PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE PORTFOLIO

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Contents

Abstract

This doctoral portfolio represents the culmination of my professional doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology. It provides a comprehensive overview of my transformation from a novice to a proficient practitioner. The portfolio comprises three consultancy case studies that delve into the dynamics of the client-practitioner relationship and the practical application of psychological principles to enhance performance and well-being. It includes a consultancy contract report, shedding light on the ethical considerations and professional boundaries inherent in applied practice. The teaching and training component highlights my growth as an educator, featuring a case study, a teaching diary, and an insightful comparative analysis of teaching experiences.

The research segment of the portfolio includes a systematic review that critically evaluates the quality of evidence in psychological skills training, emphasising the necessity for rigorous methodologies. It also encompasses two empirical studies, revealing my competence in research design, data analysis, and interpretation. The portfolio concludes with a reflective research commentary, emphasising the pivotal role of research in evidence-based practice, encapsulating lessons learned and ethical considerations.

Complementing these components are a practice log of training and a reflective practice log that document my experiential journey, and a reflective practice commentary that encapsulates my evolution from a trainee to a proficient sport and exercise psychologist. This portfolio stands as a testament to my growth, skill development, and ethical commitment throughout the doctoral journey.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an

application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute

of learning.

Acknowledgements

Prof Doc Publications

Lange-Smith, S., Cabot, J., Coffee, P., Gunnell, K., & Tod, D. (2023) The efficacy of

psychological skills training for enhancing performance in sport: A review of reviews.

International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 1-18. DOI:

10.1080/1612197X.2023.2168725

Consultancy Case Study 1

PST with Amy, a Compound Archer. 16/01/2020.

All names have been changed to protect individual's anonymity.

Introduction to the client

Client History

Amy is an archery athlete, who competes in the women's individual compound event. She made her international debut in 2004. Amy described this as one of the high points of her career; she felt under no pressure in the senior competition, as she had already satisfied her goal of becoming national junior champion. In the 2011 season, Amy finished the season with a world ranking of third. In seasons after that success, Amy generally maintained a world ranking in the lower portion of the global top 100 athletes in her discipline. Amy has competed in competitive compound archery since then at regional, domestic, and international level, and aims to become world champion before she retires.

Nature and context of consultancy

Sport psychology services were delivered to Amy through the Jersey Sport Foundation's (JSF) Performance Programme. The JSF is a non-profit organisation which provides local athletes with sport science services, subject to athletes being eligible, based on sport-specific performance criteria. Amy has been supported by the JSF since 2007. Approximately two months before I began my employment with the JSF, Amy contacted the Head of Services at the JSF, to request an athlete management meeting. In the meeting, Amy informed him that she felt her performances and results had stagnated and wanted to identify the cause of this slump and make improvements. Together they constructed a subjective performance profile,

which identified coaching, bow setup and psychology as key areas for improvement. The Head of Services then informed Amy that I would soon be joining the JSF team, and that my role would primarily be sport psychology service delivery. It was established that one of my priority tasks would be consultancy with Amy.

Contracting Process

As a JSF supported athlete, Amy had access to unlimited access to all the services offered by the JSF, including Sport Psychology. As such, Amy was entitled to unlimited and ongoing sport psychology support, until such a time as it was no longer necessary, or Amy no longer met the criteria for support. Amy and I decided on weekly one-to-one meetings, with allowance to be flexible depending on needs and circumstances. Data protection and ethical considerations occur at an organisational level within the JSF; as such Amy had already given informed consent for opt-in confidentiality within sport psychology sessions, was aware that her data would be protected by appropriate three-tier security, and that As a Sport and Exercise Psychologist in Training, I am practicing under the supervision of a HCPC registered Sport and Exercise Psychologist.

Foundations and Underpinnings

Theoretical Orientation and Approach

My approach can be characterised as practitioner led, and cognitive-behaviourally based. Cognitive-behavioural theory is based on the observation that cognitions, emotions, and behaviours are reciprocally related. Each of these can also interact with the environment, through the filter of cognitions (Leahy, 2015). Optimising cognitions will optimise behavioural outcomes, in this instance with the aim of enhancing performance. I operationalise this approach by drawing on strategies such as psychological skills training

(Vealey, 2007), Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Turner & Bennett, 2017), and Acceptance Commitment Therapy (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009). This approach has its roots in the certaintist tradition (Keegan, 2015), which fits well with my preference for evidence-based practice. However, as a 'scientist-practitioner,' I do borrow from the fallibilist philosophy by applying a critical lens to theory that protects myself, my client, and my profession by not assuming that the scientific theory or evidence is always appropriate, suitable, or needed in every context.

My aim for sport psychology practice is performance enhancement. That said, I recognise that personal and performance issues frequently overlap and interlink in complex ways. Therefore, rather than dealing purely within the realms of "performance psychology" I am happy to deal with psychological wellbeing, injury rehabilitation, sub-clinical issues, lifestyle management and/or management of career transitions (Stambulova et al., 2006; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010). I could be characterised as a employing a practitioner-led style; I see my role as analysing the psychological qualities of the athlete relevant to sport performance, and then developing these qualities by educating athletes on psychological concepts and implementing cognitive-behavioural interventions. Thus, I see myself as both an analyst, and an educator.

Ethical Standards

The ethical boundaries of the work were clarified when the structure of support was established, for example the level of support expected and my availability to Amy. The JSF's opt-in confidentiality policy regarding sport psychology services means that if the athlete requests that specific pieces of information are kept confidential, I would not disclose that information unless in situations where disclosure is mandated by the BPS Code of Ethics and

Conduct (The British Psychological Society, 2018). Otherwise, the default position is that the content of sport psychology sessions with athletes is shared with other performance practitioners, for the purposes of holistic athlete management. This information is kept confidential within the team, and any records kept are protected by the appropriate 3-tier security systems. Amy consented to this policy at intake. At intake, Amy was asked if she consented to her data and the content of her sessions to be used to produce a case study, which is a requirement for the completion of my doctoral programme. She was informed that she was under no obligation to accept, and that refusing would not affect the service that she would receive in any way. She was also informed that she would be anonymised, and that all her personal data would be protected. Amy gave informed consent to have a case study written based on the consultancy process we undertook together.

Therapeutic Alliance

In a certaintist philosophical tradition, the athlete-practitioner relationship is not considered to be of critical importance (Keegan, 2015). Nonetheless, a therapeutic alliance that facilitates trust and communication is of value in affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. This process began with an exchange of information; Amy told me about her own background, the sport of archery and the psychological challenges it poses to archery athletes. In turn, I explained the profession of sport psychology, my approach and how it could potentially help her. Following this we discussed our roles and expectations, which formed the foundation of the therapeutic alliance.

Intervention

Intake and Needs Assessment

Multiple methods were used to conduct the initial assessment, comprising of a semi-structured interview and the Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS) psychometric (Thomas, Murphy, & Hardy, 1999), and conversations with Lucy's coaches. Within the approach that I adopt, psychometrics are regarded as a valid measurement, however scientific best-practice favours triangulation of assessment measures, hence the use of additional information streams.

Interview

My intake assessment comprised of two parts. The first was a semi-structured interview, which was intended to gather information on Amy's history, and begin developing our therapeutic alliance. I prepared the following items as a practitioner-led guide to the interview schedule:

1. Confidentiality policy, styles, and preferences.

2. Athlete history

    a. First involvement, development, current involvement, support

3. General wellbeing

    a. Eating, sleeping, stress load, relationships, life satisfaction, energy availability, medical health, alcohol

4. Psychological characteristics

    a. What psychological skills/characteristics are necessary in archery?

    b. How have you managed to get to this level?

    c. Biggest strengths (psychological)

5. Presenting issues

  a. Are you having any psychological problems with performance right now?

  b. What puts you under pressure/causes you stress?

  c. What caused the change?

  d. Why now?

  e. What is sustaining the problem?

  f. What could be added or removed to solve the problem?

6. Describe best and worst competition.

  a. Thoughts, feelings, behaviours

7. Ideal state

  a. What would your ideal psychological state be?

  b. What do you want to get out of this service?

8. The way forward

  a. Other athletes have similar issues, can be solved but require commitment like everything else in sport – There's no quick fix!

  b. Follow-up, evaluation, and termination.

Psychometric Assessment

The second part of my assessment was a psychometric evaluation. The psychometric test I selected was a modified version of the Test of Performance Strategies (Thomas, Murphy, & Hardy, 1999) which is empirically validated and widely used, as well being a measure that I am familiar with and comfortable using.

I gave Amy the modified version of the TOPS to complete and return before our next session. The results of this assessment are presented below (Figures 1 & 2). I sent Amy a follow-up email with these results in diagrammatic form and requested any comments or observations she might have about them.
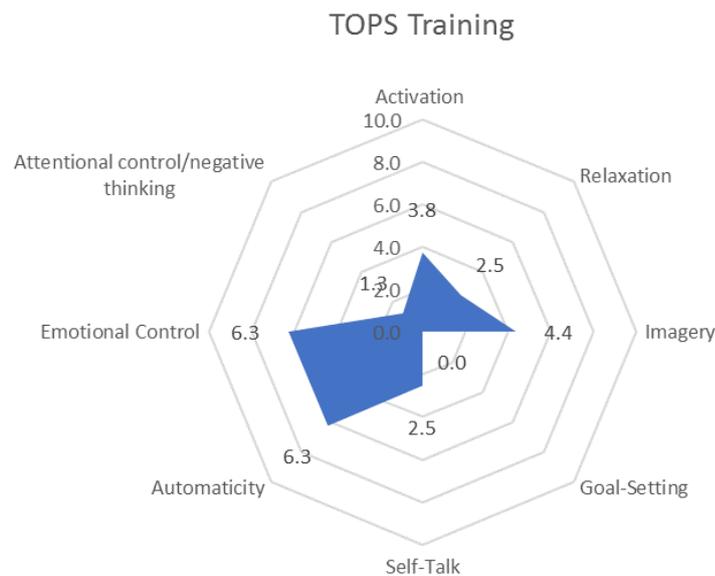
Figure 1: Results of the Test Of Performance Strategies - Training (Thomas, et al., 1999).

From the initial intake assessment, Amy reflected that her training rarely demanded use of relaxation techniques, as she is never over-aroused in training. Amy commented that she was largely unaware of her self-talk in training. She also commented, on seeing the results of this questionnaire, that it is likely that her poor attentional control rating is a consequence of not setting goals for her practice.

