriand, Armada	Belleville Bulls	Bandon Wheat Kings
Moncton Wildcats	Windsor Spitfires	Saskatoon Blades
PEI Rockets	Mississauga St. Michaels Majors	Spokane Chiefs
Saint John Sea Dogs	Brampton Battalion	Tri-City Americans
Baie-Comeau Drakkar	Barrie Colts	Vancouver Giants
Chicoutimi Sagueneens	Ottawa 67's	Swift Current Broncos
Gatineau Olympiques	Erie Otters	Seattle Thunderbirds
Quebec Remparts	Guelph Storm	Regina Pats
Rimouski Oceanic	Niagara IceDogs	Prince Albert Raiders
Rouyn-Noranda Huskies	Peterborough Petes	Prince George Cougars
Shawinigan Cataractes	Kingston Frontenacs	Moose Jaw Warriors
Val-d'Or Foreurs	Sudbury Wolves	Portland Winter Hawks
Victoriaville Tigres	Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds	Medicine Hat Tigers
Drummondville Voltiguers	London Knights	Lethbridge Hurricanes
	Saginaw Spirit	Kamloops Blazers
	Plymouth Whalers	Kelowna Rockets
	Owen Sound Attack	Kootenay Ice
		Everett Silvertips
		Victoria Royals

Note: Adopted from *Standings*, by the Western Hockey League, 2012, retrieved from http://www.whl.ca/standings/show/ls_season/238/subtype/1; *Standings*, by the Ontario Hockey League, 2012, http://www.ontariohockeyleague.com/standings/show/ls_season/44/subtype/1; *Standings*, by the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, 2012, from http://theqmjhl.ca/standings/show/ls_season/168/subtype/1.

APPENDIX C: Universities that Participate in Hockey within the CIS

Atlantic University Sport	Canada West	East Division (OUA)	West Division (OUA)
Acadia University	University of Alberta	McGill University	The University of Western Ontario
Dalhousie University	University of Calgary	University of Toronto	Lakehead University
Université de Moncton	University of Lethbridge	University of Ottawa	University of Waterloo
University of New Brunswick	University of Saskatchewan	Concordia University	York University
University of Prince Edward Island	University of Regina	Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières	Brock University
Saint Mary's University	University of Manitoba	Queens University	University of Guelph
St. Thomas University	University of British Columbia	Carleton University	Wilfred Laurier University
St. Francis Xavier University		Ryerson University	University of Windsor
		Royal Military College of Canada	University of Ontario Institute of Technology
		Nipissing University	

Note: Adopted from *Men's Ice Hockey*, by Canadian Interuniversity Sport, 2012, retrieved from http://english.cis-sic.ca/sports/mice/2011-12/standings-conf.

APPENDIX D: NCAA Division I Schools that Participate in Hockey

Atlantic Hockey	CCHA	Independents	ECAC Hockey	Hockey East	WCHA
Air Force	Alaska Fairbanks	Alabama-Huntsville	Brown	Boston College	Alaska Anchorage
American International College	Bowling Green		Clarkson	Boston University	Colorado College
Army	Ferris State		Colgate	Maine	Denver
Bentley College	Lake Superior State		Cornell	Massachusetts	Michigan Technology
Canisius	Miami (Ohio)		Dartmouth	University of Massachusetts-Lowell	Minnesota State
Connecticut	Michigan		Harvard	Merrimack	Minnesota State Mankato
Holy Cross	Michigan State		Princeton	Northeastern	Minnesota-Duluth
Mercyhurst	Nebraska-Omaha		Quinnipiac	Providence	North Dakota
Rochester Institute of Technology	Northern Michigan		Rensselaer	Vermont	St.Cloud State
Sacred Heart	Notre Dame		St. Lawrence	New Hampshire	Wisconsin
Niagara	Ohio State		Union (New York)		Bemidji State
Robert Morris	Western Michigan		Yale		Nebraska-Omaha

Note: Adopted from *Men's Division I Hockey Standings: 2011-2012*, by USCHO, 2012, retrieved from http://www.uscho.com/standings/.

APPENDIX E: Sample Information Letter for Club Hockey Organizations

Dear [Study Participant Name],

My name is Jonathon Edwards and I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. Based on your experiences in the hockey industry, I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. **The specific purpose of this research is to examine elite level youth hockey programs, policies, and procedures for attracting and developing male hockey players within Canada.** By taking part in this study, you will help us understand how Canadian male elite level hockey players are attracted to and are developed by the hockey clubs/private hockey schools/hockey academies. The study is voluntary and you will only be included if you provide permission.