TOPS Competition

Activation
10.0
8.0 5.6
6.0

Attentional control/negative
thinking
3.8 4.0

Relaxation

2.0

1.3 0.0

3.1

Emotional Control

4.4 Imagery

Automaticity 7.5

6.9 Goal-Setting

6.9

Self-Talk
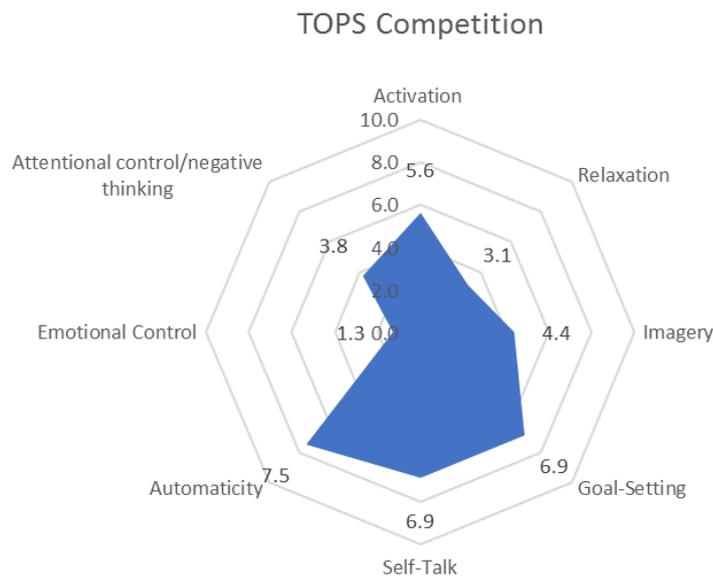
Figure 2: Results of the Test of Performance Strategies - Competition (Thomas, et al., 1999).

Amy commented that she often feels over-aroused by the demands of competition, so relaxation training would be more beneficial than activation strategies in this context. She concurred that she struggles with emotional control at competitions, particularly with regards to anxiety and frustration. Amy's coach suggested that she is frequently distracted by other archers at competition, which he believes is reflected in her relatively poor attentional control score.

Presenting Difficulties and Needs Analysis

The intake and needs assessment highlighted three presenting difficulties. These are listed below, along with the corresponding need to be addressed:

1. **Anxiety in competition**

   - Amy finds that often she experiences anxiety at competition. This is characterised by signs of somatic and cognitive over-arousal, including muscle

trembling, increased heart rate and negative affect. Amy needs to be able to down-regulate her anxiety in competition, as presently it is causing performance decrements and interfering with fine motor control.

2. **Attentional control in competition**

- Target sports athletes, such as archers should predominantly have a task-relevant, attentional focus either on the target (narrow external) or on their own form (broad internal). However, Amy finds that she is often distracted by her thoughts (narrow internal) and the competition environment (broad external). In addition, Amy occasionally finds herself distracted by other archers (task-irrelevant) who engage in "dark arts" – subtle, legal, tactics intended to disrupt other's performance. Amy needs to be able to maintain appropriate attentional focus in competition, as this is critical for peak performance (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

3. **Enjoyment in training**

- Amy does not enjoy her archery training as much as she used to. Archery training can be monotonous – there is not much variation in shooting an end (a group of three arrows), walking to the target to retrieve the arrows, then walking back, and repeating. As a result, Amy finds that her motivation to train is diminished. Within the Self-Determination Theory framework (Ryan & Deci, 2017), this would be interpreted as a deficit in intrinsic regulation. Amy's basic psychological needs need to be satisfied to a greater degree to increase her enjoyment in her training.

Case Formulation and Intervention Selection

My practice philosophy, cognitive-behavioural approach and role means that in case formulation, the information I've gathered is understood in relation to theory, and this theory then informs the programme tasks for skill development. Thus, having conducted the above needs analysis, I selected several mental skills which I intended to teach Amy to meet her presenting needs.

- **Anxiety in competition**
    - Amy's anxiety regulation will be developed using Öst's (1987) applied relaxation (AR) technique. Completion of the applied relaxation programme should allow Amy to achieve rapid relaxation in competition situations.

- **Attentional control in competition**
    - I intend to identify, and increase Amy's awareness of, thoughts which frequently distract her using the Think Aloud protocol.
    - I intend to take persistent distracting thoughts and teach Amy to reframe them into motivational self-statements using the guidelines set out by Mikes (1987).
    - I intend to introduce Amy to PETTLEP visualisation to focus her attention on her holistic technique, rather than specific components.
    - Finally, I intend to introduce Amy to the concept of pre-performance routines. I aim to develop Amy's pre-shot routine to incorporate the above mental skills. I will also use this as an opportunity to investigate Amy's use of quiet eye (Vickers, 2007), and optimise it if necessary.

- **Enjoyment in training**
    - Amy's enjoyment of archery training and competition will be increased by ensuring that her competence need is being satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2008). I intended to pursue this outcome by working with Amy and Sean to generate goals, challenges, and games that she can integrate into her training.

Completion of these will serve as mastery experiences (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1997), which should enhance her perceived competence, and may also have the welcome effect of enhancing Amy's self-efficacy.

Delivery

Given my practitioner philosophy, approach to practice and role, when delivering an intervention, I seek to prescribe things that support education, acquisition and practice of skills. Bearing in mind the interventions that were selected based on my case formulation, I planned to do a block of work with Amy, an hour per week for six weeks, at which point I planned that we would pause to evaluate our progress up to that point.

Week 1.

Pre-Session

Before the first session of work with Amy, I gave her an article to read as homework. This article was "On Target with Mental Skills: An Interview with Darrell Pace" (Vealey & Walter, 1994). The rationale for giving this to Amy was to introduce her to some of the mental skills we would be working on, and to emphasise how they were key to the success of the multiple Olympic gold medallist.

Session

I used the first part of this session with Amy to continue the rapport building process, by providing an overview of the plan for the next seven weeks, the skills we would cover and how they would benefit Amy. I related these to those noted by Pace in the interview article that Amy had read. She related that the article had made an impression on her, and that she was excited to be more like Pace.

I used the second portion of this session to begin training Amy in Öst's (1987) AR technique. I began by discussing with Amy the recommended explanation of the technique in the original paper. Then, following the guidelines set out by Wolpe and Lazarus (1966), we began the progressive stage of AR training by practicing a full-body progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) exercise, from feet upwards, which took just less than fifteen minutes to complete.

Homework

At the conclusion of the session, I asked Amy to practice the PMR exercise once a day in the week before our next meeting. I gave her a chart to facilitate this.

Week 2.

Session

To begin this session, I asked Amy to recap how she can be distracted by external distractions as well her own negative thinking in archery competitions. Following on from this, I explained how self-talk can be used as a method of redirecting attention from task-irrelevant to task-relevant stimuli. Amy understood this explanation, in fact it was Amy who progressed the session by asking how negative thoughts could be captured and scrutinised. This led well into explaining the rationale of the Think Aloud protocol (Van Someren, Barnard, & Sandberg, 1994), and how it is used. I told Amy that this was something I would ask her to use to inform our next session.

I used the remaining portion of the session to continue with the AR training. Amy had adhered to her homework, practicing PMR before bed each night. She had become reasonably proficient with the skill and reported that her sleep quality had consequently

improved. Considering this, I decided to move on to the release-only stage of AR training, once again following the guidelines set down by Öst (1987).

Homework

As homework, I asked Amy to practice the release-only relaxation once per day and gave her a new chart to facilitate this. I also asked her to employ the Think Aloud protocol during her next practice shoot. This would form the basis of the next session.

Week 3.

Pre-Session

I asked Amy to listen back to her own Think Aloud recording, and to send it to me.

Session

We used this session to review the feedback from the Think Aloud protocol Amy used at a training shoot. Amy admitted that she was surprised to listen back to find that a lot of her thinking was negative or irrelevant, and that there was an absence of positive self-talk. Considering this, we identified Amy's most common thoughts, and wrote them all down. We then reframed each into a motivational self-statement according to the guidelines laid out by Mikes (1987). At the conclusion of the session, Amy had a list of self-statements which she made frequently, and a corresponding list of more facilitative, motivational self-statements.

Towards the end of the session, we reviewed Amy's progress with the AR training. Amy had made good progress, becoming proficient with release-only relaxation. Considering this, I progressed Amy into cue-controlled relaxation. Amy remarked that this felt like Pace's description of his relaxation techniques.

Homework

I asked Amy to practice cue-controlled relaxation once per day as homework. I had also asked Amy to bring to the next session some notes from Sean about key coaching points that she should keep in mind when shooting at competition. From this request, it transpired that Amy was very rarely sending Sean footage of herself shooting. Therefore, I suggested to Amy that she should film herself at a training, shoot, and send the footage to Sean for video coaching. I asked that she bring any feedback to our next session.

Week 4.

Session

In this session I aimed to develop Amy's skill with instructional self-talk. Amy had brought with her several coaching points which had been sent to her by her coach, having seen the footage of Amy shooting. In an exercise like the one we had completed the previous week, we worked together to distil the essence of the coaching points sent by Sean into single statements. We struggled initially; Amy didn't understand the exercise well initially and I lack knowledge around archery. I suggested a role-pay exercise, where I was a novice archer, and Amy was coaching me the points that Sean had fed back to her, although she was allowed only one sentence per point. We made much more progress this way and were able to distil the coaching points from Sean into a bank of instructional self-statements.

I used the remainder of the session to review Amy's progress with the applied relaxation method. Amy reported to me that she had been practicing cue-controlled relaxation, but was saying the cues internally, as she felt awkward saying them out loud! As there was not, to my knowledge, any problem with this theoretically, I decided to progress Amy to the differential stage of applied relaxation. We practiced this once from a seated position, and I suggested to

Amy that throughout the coming week she progress from sitting still, to sitting and writing, to standing still, to walking, every other day throughout the coming week.

Homework

As previously outlined, I asked Amy to practice the differential phase of the applied relaxation program daily until our next meeting.

Week 5.

Session

In this session, I aimed to introduce Amy to visualisation, and develop her use of this skill. I began the session by revisiting what Amy had told me about how archers should have a broad internal focus while shooting, but it seemed that she has a much narrower internal focus. Amy agreed, commenting that she focuses too much on individual elements of her technique, rather than her form globally. I took this opportunity to introduce Amy to the idea of "paralysis by analysis" (Ehrlenspiel, 2001), and suggested that we explore a technique that might help to broaden her attentional focus. Amy agreed, so I introduced the concept of visualisation to her, and talked through the PETTLEP model (Holmes & Collins, 2001). I asked Amy when she thought the most appropriate time to deploy this technique would be whilst shooting, and she concluded that it would be best used for a few seconds immediately before each end. I had asked Amy to bring her bow to this session, so we trialled what it would be like using imagery before each shot.

I used the second portion of the session to review Amy's progress with the applied relaxation training. She had progressed well with differential relaxation, commenting that she had found it easy in fact. Considering that, I progressed her to the rapid relaxation stage of the protocol.

I explained this stage to Amy, and that she would have to practice many more times per day,

but the amount of time spent practicing (Öst, 1987) would remain similar as each practice

would not take much time.

Homework

As with previous weeks, I asked Amy to continue practising the applied relaxation protocol. I

also asked her to start integrating visualisation practice into her training shoots.

Week 6.

Session

I used this session to review and optimise Amy's pre-shot routine. Together we watched

footage of the final shoot-off from the Vegas 2019 competition (World Archery, 2019)

alongside footage of Amy shooting, to compare Amy's pre-shot routine with those of the best

athletes in her category. We made three observations: Sara Lopez and So Chae-won (the

archers in the video) both utilised very standardised pre-shot routines. Secondly, both archers

had much earlier onset, and later offset of visual fixation than Amy did. I used this as an

opportunity to explain the benefit of earlier onset and later offset of quiet eye to Amy and

encouraged her to think about this while shooting. Finally, during So Chae-won's pre-shot

routine there is a period lasting approximately 4s in which she remains immobile, either with

her eyes closed or staring into the middle distance. Amy reported that she has heard that

Korean archers are instructed to use breath control and visualisation techniques pre-shot,

which she imagined was the explanation for So's action. At this point I introduced Amy to

Singer's (1988) 5-stage model for pre-performance routines, and we began to devise one for

Amy. We discussed how her AR skill and motivational self-talk could be incorporated in the

readying stage, and we discussed the possibility of introducing PETTLEP imagery into her routine at the visualisation stage.

At this point, time was beginning to run out for the session, but I was briefly able to explain to Amy that the application training stage of AR involved applying what she had been practicing in the context of practicing archery. As it is difficult to simulate the competitive environment regularly to practice the application stage, I encouraged Amy to use visualise the competition environment whilst doing her archery practice, before practicing the applied relaxation.

Homework

As with previous weeks, I asked Amy to continue practising the applied relaxation protocol.

Week 7.

Pre-Session

I messaged Amy before this session to ask her to think about the kinds of training activities she had practiced while learning archery. I contacted her coach to enquire to what extent he was programming her practice sessions. It transpired that he was not programming her sessions. I suggested to him that Amy and I could work together to devise several training games and activities to increase her engagement and enjoyment in training, without compromising the quality of her practice. He gave this idea his blessing, and agreed to review and give feedback on what we came up with to provide quality assurance.

Session

This session took place at Amy's training venue. During the session, Amy and I explored different ways in which she could adapt her training. I was trying to be guided by basic psychological needs theory, but I framed this exercise as finding ways to add variety and opportunities for achievement to Amy's training. Together, we compiled a list of activities, or targets to achieve, in practice shoots. Given that we were at Amy's training venue, Amy was able to trial some of these activities. While a relatively straightforward task, this took most of the session.

With the remainder of the session, I took the opportunity to recap the skills that we had been through in previous weeks, what their place was in competition, and how they packaged together within Amy's pre-shot routine. This served as a debrief, as it was our last session physically together for some time, and an opportunity for Amy to ask some questions which had been thus far unanswered.

Homework

While not strictly homework, Amy was to put into practice what we had done in this session by choosing one activity or challenge from the bank we compiled into her practice at each shoot.

Monitoring and Evaluation

I followed up with Amy one month after our final session together. My rationale for evaluating the effectiveness of consultancy at this point was because some time had passed, in which I hoped the mental skills that we had worked on together had been ingrained as

good habits. In addition, Amy had competed in this time, allowing her to test these skills in competition.

I once again used multiple methods of assessment given my belief in the importance of triangulation. In keeping with the certaintist tradition, my first assessment was a post-intervention evaluation using the TOPS. A summary of the results can be found in Figures 3 and 4. The TOPS indicated that Amy's ability to relax in both training and competition had improved, and that she was making better use of imagery, self-talk, and goal setting in training. There was little appreciable difference made to Amy's use of imagery in competition, or on the attentional control/negative thinking factor in either condition.

I also conducted a follow-up interview with Amy to collect more qualitative information about whether she was using the skills that we had covered, and whether they had been effective. Amy reported that what she was finding most useful was the pre-shot routine, as it packaged together several of the skills that we had covered. Amy reported that she had reverted to using a shortened PMR rather than using applied relaxation in the competition. Nonetheless, Amy believed that both skills were useful in the competition she had attended, where she had shot an indoor PB. Finally, Amy reported that she was enjoying training more, now that some variety and greater opportunity for achievement had been introduced, rather than just repeatedly shooting ends.

Training TOPS - Before
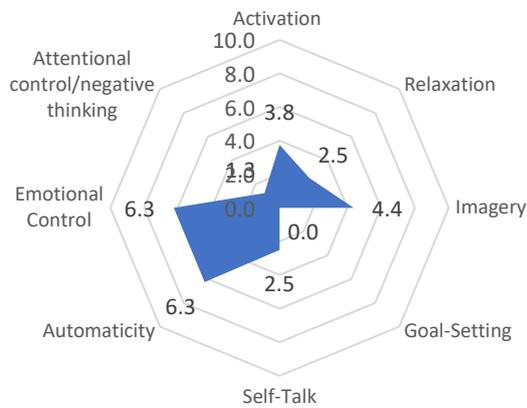
Training TOPS - After
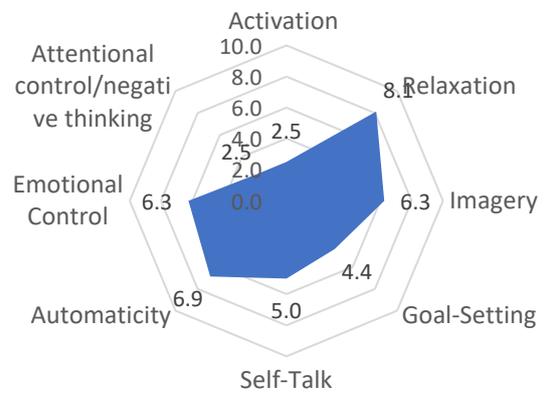
Figure 3: Results of the Test Of Performance Strategies (training) before and after intervention.

Competition TOPS - Before
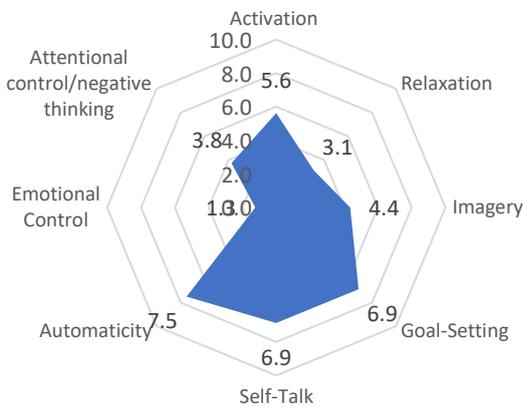
Competition TOPS - After
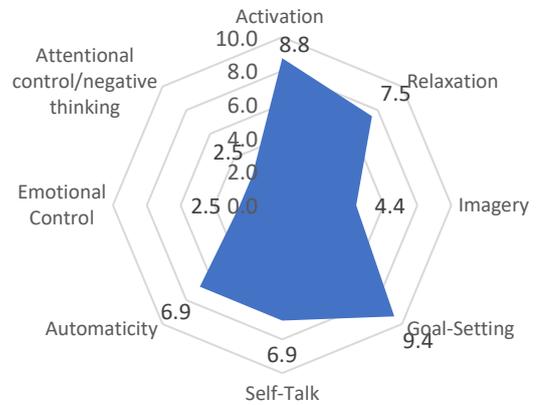
Figure 4: Results of the Test Of Performance Strategies (competition) before and after intervention.

Evaluation of Consultancy

As previously stated, my aim for consultancy was to deliver performance enhancement by developing Amy's attentional and emotional control in competition, and enjoyment in

training. Therefore, a critical question when evaluating my consultancy is whether I have delivered this. There is some evidence to suggest that this is the case; Amy's subjective reports indicated that the mental skills that she has learned are proving useful in helping her to control her anxiety and attention in competition situations. For example, Amy fed back that she "felt much more relaxed than at [previous competition]" in her most recent competition, although it is worth noting that the more recent competition was less significant in the competition calendar and could have been naturally less anxiety-provoking. In addition, it is interesting that Amy shot an indoor PB soon after the intervention was completed, although naturally it is not possible to establish to what extent this was due to the sport psychology intervention. Nonetheless, Amy's subjective reports of improvement and her strong competition performance after the intervention suggest that the intervention was at least somewhat successful in enhancing Amy's performance.

An interesting point was that Amy elected to dispense with the applied relaxation that we had worked towards, and instead abridge the PMR technique that she had learned earlier. That Amy has understood the purpose of the mental skill well enough to adapt it to suit her needs is evidence that she is becoming more self-reliant, which is an indicator that the intervention has been successful. However, Amy's preference for using PMR does highlight a weakness of this intervention; it appears that the components of the intervention which were most effective (e.g. using PMR, and encouraging earlier onset and later offset of visual fixation while shooting) were covered relatively briefly, whereas skills which Amy did not report as being as helpful (particularly the "full version" of applied relaxation) had significant amounts of time devoted to their development. Indeed, Amy fed back that she "preferred the more practical bits," and retained them better as well. This suggests that the consultancy could have

been more effective had more time been devoted to the components of the intervention that were more effective.

A further critique of this consultancy was that at first the teaching methods I used were not well suited to how Amy learns. An example of this was that Amy did not find progress charts helpful with practicing applied relaxation. She found instead that setting reminders so her phone would vibrate was more helpful as a reminder, as it was more immediate and more kinaesthetic. Similarly, at the close of session four Amy remarked that she was struggling to completely remember sessions to that point, as they had been predominantly talk-based. To overcome this, I made sure that there were kinaesthetic, practical elements of sessions five to seven, and eventually in session seven taking the session to her training venue and making the learning almost entirely experiential. Thus, as the consultancy progressed, I took Amy's learning style more into account, which may explain to an extent why the content of the later sessions seemed to have a greater positive impact. This was an important learning experience for me, teaching me that it's critical to establish clients learning style at intake, and tailor my case formulation considering that.

Conclusion

I was contracted to work with Amy, a compound archery athlete, who was presenting problems with anxiety in competition, reduced attentional control in competition, and reduced enjoyment in training. I assessed Amy using the TOPS and a semi-structured intake interview. I used an MST intervention, aimed at developing Amy's ability to use self-talk, applied relaxation and a pre-shot routine to develop Amy's anxiety and attention control in competition. I also attempted to apply basic psychological needs theory to develop activities and goals for Amy's training, to give her more opportunities for achievement and increase her perceived competence. A repeat TOPS suggested that the intervention was successful, and

Amy reports that she is enjoying her training more and has recently shot an indoor PB in competition. It appears that in some areas the consultancy could have been more effective. A greater attempt to understand Amy's learning style should have been made earlier in consultancy. Nonetheless, it appears that the principal aim of consultancy, performance enhancement through developing Amy's attentional and emotional control in competition, and enjoyment in training, has been satisfied.

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Consultancy Case Study 2

REBT with Jack, an Amateur Boxer. 12/10/2020.

All names have been changed to protect individual's anonymity.

Introduction to the client

Client History

Jack is a boxer in his mid-thirties. He has been involved in amateur boxing for approximately a decade. Towards the latter years of this period, Jack began boxing regularly in club shows. Meeting with some success, Jack entered the England Boxing National Amateur Championships of 2019, reaching the semi-final. Given this success, Jack was selected for the Commonwealth Games pathway, with the goal for him to compete at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, 2022.

Nature and context of consultancy

Sport psychology services were delivered to Jack through the Jersey Sport Foundation's (JSF) Performance Programme. The JSF is a non-profit organisation which provides local athletes with sport science services, subject to athletes being eligible, based on sport-specific performance criteria. Jack has been supported by the JSF since 2018.