We would like to invite you to take part in a one-on-one interview in person or over the phone. Interviews will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. In-person interviews will be done at a site and time that is convenient for you, which can include the arena, your home, or coffee shop. Phone interviews will take place in a secure office with a closed door at either the office of the University of Alberta or at the personal office of principal investigator. At the beginning of the phone interview we will review the information letter and consent form and you will be asked to provide verbal consent to participate in the study. Both types of interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator. There are no risks with this study. You are free to withdraw at any time. There are no negative consequences for non-participation.

All hardcopies of the transcribed data will remain confidential and be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Alberta. The tapes used to record the interviews will be destroyed once the transcription process has been completed. Data will be stored for a period of five years post-publication. All the names of interviewees and organizations will be removed and pseudonyms will be used in the written report and within the transcribed data so that your identity is kept private.

If you have concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Wendy Rodgers, *Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Board*, at 780-492-8126. Dr. Rodgers has no direct involvement with this project. If you have any questions about the study, please free to contact any member of the research team using the contact information included below.

Sincerely,
Jonathon Edwards, Graduate Student & Dr. Marvin Washington

Principal Investigator:
Jonathon Edwards, Ph.D Student;
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation;
University of Alberta;
Ph: 492-6582; Fax: 492-2364;
Email: jre2@ualberta.ca

Supervisor:
Marvin Washington, Ph.D. Associate Professor;
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation;
University of Alberta;
Ph: (780) 492-2311; Fax: 492-2364;
Email: mwashing@sports.ualberta.ca

APPENDIX F: Sample of the Consent Form used for Club Hockey Organizations

Title of Project: *An Exploratory Insight into the Role of Private Hockey Schools, Hockey Academies, and Club Level Hockey Involved in Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System*

Principal Investigator: Jonathon Edwards, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9 Ph: 492-6582; Fax: 492-2364; jre2@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Marvin Washington, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9; Ph: (780) 492-2311; Fax: 492-2364; mwashing@sports.ualberta.ca

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? Yes No

Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet? Yes No

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study?

Yes No

Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence?

Yes No

Do you understand that the name of your organization and yourself will remain anonymous?

Yes No

Do you understand that the information that is provided may be used for publication purposes?

Yes No

I agree to take part in this study:

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Research Participant *Date* *Witness*

_____ _____

Printed Name (Participant) *Printed Name (Witness)*

APPENDIX G: Interview Guide for Club Hockey Organizations

General Questions:

1. What is your role in the organization?
2. What is the mission of your organization?
3. Has the current economic conditions affected your membership in anyway?
4. What does success entail for your organization?
5. What type of historical accomplishments can you credit your organizations?
6. What obstacles does the organization face when they are providing hockey?
7. What is the cost per year?

Coaching:

8. How do you recruit coaches?
9. How are coaches chosen?
10. What opportunities do you provide to coaches?
11. What are some things that you look for in coaches?
12. What does coaching mean for your organization?
13. Do you guys accept parent coaching?
14. Do coaches receive funding?

The Program:

15. Describe your program.
16. How are players developed?
17. What does development mean to the organization?
18. How are try outs conducted?
19. How important is academics within the program?

NCAA, CHL, and CIS Hockey:

20. What type of communication exists between your organization and CIS, CHL, and NCAA?
21. Do you feel pressure from CHL or NCAA teams to keep a player at a certain level even if they are not good enough to remain at that level?

Communication:

22. How well would you say that your communication is with the feeder organizations?
23. Do you go to their meetings or do they come to your meetings? How does that communication lines work?
24. Describe your relationship with the governing bodies?

APPENDIX H: Sample Interview Guide for the Governing Hockey Bodies

General Questions:

1. What is your role in the organization?
2. What is the mission of your organization?
3. Have the current economic conditions affected your membership in any way?
4. What are your expectations of the program?
5. What obstacles does an organization face when providing hockey to youth?
6. What type of communication do you have with other organizations?
7. How can the organization improve?
8. What does success mean for your organization?
9. How do you measure success?
10. Where do you see hockey and your organization moving to in the future?

Communication:

11. How is information disseminated to the organizations?
12. What methods of communication do you use with the organizations?

Coaching:

13. What programs do you offer coaches?
14. What information do you provide to coaches for education/training purposes?

Hockey Program:

19. Do you utilize the LTPD model?
20. What does development mean to the organization?
21. How do you showcase your players for recruitment at higher levels?
22. Discuss the boundary regulations for player mobility.

CIS, CHL, and NCAA:

23. Do you ever communicate with CHL, CIS, or NCAA?

APPENDIX I: Sample Information Letter for the Institutions Involved in Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System

Dear [Study Participant Name],

My name is Jonathon Edwards and I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. Based on your experiences in the hockey industry, I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. **The specific purpose of this research is to examine the CIS, CHL, and NCAA policies, procedures, and programs for attracting and developing Canada's male hockey players.** By taking part in this study, you will help us understand how Canadian male elite level hockey players are attracted to CIS, CHL, and NCAA. The study is voluntary and you will only be included if you provide permission.