Approximately four months after I began my employment with the JSF, Jack's JSF Strength and Conditioning coach approached me to inform me that he suspected that one of his athletes was being affected by performance-limiting beliefs. He invited me to attend and observe an upcoming fight that Jack would be participating in. I attended the fight, and

observed as Jack withdrew from the fight part-way through the second round due to concern about aggravating a previous injury.

I approached Jack several days after this fight. I introduced myself and broached the topic of sport psychology. Jack was aware of my employment with the JSF, and was keen to engage in sport psychology work, as he believed he was being held back by the mental aspects of boxing. At this point we agreed a date for intake, and established how often we would meet.

Contracting Process

As a supported athlete, Jack had access to all the services offered by the JSF, including Sport Psychology. As such, Jack was entitled to unlimited and ongoing sport psychology support, until such a time as it was no longer necessary, or Jack no longer met the criteria for support. Jack and I decided on weekly one-to-one meetings, with allowance to be flexible depending on needs and circumstances. Data protection and ethical considerations occur at an organisational level within the JSF, and as such Jack had already given informed consent for opt-in confidentiality within sport psychology sessions, was aware that his data would be protected by appropriate three-tier security, and that I was practicing under supervision.

Foundations and Underpinnings

Theoretical Orientation and Approach

My practitioner-led approach in sport psychology intervention incorporates Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), a cognitive-behavioural technique developed by Ellis (1995). Recognising the reciprocal relationship between cognitions, emotions, behaviours, and the environment, I utilise REBT to optimise athletes' beliefs and facilitate performance enhancement (Leahy, 2015; Ellis, 1995). This approach involves identifying and modifying

irrational beliefs, thereby influencing emotional responses and, consequently, behavioural outcomes. In addition to REBT, I integrate psychological skills to comprehensively address athletes' mental well-being (Vealey, 2007; Hayes et al., 2009). Embracing evidence-based practice, I align with the certaintist tradition but adopt a fallibilist philosophy to critically evaluate and apply theories, ensuring their effectiveness in diverse contexts. My primary focus remains on performance enhancement, and the application of REBT can play a crucial role in this process. By targeting irrational beliefs and promoting cognitive restructuring, I empower athletes to develop resilience, improve decision-making, and navigate challenges effectively. Emphasising REBT as a cornerstone of my practitioner role, I strive to create a dynamic and empowering environment that facilitates athletes' autonomy and choice in their psychological development (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Ethical Standards

The ethical boundaries for this work, consistent with case study 1, were established during the support structure setup, clarifying the expected level of assistance and my availability to Jack. The JSF's sport psychology service follows an opt-in confidentiality policy, keeping specific information confidential unless mandated by the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (The British Psychological Society, 2018). Typically, sport psychology session content is shared with performance practitioners for holistic athlete management, maintaining confidentiality within the team through secure systems. Jack consented to this policy during intake. As a Sport and Exercise Psychologist in Training under HCPC supervision, Jack was informed of this relationship during intake. He voluntarily agreed to his data being used for a case study, a requirement for my doctoral program, with no impact on the provided service. Jack was assured of anonymity and data protection and willingly consented to the case study on the consultancy process.

Therapeutic Alliance

In the certaintist philosophical tradition, the athlete-practitioner relationship may not be deemed crucial (Keegan, 2015). Nevertheless, establishing a therapeutic alliance that fosters trust and communication holds significance for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, especially within the framework of Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT). This process initiated with an exchange of information; Jack shared details about his background and the psychological challenges in boxing. Reciprocally, I elucidated the profession of sport psychology, my REBT-based approach, and its potential benefits for him. Subsequently, we delved into our respective roles and expectations, laying the groundwork for a robust therapeutic alliance.

Intervention

Intake Assessment

Based on my certaintist practice philosophy and approach to practice, I generally prefer a triangulated approach to assessment, utilising a psychometric assessment. However, I had an awareness before beginning consultancy that there was some scepticism towards psychology assessment within the boxing club. Therefore, I elected to forgo the psychometric assessment, in favour of a more dialogical approach which I believed would be more helpful with developing relationships. Nonetheless, I made sure to maintain my preference for triangulation of methods, drawing on multiple information sources.

Consultation with Coaches

Before ever meeting with Jack, I was able to hold conversations with both his JSF Strength and Conditioning coach, Steve, and his club head coach, Tim. Steve has a strong relationship with Jack, and a rich understanding of the sport as he himself is a former boxer. Steve

informed me that he and Jack had spoken previously about Jack becoming nervous in the lead-up to the fight, to the extent that he would feel that he did not wish to compete. Steve also informed me that he believed that Jack did not perform to the best of his ability in competitive fights, due in part to nerves.

I was interested by the latter point, and through Steve I was able to set up a meeting with Tim, Jack's head coach, before a training session. Tim confirmed, and further emphasised, the point that Jack was able to perform to a much greater standard in training than he usually was able to in fights. He described Jack as becoming "stiff" and "robotic" in fights, where in sparring he was sees Jack "fighting easily" and "relaxed." Tim has known Jack for many years, playing a role in his upbringing, and knows Jack to be talkative and outgoing, but commented several times that Jack becomes quiet and withdrawn in the hours leading up to a fight.

Behavioural Observation

Immediately after meeting with Tim, I had the opportunity to observe Jack in training. I have almost no knowledge of boxing, so I made a point of trying to observe only his mannerisms, body language and interactions with others. As Tim had said, Jack indeed seemed sociable and relaxed, while training and in recovery periods.

Approximately a week later I had the opportunity to observe Jack again, this time in the context of a competitive fight. Jack was fighting late on the card, so during preliminary rounds he mingled with the audience. While he spoke with others, it did seem to me that he was less relaxed than before, and that his body language was more defensive. Jack left the main venue to prepare roughly ninety minutes before his fight. When he walked out for his

fight, his body language remained closed, and he had a troubled facial expression. Jack withdrew from the fight in the second round, being concerned about aggravating a hip injury and conceding the victory to his opponent was a potential consequence of his debilitative competitive anxiety.

Interview

Approximately a week after his fight, I arranged to meet Jack before one of his strength and conditioning sessions. We had an informal conversation where Jack told me about his previous involvement with boxing, his previous experiences with competition, and the previous fight. Jack mentioned a particular anecdote where in a previous fight he had been called to the ring much sooner than he had expected, leaving him no time to prepare as he would normally. To his surprise, Jack found that this was one of his best fights, described as being 'relaxed, fun, and effortless'. Following this I asked Jack what he normally finds himself doing in the time immediately before fights. He told me that he uses the time to warm up, but often finds himself thinking about "seeing" negative outcomes of the fight. I asked him specifically what kind of outcomes he meant, to which he replied that the main concern was "getting humiliated" or being made to "look stupid" in front of the assembled crowd. He went on to say that he'd feel himself becoming more and more nervous, and "churning" in his stomach. This would persist up until the point of the fight starting, often becoming so unpleasant that he would feel like "running away."

Presenting Difficulties and Needs Analysis

The intake and needs assessment highlighted three interlinked presenting difficulties. These are listed below, along with the corresponding need to be addressed:

1. Obstructive anxiety pre-competition

- Both I and Jack's coaches had noticed that he becomes very anxious before fights. Tim believed this to be the reason behind the stiffness and rigidity he sees in Jack when he fights. Jack also reported feeling overly anxious in the build-up to fights. This suggests a need to reduce Jack's anxiety to a more optimal level pre-fight (Hanin, 2000).

2. Inappropriate attentional focus

- Jack had told me that he found himself fixating on, and visualising, potential negative outcomes for his fights. This is characteristic of an outcome focus, which research suggests may be sub-optimal for sport performance (Kyllo & Landers, 1995). This suggests a need to refocus his attention on the processes of winning his fights, rather than fixating on outcome.

3. Dysfunctional beliefs around audience

- During my initial conversation with him, Jack had spoken of how awful "being humiliated" in front of an audience would be, and how he would not be able to tolerate it. This seemed consistent with typical irrational beliefs in sportspeople (Turner & Bennett, 2017) and suggested a need to modify these beliefs.

Case Formulation and Intervention Selection

Having conducted the above needs analysis, I selected several mental skills to address Jack's first two needs. These skills aim to enhance his performance and manage the psychological challenges inherent in boxing. Additionally, recognising the importance of modifying irrational beliefs, particularly Jack's fear of humiliation, I incorporated a programme of Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT). This theoretical approach, rooted in the idea that irrational beliefs contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviours, aligns with

the identified need for belief modification (Turner & Bennett, 2017). By integrating REBT into the intervention, the goal is to bridge theory to practice, offering a comprehensive approach that combines mental skills training with targeted cognitive-behavioural strategies to address Jack's unique psychological challenges in sports performance.

- Obstructive anxiety pre-competition
  - Jack's anxiety regulation will be developed by teaching him the skill of progressive muscle relaxation (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966). This should serve to reduce the muscular tension and abnormal gastrointestinal sensation that is characteristic of somatic anxiety.
- Inappropriate attentional focus
  - Jack will be educated around the effects of visualisation and the importance of keeping mental rehearsal constructive (Weinberg, 1981).
  - Jack will be taught the PETTLEP model of visualisation (Smith, Wright, Allsopp, & Westhead, 2007) as part of best practice for visualisation.
  - I intend to use guidelines set out by Mikes (1987) to develop self-statements that Jack can use to maintain a process-focus.
- Dysfunctional beliefs around audience
  - I intend to use a programme of REBT (Ellis, 1995), based on the sport-specific practice detailed in Turner and Bennett (2017), to address Jack's dysfunctional underlying beliefs around fighting in front of an audience.

Delivery

Bearing in mind the interventions that were chosen based on my case formulation, I planned to do a block of work with Jack, 45 minutes per week for six weeks, at which point we would pause to evaluate our progress up to that point.

Week 1.

Session

I used the first part of this session with Jack to continue the rapport building process, by providing an overview of the plan for the next seven weeks, the skills we would cover and how they would benefit him.

In the second part of the session, I began to address the issue of pre-fight anxiety with Jack. We had a conversation around nervousness, and how to some extent it is normal for performance athletes. I guided the conversation to how some nerves can be useful for performance, but too much can lead to performance detriments. Jack felt this accurately reflected his experience and expressed interest in a method for regulating his anxiety. At this point I guided Jack through the coaching points of using PMR. After practicing the technique several times, we discussed when it might be best for Jack to deploy this skill in the context of competition preparation. After some discussion, Jack recognised that the hour immediately before his fights was when the symptoms of somatic anxiety were most severe. He resolved that he would use PMR in these periods in future fights.

Homework

At the conclusion of the session, I asked Jack to practice the PMR exercise once a day in the week before our next meeting.

Week 2.

Session

I used this session to begin to address the issue of Jack's attention to negative outcomes before fights. After checking in on Jack's PMR practice, I broached the topic of visualisation,

asking if Jack was aware of the use of the skill. Jack proved to have an awareness of visualisation in sport, speaking of how he is aware of elite athletes having spoken about using visualisation to facilitate skill acquisition and build confidence. Building on this, I introduced Jack to the idea that visualisation can be seen as "mental rehearsal," and asked him to consider his tendency to visualise negative outcomes pre-fight. Jack began to understand that this habit was likely limiting his performance, so we resolved to use the latter portion of the session to develop better practice for visualisation.

I guided Jack through the main points of PETTLEP visualisation, after which we discussed situations when he might use this skill. We decided on three strategies that Jack felt might be useful:

1. When not fighting soon – Visualising scenarios in which he was in certain situations (losing after first round, winning with half a round to go etc.), or facing opponents with differing characteristics (height, reach, style, dominant hand etc.) to "rehearse" for.

2. When fighting soon – Visualising himself at the event, before his fight, feeling calm and relaxed despite the presence of a crown, approaching the fight with confidence.

3. In the preparation time before a fight – Visualising the fight going to plan, including likely scenarios that he's previously rehearsed, winning and having his hand raised by the referee at the end.

Homework

As well as practicing PMR, I tasked Jack with having a conversation with his coach about the different scenarios or opponent types he might face, to inform his visualisation practice. Jack

also volunteered to do some research on the likely opponents he might face at the 2022 Commonwealth Games, so that he could begin mentally rehearsing to compete against them.

Week 3.

Session

To begin this session, I asked Jack to recap how he found himself fixing his attention on the outcome of a fight in the build-up to it. After this, I led the conversation on to the distinction between controllable and non-controllable factors in competition, and how attention is best reserved for processes which are controllable. Following on from this, I explained how self-talk can be used as a method of redirecting attention from outcome-focussed to process-focussed.

Together we tried to identify Jack's most common "inner voice" statements, regarding outcomes of fights and wrote them all down. We then reframed each into an instructional, process-focussed self-statement according to the guidelines laid out by Mikes (1987). At the conclusion of the session, Jack had a list of self-statements which he made frequently, and a corresponding list of more facilitative self-statements.

Homework

I set Jack a task that would integrate the three mental skills that we'd looked at so far. I tasked him with visualising a fight night, making it as multisensory as possible and calling to mind memories of the anxiety he'd felt previously. Once he had immersed himself, Jack's task was to use any of the self-statements we'd worked on together, and to practice a cycle of PMR to relax himself.

There was a three-week hiatus in service delivery at this point due to Jack's and my

timetables shifting due the COVID-19 pandemic. Sessions 4, 5 and 6 took place online, using

videoconferencing software with screen sharing.

Week 4.

Session

In this session I intended to begin the programme of REBT with Jack. I began by asking him

about his perceptions of fighting in front of a crowd. Jack responded that fighting in front of a

crowd made him feel anxious and fail to perform to the best of his ability (see Figure 1).

Following on from this, we discussed that while it is likely that all fighters become nervous

before fights, it seems that others do not experience the same consequences Jack does, so

there must be another factor involved.

Figure 1: Unwanted A-C configuration.

A
Activating Event

Situational A: I have a fight approaching soon

Inferential A: There is a possibility I could be knocked out or humiliated

C
Consequences

Cognitive: Catastrophising about threat

Emotional: Anxiety

Behaviour: Becoming stiff, not fighting to best of ability
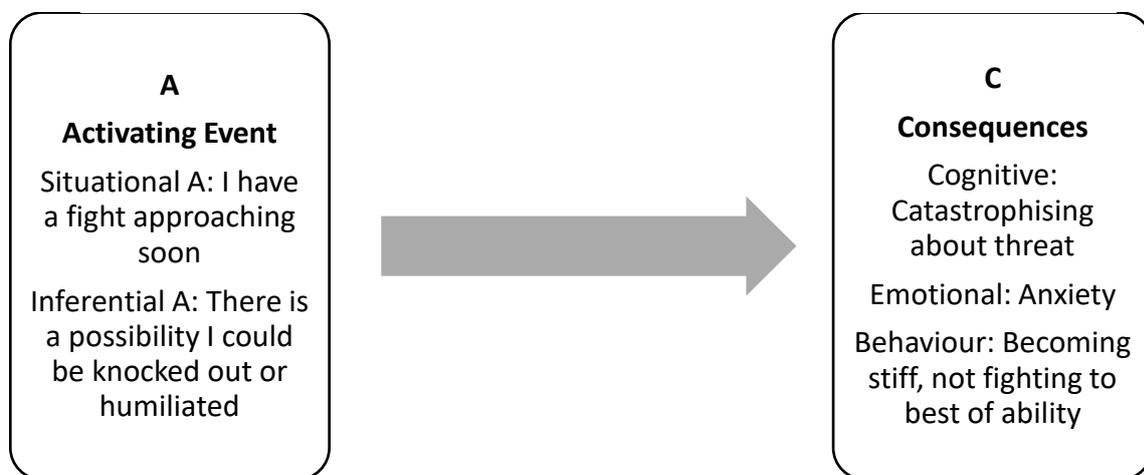
At this point I introduced REBT to Jack, although I termed it "ABC Thinking" to avoid using the word "therapy." This model made sense to Jack, as he understood that the underlying beliefs about the same event (an upcoming fight) could result in different consequences for different fighters. At this point we filled out a worksheet to establish a full ABC configuration for Jack (Figure 2).

A **Activating Event** Situational A: I have a fight approaching soon Inferential A: "There is a possibility I could be knocked out or humiliated"	→	B **Beliefs** "I really don't want to be knocked out or humiliated in front of a crowd, therefore I must not" "Getting knocked out or humiliated would be awful" "I wouldn't be able to take it, I'd quit boxing" "People watching would think I'm useless"	→	C **Consequences** Cognitive: Catastrophising about threat Emotional: Anxiety Behaviour: Becoming stiff, not fighting to best of ability

Figure 2: Irrational ABC configuration.

Homework

Having established a matrix of scenarios and opponent characteristics with his Tim, I challenged Jack to practice 15 minutes of visualisation, preparing for a different opponent or scenario, three times a week going forward, or using the multi-method task he'd practiced the previous week.

Week 5.

Session

In this session I planned to develop rational alternatives to the beliefs in the ABC configuration we'd established in the previous session. I approached this by asking Jack to consider the consequences we had discussed and written previously, and which consequences he would prefer to have in response to the activating event, given that this is unchangeable if he remains in the sport. Having established these (Figure 3), I asked Jack what kind of beliefs one might need to hold for these consequences to be realised. In discussing this we established a set of rational alternative beliefs (Figure 3).

A **Activating Event** Situational A: I have a fight approaching soon Inferential A: "There is a possibility I could be knocked out or humiliated"	B **Beliefs** "I really don't want to be knocked out or humiliated in front of a crowd, but it's happened to many great boxers" "I would be bad getting knocked out or humiliated, but it wouldn't be the end of the world" "Although it would be hard, I could take a loss like that, and I'd carry on boxing because I really value it" "The people watching who really matter to me, value me for more than just winning boxing fights"	C **Consequences** Cognitive: Focus on the process of winning the fight Emotional: Healthy concern Behaviour: Staying relaxed, enjoying the fight and giving maximum effort.

Figure 3: Rational ABC configuration.

Homework

I set Jack's task for this week as the same as the previous week, as I was seeking to ingrain this as a habit.

Week 6.

Session

This session was devoted to disputing the original set of beliefs and effecting the newer set of more effective beliefs. Together we worked through the irrational beliefs around demand, awfulizing, low frustration tolerance and depreciation, and their corresponding more effective beliefs. For each belief, I used modified versions of the prompt questions in Turner and Bennett (2017) to dispute the irrational beliefs on empirical, logical, and pragmatic grounds. What followed was a constructive dialogue around Jacks beliefs. In general, Jack agreed that the rational alternative beliefs that he had developed in the previous session had a greater

logical, empirical, and pragmatic basis than the irrational beliefs. He seemed to understand that given these beliefs had a stronger basis, he could progressively integrate them into his own belief system. We had a brief discussion about how we could facilitate this, in which Jack suggested that the rational beliefs could be used as self-statements, or a credo, which he would write on a card to stick to his door. He resolved to recite the words of this credo each time he passed through the door. At the conclusion of this, Jack was visibly enthused, and expressed that he'd never spoken about boxing with anyone in this way before.

Homework

Jack and I agreed that we would meet again in a month to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. In the interim, he agreed to keep practicing PMR and visualisation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

I followed up with Jack and his coaches one month after our final session together. My rationale for evaluating the effectiveness of consultancy at this point was because some time had passed, in which I hoped the mental skills that we had worked on together had ingrained as good habits, and that the effective new beliefs we had discussed had been adopted. As previously stated, my aim for practice is performance enhancement. However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has been difficult to evaluate as Jack has not had an opportunity to fight competitively since the first fight I observed. In addition, given my decision to forgo a psychometric assessment pre-intervention, a post-intervention psychometric would be largely redundant. Therefore, my monitoring of the effectiveness of my consultancy was based on qualitative feedback from Jack, Steve, and Tim.

Jack's Feedback

In our follow up conversation, Jack reported that he was practicing visualisation three times a week, either rehearsing for different types of opponents, rehearsing technique from his sessions, or visualising himself performing well in front of crowds. He was practicing PMR less frequently, reporting that he was confident with how to do it, and wanted to "hold it in reserve for fight nights." Jack still has the list of instructional self-statements that we put together but has not had cause to use it on account of having no fights. However, he fed back that he has become more aware of his inner dialogue and is starting to make use of self-talk as a tool to moderate his motivation and attention in training. He reported that he still has the card with his credo on his door, but he has now memorised it.

Jack acknowledges that the real test of whether the programme of REBT, or "ABC Thinking," has produced meaningful change in the beliefs underlying the unwanted consequences of an upcoming fight. However, he did report that he feels generally more confident about fights in the future and feels less anxious at the thought of fighting in front of a crowd.

Steve's Feedback

In our conversation, Steve mentioned to me that Jack had spoken enthusiastically about the work that we had done together. Knowing that there is some scepticism towards psychology within the boxing club, Steve had been regularly checking in with Jack over the course of the intervention, to encourage him to engage fully. He fed back to me that this had turned out not to be necessary, as Jack had reported to him that he was happy with what we were doing in sessions because there was "stuff to practice and do" rather than "just talking." I asked Steve what Jack had told him about what we were working on together, and Steve was aware of all

the major points. This indicates that Jack had retained and understood the content that we'd covered, as he was able to explain it to Steve.

Tim's Feedback

Tim indicated to me that he perceived that Jack's work with me had made a positive impact. Tim's feedback was based less around what Jack had told him, and more around the difference that he had seen in Jack in training, indicating that in general he appeared more confident and focused. In addition, while Jack has not had any opportunities to fight competitively, there has been opportunity for competition-simulation sparring in training sessions. Tim reported that he had seen that Jack was more relaxed, focused and unbothered by spectating boxers than he had been in previous sessions such as these. While this is not the same as a real competitive fight, this gives some indication that the intervention may have been successful in its objectives.