We would like to invite you to take part in a one-on-one interview in person or over the phone. Interviews will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. In-person interviews will be done at a site and time that is convenient for you; while phone interviews will take place in a secure office with a closed door at either the office of the University of Alberta or at the personal office of principal investigator. At the beginning of the phone interview we will review the information letter and consent form and you will be asked to provide verbal consent to participate in the study. Both types of interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator. Upon the completion of the transcribed interviews you will receive a copy of the transcribed interviews for your review. There are no risks with this study. You are free to withdraw at any time up until the analysis of the data begins and you can request that the tape recorder be shut off at anytime during the interview. There are no negative consequences for non-participation in this study.

All hardcopies of the transcribed data will remain confidential and be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Alberta. Data will be stored for a period of five years post-publication as per University of Alberta Policy. All the names of interviewees and organizations will be removed and pseudonyms will be used in the written report and within the transcribed data so that your identity is kept private.

The benefits of participating in this study are that managers can gain valuable information pertaining to the understanding of how Canadian male elite level hockey players are attracted and developed by organizations such as the governing body of the CIS, CHL, and NCAA, as well as their members. Your participation in this study will provide further insight to both players and parents through an understanding of which organization (i.e., CIS, CHL, and NCAA) will be an option for their sons as they progress through Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System.

If you have concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Kelvin Jones, *Faculties of Physical Education and Recreation (PER), Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES) and Native Studies (NS),* at 780-492-0650. Dr. Jones has no direct involvement with this project. If you have any questions about the study, please free to contact any member of the research team using the contact information included below.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Edwards, Graduate Candidate & Dr. Marvin Washington

Principal Investigator:

Jonathon Edwards, Ph.D Candidate;
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation;
University of Alberta;
Ph: 492-6582; Fax: 492-2364;
Email: jre2@ualberta.ca

Supervisor:

Marvin Washington, Ph.D. Associate Professor;
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation;
University of Alberta;
Ph: (780) 492-2311; Fax: 492-2364;
Email: mwashing@sports.ualberta.ca

APPENDIX J: Sample of the Consent Form used for Institutions

Title of Project: *An Exploratory Insight into the Institutions Involvement in Canada's Elite Level Hockey Development System*

Principal Investigator: Jonathon Edwards, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9 Ph: 492-6582; Fax: 492-2364; jre2@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Marvin Washington, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9; Ph: (780) 492-2311; Fax: 492-2364; mwashing@sports.ualberta.ca

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? Yes No

Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet? Yes No

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study?

Yes No

Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence?

Yes No

Do you understand that your name and organization will remain anonymous?

Yes No

Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Yes No

Do you understand that this interview will be audio recorded? Yes No

Do you understand who will have access to the information that you provide?

Yes No

Do you understand that the information that is provided may be used for publication purposes?

Yes No

I agree to take part in this study:

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Research Participant *Date* *Witness*

_____ _____

Printed Name (Participant) *Printed Name (Witness)*

APPENDIX K: Sample Interview Guide for the Institutions

General Questions:

1. Due to the limited number of organizations in your position, do you provide permission for me to use the organizations name within the reports and publications?
2. Please discuss your role within the organization.
3. Can you speak to some background information about your organization (i.e., mission, values, goals, and strategic plans)?
4. What are some of the programs that your organization offers to its members?
5. Have the current economic conditions affected your membership in any way?
6. How can the organization improve?
7. What importance does the organization place on being perceived as a viable place to play and provide opportunities to get the player to the next level?
8. Who would you consider to be major stakeholders within your organization?
9. What role do the stakeholders play in your organization?
10. Discuss the type of relationship you have with the NHL or other professional hockey leagues?
11. What differentiates your organization from the other two organizations?
12. How does CHL, CIS, or NCAA face adversity the other organizations?
13. When did the partnership between the CIS, CHL or NCAA?
14. Where do you see the organization going in the next 10 years?

Recruitment:

15. What are your goals for recruitment?
16. Are there any stipulations placed upon franchises regarding recruitment?
17. How do you regulate parity among franchises for recruitment?
18. Discuss some of the features of your organizations that have an impact on recruitment procedures for your members?
19. What are some of the requirements for entering into the hockey program?
20. What are the incentives provided for the recruitment?

Policies, Procedures, and Rules:

21. How are policies and procedures developed?
22. How are these rules enforced?

Communication:

23. Do you communicate and interact with other organizations?

24. What type of relationship does your organization have with other organizations?
25. Have you ever used policies from other leagues or organizations?
26. How do you communicate with potential parents and athletes?