Evaluation of Consultancy

My aim for this consultancy was to deliver performance enhancement through developing Jack's attentional and anxiety control and modifying irrational beliefs around performing in front of crowds. Therefore, a critical question when evaluating my consultancy is whether I have delivered this. A critique of my approach to this case is that it has proved difficult to measure the effectiveness of my consultancy, for two reasons; firstly, I do not have any pre-post psychometric data to serve as quantitative evidence. My reasoning for this was that I knew that there was some scepticism about psychological assessment within the boxing club, therefore I judged that leading with a psychometric assessment would not be sensible. This was problematic for me because, within my approach and philosophy, psychometrics are seen as a valid and reliable source of data informing intake and evaluation. On the other hand, I

saw this as an opportunity to apply my professional judgement and be somewhat more pragmatic and flexible in my approach. As a result, my intake and evaluation assessments were more dialogical, which served to build key relationships and trust with Jack and Tim, in valuable to our productive work given the culture and psychology preconceptions of the club. Nonetheless, this lack of quantitative evidence does not help to answer the question of whether this consultancy was effective. A second issue regarding evaluation of the effectiveness of this consultancy is the lack of post-intervention competition. Given the lack of fights, there has not been opportunity to test, *in situ*, whether Jack perceives his training in mental skills and supposedly modified beliefs have produced genuine performance enhancement. Nonetheless, subjective reports from Jack and his coaches seem promising in their indication that the effects of consultancy have been positive.

A strength of my consultancy in this case was that I was able to facilitate Jack's engagement with the intervention using my knowledge of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008). For example, by forgoing psychometrics and instead focusing the intake on dialogue, I was able to build trust between Jack and myself, thus increasing his perception of relatedness. In addition, by giving Jack tasks that he could practice and master early in the programme of intervention I believe I was able to develop a sense of competence in Jack, as he was able to feel progress early on. This was reflected in his feedback to Steve, that he was pleased to have "stuff to practice and do" rather than "just talking." Furthermore, I was able to afford Jack significant autonomy within the programme I had set out. For example, after covering the technical points of PMR and visualisation, I asked Jack where he thought these skills might be best applied, rather than dictating my own impressions to him. Similarly, when generating rational alternative beliefs, Jack had complete autonomy to decide what kind of beliefs he thought would underpin positive consequences for awareness of an upcoming fight. Jack embraced this

autonomy fully and displayed creative thinking when suggesting using self-talk as a mechanism to embed the rational alternative beliefs we had discussed. SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008) suggests that as individual's perception of competence, relatedness, and autonomy increase, so will their intrinsically motivated engagement with the task at hand. I suspect that my use of these principles was critical to overcoming the cultural scepticism of psychology in boxing in Jersey and achieving buy-in from Jack.

Conclusion

I was contracted to work with Jack, a boxer, who was presenting problems with obstructive anxiety pre-fight, inappropriate attentional focus, and dysfunctional beliefs about fighting in front of an audience. I assessed Jack's needs by consulting with his coaches, observing him in competition and a semi-structured interview. I used an MST intervention, aimed at developing Jack's ability to use self-talk, PMR and a visualisation to develop his anxiety and attention control in competition. I also attempted to use a programme of REBT to replace what I perceived to be irrational beliefs underlying Jack's difficulty with performing in front of an audience with more rational beliefs. Subjective reports from Jack and his coaching team suggest that he has benefitted from the intervention, and that he feels more confident and less anxious about future fights. However, given the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Jack has not had an opportunity to fight since the intervention. This has meant that it has not been possible to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in the context of competition. Therefore, it is difficult to discern at this point whether my principal aim, for performance enhancement, has been satisfied. Nonetheless, subjective feedback from Jack and his coaches suggests that he has developed his ability to regulate his attention and anxiety levels and feels more confident about fighting in front of crowds on the future.

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Consultancy Case Study 3

ACT with Nina, a Heptathlete. 01/12/2020.

All names have been changed to protect individual's anonymity.

Introduction to the client

Client History

Nina is a track and field athlete, with a focus on heptathlon, for which she is on a national pathway. She is in her early twenties. She has been involved in track and field athletics for approximately eight years, with an early emphasis on middle distance track events, and later specialising in heptathlon. Nina has performed well at local, county, and national youth levels, and was selected for a youth talent development pathway. She is a dual career athlete, who works in a self-employed capacity alongside training for her sport. She aims to compete at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, 2022.

Nature and context of consultancy

Sport psychology services were delivered to Nina through the Jersey Sport Foundation's (JSF) Performance Programme. Nina has been supported by the JSF since 2017. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, part of my role within the JSF is to informally meet with all athletes at least quarterly, to check on their general mental wellbeing and engage them in more formal sport psychology support if both parties wish. In September of 2020, Nina and I had a scheduled catch-up. During this meeting, she confided in me that over the previous months she had been experiencing a lack of motivation and uncomfortable thoughts and emotions. In particular, she informed me that she was finding it particularly difficult to deal with feelings of disappointment that she was not making the progress that she wanted, in her

sport, in her work and in her relationships. These feelings of disappointment had led to despondency, and a feeling of reluctance to train. When I asked if she would appreciate more formal sport psychology support, Nina requested that we work on her ability to "control her emotions." At this point we agreed a date for a formal intake process and established that we would likely meet weekly.

Contracting Process

As a supported athlete, Nina had access to all the services offered by the JSF, including Sport Psychology. As such, Nina was entitled to unlimited and ongoing sport psychology support, until such a time as it was no longer necessary, or Nina no longer met the criteria for support. Nina and I decided on weekly one-to-one meetings, with allowance to be flexible depending on needs and circumstances. Data protection and ethical considerations occur at an organisational level within the JSF, as such Nina had already given informed consent for opt-in confidentiality within sport psychology sessions, was aware that her data would be protected by appropriate three-tier security, and that I was practicing under supervision.

Foundations and Underpinnings

Theoretical Orientation and Approach

The optimisation of cognitions for enhanced behavioural outcomes is a central focus in my approach. In practice, I strategically integrate various methods, with a pronounced emphasis on Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009), complemented by psychological skills training and Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Vealey, 2007; Ellis, 1995). This approach, deeply influenced by the certaintist tradition and my commitment to evidence-based practice (Keegan, 2015), incorporates a fallibilist philosophy, ensuring a critical lens is applied to theories for context-specific appropriateness.

Pragmatism, vital in adapting to contextual demands, is an integral aspect of my practitioner stance. The evolution of my understanding of pragmatism has been particularly pronounced as I've delved deeper into ACT. ACT, rooted in functional contextualism, aligns seamlessly with my therapeutic approach (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009). Its fundamentally pragmatic philosophy emphasises the flexible adaptation of interventions to meet individual needs and contextual demands, reinforcing the practical nature of my therapeutic stance and highlighting ACT's pivotal role in shaping my approach.

Building on this framework, my therapeutic approach has transitioned from a primarily practitioner-led style to one that is more client-led, a shift influenced by my deepening understanding and application of ACT. This evolution is particularly evident in redefining my role from exclusively analysing and developing athletes' psychological qualities to adopting a more balanced style. Now, the client actively shapes the therapy goals and values they wish to cultivate, while I facilitate the exploration of these values and actions. This shift aligns with my belief that clients are humans first and athletes second, emphasising their autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The greater balance not only resonates with this core belief, but also allows me to leverage my knowledge and skills effectively, influencing the intervention's trajectory while empowering clients to take greater control over their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours—an objective deeply rooted in my value for mastery and self-discipline. My aim for sport psychology practice is performance enhancement. That said, I recognise that personal and performance issues frequently overlap and interlink in complex ways. Therefore, rather than dealing purely within the realms of "performance psychology" my practice approach has evolved to the point where I feel more comfortable to deal with psychological wellbeing, injury rehabilitation, sub-clinical issues, lifestyle management and/or management of career transitions (Stambulova et al., 2006; Henriksen, Stambulova, &

Roessler, 2010). This is because of a developing core belief that the reality exists in shades

of grey, and that most phenomena exist on continua rather than as binaries. In practice what

this means is that I recognise that there is more which is relevant to the work of a sport

psychologist than that which falls within the narrow "performance psychology" lens. The

case of Nina is a good example of this, as the presenting issue in the context of her training

both overlapped and interlinked with other areas of her life, and all were contributing to a

diminishment of her performance.

Ethical Standards

The ethical boundaries of the work were clarified when the structure of support was

established, as in the previous case studies with Amy and Jack. The JSF has an opt-in

confidentiality policy regarding the sport psychology service. That means that if the athlete

requests that specific pieces of information are kept totally confidential, I would not disclose

that information unless in situations where disclosure is mandated by the BPS Code of Ethics

and Conduct (The British Psychological Society, 2018). Otherwise, the default position is that

the content of sport psychology sessions with athletes is shared with other performance

practitioners, for the purposes of holistic athlete management. This information is kept

confidential within the team, and any records kept are protected by the appropriate 3-tier

security systems. Nina consented to this policy at intake.

Therapeutic Alliance

In a traditional PST delivery, the athlete-practitioner relationship is not considered to be of

critical importance (Keegan, 2015), although a therapeutic alliance that facilitates trust and

communication is nonetheless considered of value. However, the quality of the therapeutic

alliance takes on greater significance when using other methods, such as ACT. While it is true

that within ACT, the client-practitioner relationship is not viewed as the end goal for therapy, it is seen as a powerful vehicle for change, as strong, open, mutually respectful relationships are seen as the epitome of psychological flexibility (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009). Therefore, a key element in the development of the therapeutic alliance between myself and Nina was an initial discussion of the concept of psychological flexibility, and that as two fallible humans we likely wrestle with many of the same issues, albeit in different ways. As such, I was able to bring a more empathic attitude and a willingness to selectively self-disclose to our sessions. This directly informed our discussion around roles, expectations, and goals for therapy, which was the foundation of our therapeutic alliance.

Intervention

Intake Assessment

Within the certaintist, cognitive-behavioural tradition, psychometrics are viewed as valid and useful measures for intake assessment (Keegan, 2015). I am generally favourable towards the use of psychometrics, as they provide a quantitative indication of the success of an intervention through pre-post analysis. Nonetheless, as I have gained experience and increasingly adopted a more fallibilist perspective, I have come to recognise that triangulation of assessment measures is essential, as no single method is without flaws. In addition, I have developed a preference for conducting an informal intake interview before issuing a psychometric assessment. This allows me to gain an initial impression of the case, which then allows me to select a psychometric that is appropriate for the purpose of confirming or disconfirming my initial suspicions. In Nina's case, I held conversations with both Nina and her coach before issuing a psychometric.

Interview

The following is the rough interview schedule that I used with Nina.

1. Confidentiality policy, styles, and preferences.

2. Athlete history

    a. First involvement, development, current involvement, support

3. General wellbeing

    a. Eating, sleeping, stress load, relationships, life satisfaction, energy availability, medical health, alcohol

4. Presenting issues

    a. Predisposing factors

    b. Precipitating factors

    c. Perpetuating factors

    d. Protective factors

5. Ideal state

    a. Description of ideal psychological state

6. The way forward

    a. Outline of intervention, follow-up, evaluation, and termination.

Regarding presenting issues, was clear that her "problem with emotional control" related to training, and not to competition. She reported that in recent training cycles, she would often get "caught up" in feelings of amotivation, as she felt that she had not been making the progress that she'd hoped that she might. She reported that this resulted in lowered mood, which was exacerbated by the fact that she was working from home, which she found frustrating, and that she felt that the world around her felt a hostile and dangerous place, given the context of the covid-19 pandemic. She also related that she was anxious about her

future with her current boyfriend, with whom she had been in frequent contact, and that she also found herself frequently caught up in memories of her late father, whose anniversary of passing away was close by and tended to bring up uncomfortable emotions. Taken together, these experiences had led to feelings of despondency, and a feeling of reluctance to train as normal. Moreover, she reported that she felt that she had "fallen out of love" with the sport and felt that she had lost touch with why she participated in her sport.

Conversation with Coach

I had an informal conversation with Nina's coach via videoconference as the coach was in self-isolation at the time. She reported to me that Nina seemed to be lacking commitment, having missed some training sessions without explanation and offering reduced effort in training sessions which she did attend. Nina's coach reported that often Nina seemed to have "her mind somewhere else" while in training, presenting as reduced concentration. When I asked whether Nina seemed to have lost touch with the values that attracted her to the sport, her coach agreed that this may have been a possibility.

Psychometric

At this point, I had developed an idea that the essence of Nina's presenting issues was a lack of psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility is developed through the core processes of ACT (Hayes et al., 2009), therefore I suspected that engaging Nina in ACT would be beneficial. However, I wanted to confirm this possibility with a psychometric assessment. I selected the compACT assessment, which has shown initial promise as a general measure of ACT processes and psychological flexibility (Francis, Dawson, & Golijani-Moghaddam, 2016). I sent a copy of the assessment to Nina via email, which she returned promptly. She scored 69 on the compACT assessment, which indicated moderate psychological inflexibility.

Presenting Difficulties and Needs Analysis

The intake assessment highlighted three interlinked presenting difficulties. These are listed below, along with the corresponding need to be addressed:

1. Disconnection with present moment

    -   Nina reported in the interview, and her coach also indicated, that she frequently finds herself caught up in thoughts of the past (relating to previous disappointments and memories of her late father) and worries about the future (her future in her sport and her relationship with her boyfriend). This often leads her to being distracted from what she is doing in the present moment and lacking in concentration.

2. Fusion

    -   Nina indicated in the compACT assessment and in the interview that she often finds herself "caught up" in her thoughts and feelings. In ACT terms, this would be referred to as fusion or being "hooked" (Harris, ACT made simple: An easy-to-read primer on acceptance and commitment therapy, 2019). This exacerbates her feelings of despondency, which reduces her motivation to train.

3. Disconnection from values

    -   Nina mentioned in her interview, and her coach also suggested, that she has somewhat lost connection with the values which initially drew her into her sport. This has impacted on her ability to commit to her training, both in terms of consistency and effort.

Case Formulation and Intervention Selection

My philosophy, Cognitive-Behavioural approach and role means that in case formulation, the information I've gathered is understood in relation to theory, and this theory then informs the programme for intervention. Thus, having conducted the above needs analysis, I elected to work through a block of ACT with Nina. I aim to address each of the six core processes within ACT. Although three of the processes relate more closely to the issues presenting in the needs analysis, addressing the other processes as well will facilitate a more holistic approach and further enhance the intervention delivered to Nina.

- Self as context
  - To develop Nina's sense of an "observing self," we will explore various exercises related to noticing thoughts and sensations as they arise in consciousness. This will lay the foundations for later work around defusion.

- Contacting the present moment
  - We will explore various aspects of mindfulness to develop Nina's ability to remain in contact with the present moment. Using sensory information will be crucial in promoting Nina's present-moment awareness over past- or future-dominated thinking.

- Acceptance
  - Using the foundational mindfulness skills developed earlier stages, Nina and I will explore various methods of observing thoughts and feelings as they arise and making room for them, as opposed to struggling to get rid of them.

- Defusion
  - Having developed Nina's ability to notice, name and accept unwanted thoughts, and feelings, we will explore ways of de-fusing or "unhooking" from rumination on these thoughts and feelings.

- Values

  - Using pre-prepared resources and free-dialogue, Nina and I will explore the values which are important to her. This should bring some clarity to what value she finds in her sport, and will either guide her back to committed training, or down another, values-guided route.

- Committed action.

  - Having explored values, Nina and I will explore how they can guide her choose actions that will lead her to a richer, more meaningful life. The choice point exercise will be central to this discussion.

Delivery

Given my practitioner philosophy, approach to practice and role, when delivering an intervention, I seek to enhance performance by reframing client's relationships with cognitions and emotions and encouraging the practice of certain skills. Bearing in mind the interventions that were selected based on my case formulation, I planned to do a block of work with Nina, 45 minutes per week for six weeks, at which point we would pause to evaluate our progress up to that point.

Week 1 – Creative Hopelessness

Session

To begin the session, I began to address the issue of "emotional control," the agenda which brought Nina to me initially. The agenda of control is antithetical to the core processes of ACT, and it is recommended that practitioners working with clients who are fused with this agenda should engage their clients in "creative hopelessness" exercises (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009). As such, I guided Nina through four "creative hopelessness" thought

experiments, outlined in Harris (2019). These involved asking Nina to perform impossible cognitive tasks, such as deleting a memory, making a limb go numb, or not thinking about a particular thing whilst it was being vividly described to her. The purpose of this is to demonstrate to the client that full voluntary control of cognitions and emotion is not possible. At this stage, we then discussed other strategies that Nina had previously tried to use to control her emotions, whether then had worked, and what they had cost her. It was at this stage that we began to discuss whether Nina would be open to a different way of approaching unwanted thoughts and feelings and I outlined the ACT approach and process. I used the remaining part of this session with Nina to continue the rapport building process, by providing an overview of the plan for the coming weeks, what we would cover and the benefits to her.

Week 2 – Self as Context and Contacting the Present Moment

Session

In this session we began work on the "self as context" and "contacting the present moment" processes of ACT. We began the session by exploring and developing Nina's understanding of mindfulness. After outlining the rudiments of mindfulness practice, we began a very simple exercise of paying attention to thoughts as they arose in consciousness. This continued for several minutes, after which we had a conversation around how thoughts can be generated involuntarily, and how we have a capacity for meta-thought – noticing and thinking about our thoughts. We then explored a further mindfulness exercise, modified from a 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise, whereby we both took notice of five things we could see, four things we could feel, three things we could hear, two things we could smell and one we could taste. Afterwards we discussed where our thoughts had been during this exercise. For both of us, our thoughts had been grounded in the present moment, neither of us found our awareness

drifting towards past or possible future events. We discussed how grounding herself in the present moment may be a useful skill for Nina, as it takes awareness away from unwanted thoughts and feelings related to past or future events.

Homework

For homework, Nina and I discussed where she might be able to practice the mindfulness methods which we had been through in the session. Nina committed to practicing mindfulness and grounding three times or more in the coming week.

Week 3- Acceptance

Session

To begin this session, we briefly recapped the key points from the previous week, reminding ourselves that we have a capacity for meta-thought, that we have both "thinking selves" and "observing selves." We also recapped the process of contacting the present moment by being mindful of our sensory experiences. At this point, Nina fed back to me how her homework had gone; she'd found that she had begun to enjoy mindfulness practice, finding it particularly useful and pleasant while eating, drinking, or taking a shower – times where previously she'd found herself caught up in negative thoughts.

We then went on to another mindfulness practice, based on the "leaves on a stream" exercise (Harris, 2013), in which I encouraged Nina to notice thoughts as they arose in consciousness, give them a label, and then allow them to just be as they are, coming and going as they please, without trying to influence whether or not they were in consciousness. I also asked that she notice any emotions that she experienced in that time, treating them with an attitude of curiosity, and exploring their qualities and location. At the close of this exercise, Nina and

I discussed her experience of this practice. We discussed how engaging the "observing self" helps us to open and accept unwanted thoughts and emotions, as it gives us the perspective to see cognitions and emotions for what they are, rather than being perpetually identified with them. At this point I took Nina through the "hands as thoughts" exercise (Harris, 2013), to illustrate how opening up and accepting thoughts and emotions for what they are underpins the work that we would come onto next week, around unhooking from difficult thoughts and feelings.

Homework

As homework, Nina committed to further integrating mindful practice into her weekly routine. I gave her the freedom to experiment with this as she pleased to find what worked well for her, as long as her practice involved some components of connecting with her present moment experience, engaging the "observing self" and opening up to thoughts and feelings that she experienced.

Week 4 - Defusion

Session

We began this session with another brief mindfulness exercise, noticing and naming thoughts and emotions that arose in consciousness. Nina was experiencing some particularly difficult thoughts in this session, as it was near to the anniversary of her father's passing away, and there was some uncertainty around the future of her employment. Nina was able to name emotions like sadness, and frustration, and thoughts like "I'm worried about the future," "I'm not doing well enough," and "would dad be proud?" I encouraged Nina to "name the story" (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009) that her mind was telling her. After some discussion, Nina concluded that the story that her mind was telling her was "I have to be perfect all the time."

At this point I began to introduce some defusion skills to Nina. I encouraged her to get "hooked" by the story, by repeating it to herself and visualising herself in previous situations when she'd been hooked by this thought. After this, I asked her instead to say "I'm having the thought that I need to be perfect all the time," and then after that "I notice that I'm having the thought that I need to be perfect all the time." We then went on to develop a "dropping anchor" (Harris, 2013) process, which involved elements of grounding, mindful exploration of thoughts and feelings, and the new defusion technique.

Week 5 - Values

Session

In this session, I began by briefly outlining what is meant by values, what they are and what purpose they serve in the ACT framework. Together, we then went through a checklist of some common values. Nina read through the list and wrote a number (one to three) next to each value, based on how important it is to her. Once she'd marked each value, we went through all the values she'd marked as 3 (Very Important) and picked out the 6 most important, discussing which were the most important to her and why. We then plotted how closely Nina was living by her values in each area of her life using the ACT "bullseye" (Harris, 2013), and discussed how she might be able to bring those values to different areas of her life more.

Week 6 – Committed Action

Session

In the final session, I wanted to introduce Nina to the choice point (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009) as a framework for thinking about committed action. Together, we went through examples of broad and narrow focussed choice points, taken from Harris (2013). We

then constructed two example choice points for Nina, one for an upcoming decision of what she was going to do with the coming weekend (a narrow focus) and one for how to approach her employment situation (a broad focus). The process involves noticing "hooks;" unhelpful thoughts and feelings, and behaviours which take her away from the life she wants to lead when hooked. Following this, "helpers" are identified, these being values, supporting individuals or helpful skills for that situation. This then forms a framework for planning to commit to actions that are in line with an individual's values and will bring them closer to the kind of life they wish to lead.

Monitoring and Feedback

I followed up with Nina and her coach one month after our final session together. My rationale for evaluating the effectiveness of consultancy at this point was because some time had passed, in which I hoped that the good habits around mindfulness, acceptance, defusion and committed action that we had worked on would have had time to ingrain. My post-intervention evaluation mirrored my information gathering in the intake process, being based on conversations with Nina, her coach, and a post-intervention psychometric assessment.

Nina's Feedback

Nina and I met for a follow-up conversation, in person, four weeks after session 6. Initially, my questions related to fusion, disconnection from the present moment and disconnection from values, as these were the core needs identified in my needs analysis. Further discussion concerned how the work we had done had affected her training, and her life in general. Nina reported that the dialogue, exercises and thought experiments which we had been through had been particularly useful in developing her capacity for diffusion and contact with the present moment. In particular, she noted that mindfulness of present-moment sensory experience was

helping her to ground her awareness in the present moment in moments where she was beginning to become hooked by rumination on saddening thoughts about the past, or anxiety-provoking concerns about the future. At this point I enquired about whether Nina felt that this ability was underpinned by an improved ability to identify her thoughts as they arose in consciousness. Notably, Nina reported that she had not found this to be the case, as she felt that this ability was well developed before our work together.

Nina expressed that the work we had done around defusion had been useful in the month since we had finished session six, as her employment situation had become more unclear. She reported that it had been easier to manage this uncertainty using defusion, or "unhooking," as we had practiced. Furthermore, Nina reported that this, along with identification of values, had helped her with the amotivation she had experienced with her training.

Finally, concerning values, Nina reported that identifying her values had been helped her with her commitment to training, which had been one of the initial concerns which had brought her to me. Nina told me that having identified that identifying her values of fun, excellence, and industry, which underpinned her involvement in sport, as well as using the choice point, had helped her to be much more regular and committed with her training.

Coaches Feedback

After speaking with Nina, I also held a phone conversation with her coach to enquire whether she had noticed any difference in Nina since our work together. Nina's coach reported that Nina had indeed been training more regularly, in fact she had not missed any sessions in the previous month. She also reported that, contrary to the situation prior to our work together, it was clear that Nina was displaying maximum effort in her training. Nina's coach also told me

that she had noted an improvement in Nina's general mood. She told me that Nina appeared more contented and less anxious, and was more engaged in the session, asking questions and giving feedback with increased frequency.

Psychometric assessment

I followed up on the initial compACT assessment which Nina completed at intake with another, which I emailed to her after our follow-up meeting. I also asked her to fill in the Consultant Evaluation Form (Partington & Orlick, 1987) which I used in my evaluation of consultancy. Nina returned both promptly. She scored 45 on the compACT assessment, which indicated that her psychological flexibility had improved significantly, having scored 69 on the intake assessment.

Evaluation of Consultancy

As part of the evaluation of this consultancy, I asked Nina to complete a copy of The Sport Psychology Consultant Evaluation Form (Partington & Orlick, 1987). Using this form, Nina rated the work we had done together at 79 out of a possible 100. In particular, she strongly indicated that I "Seemed open, flexible, and ready to collaborate/cooperate with me", while highlighting that trying "to help me draw upon my strengths (e.g., the things that already worked for me) in order to make my best performance more consistent" was an area where I could improve. She later clarified that this was with particular reference to the work in the second session on self-as-context. Summarily, Nina rated by effectiveness as a consultant as a 3, on a scale of -5 to 5.

Previously, my aim for consultancy has been direct performance enhancement. Therefore, the question which normally follows naturally when evaluating my consultancy is whether I have

delivered this. However, in the case of Nina, while I sought to enhance her performance, I did so indirectly as I aimed to develop Nina's psychological flexibility. The goal here was to enhance Nina's lifestyle and approach to training, thereby bringing benefits to her competitive performance indirectly. This demonstrates an evolution in my ability and approach to practice, as this was a first step towards delivering sport psychology services in a slightly different way.

In a similar vein, a strength of this consultancy was that it was more dialogical and client-led than previous instances where I had delivered sport psychology services to individuals. This is a strength because, again, it demonstrates an ability to evolve and work in a different way. In addition, working in a more dialogical manner brings inherent advantages, as it builds a sense of relatedness with for the client, which is likely to make their motivation for working on their psychology more internally regulated (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This is particularly true for ACT, in which the therapeutic alliance is seen as a powerful vehicle for change, and strong, open, mutually respectful relationships are seen as the epitome of psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2009).

On the other hand, a potential criticism of my consultancy in this case was that my plan for the consultancy was structured and rigid. The first problem which this presented was that Nina reported that she had not felt that she particularly needed to improve her to identify her thoughts as they arose in consciousness, as she felt that this ability was well developed before our work together. Thus, she felt that some of the session we spent on this was not a good use of our time together. However, Hayes et al. (2009) note that it is common for novice ACT practitioners to be rigid in their practice initially, and gradually develop an ability to move more fluidly around the points of the ACT Hexaflex. Indeed, Tod, Andersen, and Marchant

(2009) note that, in general, neophyte sport psychology practitioners move from being more rigid to more flexible in their practice with experience, therefore my rigid approach to planning this consultancy is perhaps not surprising. Nonetheless, in future I will make efforts to allow more flexibility in my planning of ACT interventions, as this would allow my clients a greater degree of autonomy in determining what sessions will consist of, which will bring further benefits in terms of self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Conclusion

I was contracted to work with Nina, a heptathlete, who wished to develop an ability to "control her emotions," as she was experiencing feelings of disappointment, leading to despondency and reluctance to train. I assessed Nina's needs by interviewing her, consulting with her coach, and using the compACT psychometric. Through the intake and needs analysis process, I determined that Nina's presenting issues centred around disconnection with the present moment, disconnection from values and fusion with thoughts and feelings. I used a relatively structured ACT intervention, with the aim of developing Nina's ability to defuse from thoughts and feelings, connect with values and the present moment, and increase her overall psychological flexibility. Subjective reports from Nina and her coach suggest that she has benefitted from the intervention, and that he better able to manage her thoughts and feelings, allowing her to train more consistently. In addition, Nina's score on the compACT improved significantly in a follow-up assessment one month after the intervention. This intervention has provided an indirect improvement to Nina's performance, as consistent, committed training is fundamental for successful competitive performance in sport. Through my own reflections and Nina's feedback, I have determined that a key area where I can improve my use of ACT in applied practice by allowing my sessions to be less structured and rigid, and instead move more fluidly around the points of the ACT hexaflex.

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Consultancy Contract and Report

Work Agreement

The document below is the content of the work agreement which was signed by myself and the JSF head of services on November 18th 2019.

1. Parties to the agreement

This contract is between the Jersey Sport Foundation (JSF) and Simon Lange-Smith, of 19 Roche aux Mouettes, Old Forge Lane, Grouville, Jersey, JE3 9BH

2. Title & Place of Work

The title for this position is Psychology Lead. The principal place of work will initially be the JSF offices, however work may take place at other locations including the JSF Performance Facility and athlete's training venues.

3. Responsibilities

Purpose of role is to use psychological practice to support the enhancement of the performance of athletes on the JSF Performance and Talent programmes. This may include activities such as:

- 1-1 consultations with athletes, coaches, parents and JSF staff
- Group workshops with athletes, coaches, parents and JSF staff
- Delivery of formal education sessions
- Development of JSF services
- Support for other JSF service area projects

4. Dates of Employment

This agreement is effective from 01/01/2020 for 24 months.

5. Remuneration

There will be no formal remuneration as part of this agreement.

6. Hours of Work

This role requires 37.5 hours of work per week. This includes all preparation and delivery of services, research, continued professional development work, reflective practice and writing of professional doctorate assignments. All activities will be logged in timesheets as per the JSF's protocol.

7. Documentation

As part of this agreement, it is understood that the Psychology Lead intends to document the development and elements of his work to submit as a component of a doctoral portfolio. No personally identifiable information will be included in this case study, and the names of involved individuals will be suitably changed to protect their anonymity.

8. Termination of Agreement

Either party may terminate this agreement by giving notice in writing to the other party, subject to a one-month notice period.

9. Confidentiality

Interactions with the Psychology Lead will not be considered confidential as a default. However, should any individual request any information shared with the Psychological

Development Lead be kept confidential, then this request will be respected, subject to the conditions for confidentiality as laid out by the British Psychological Society code of ethics.

Report

In January 2021 I was offered an opportunity in a new role, which I accepted. As such my full-time role with the JSF transitioned into a part-time zero-hour role. The report below is the report I produced for the HoS at the conclusion of my full-time role.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to report on my activities in the role of Psychology Lead for the Jersey Sport Foundation in the year 2020. The year was characterised by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the restrictions resulting from that. Nonetheless, the delivery of sport psychology services was maintained throughout the period of the pandemic to date, and the range of services has continued to expand. One-to-one sessions with athletes have formed the backbone of the JSF's sport psychology service. This has been supplemented by the profiling system, which was developed early in 2020, and has continued to evolve, allowing more intelligent targeting of psychological services. The role has also included education components, primarily directed towards JSF athletes, although also including education delivered to the fledgling HND course at Highlands College. Additional projects have included the introduction of heart rate variability (HRV) monitoring and use of the SpotlightPROFILE. The introduction of HRV monitoring has had limited impact thus far and needs to be reviewed to maximise the potential impact of the service. However, introduction of the SpotlightPROFILE as a tool to develop coach-athlete relationships has thus far received positive feedback from participants and has yielded objective benefits to athlete-coach relationships. Finally in recent weeks a project has been undertaken to construct a

hierarchical model for long-term individual psychological development, which can be used for reference in JSF strategy and policy making.

These activities are presented in more detail in the following sections. Activities are presented in order in which they began, although note that many were carried out concurrently. Each section includes a summary of activities to date, as well as recommendations for how this area of psychological service provision may be developed going forward.

One-to-one Sessions

To this point, I have logged 167 hours of 1-1 psychology sessions with athletes and coaches supported by the JSF. 188 hours have been devoted to preparing for these sessions. These sessions were either recommended to athletes based on a 'weakness' in psychology indicated by their profile or were requested by the athletes directly. Most athletes on the programme were offered a block of 1-1 sessions after their profiles were debriefed to them, whilst Tier one and some Tier two athletes have been entitled to continuous support. With athletes, these sessions have primarily been devoted to psychological skills training, although over time this has evolved to incorporate elements of Rational Emotional Behaviour Therapy (REBT) and Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT). Excessive anxiety before and during competition has been a recurring theme, while in latter months a greater volume of athletes benefitted from ACT as "general life" psychology as opposed to "competition" psychology as the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic continue.

Recommendations

One-to-one sessions are a core element of the JSF's sport psychology service and provide valuable support to athletes within the foundation. I would recommend that they are

preserved going forward and continue to be targeted at the athletes with greatest need as indicated by their profile.

Profiling

One of my early tasks as psychology lead was to begin the development of a profiling tool to assess the psychological qualities of the JSF athletes. This process began by collating the psychological abilities and qualities that we would hope to see in our athletes and collating and amalgamating psychometric measures purported to assess these abilities and qualities. This resulted in a pilot profile which was extensive and included measures of both process and outcome. The profile was then streamlined by adopting the 5C's framework (Harwood & Anderson, 2015), which shortened the length of the psychometric assessment and unified the factors under one theory. This updated profile was further developed to include triangulated subjective assessments from athlete's technical and JSF coaches. While the consensus is that this profile confers a strong degree of validity, ensuring that athletes complete the psychometric assessment regularly and in a timely manner has proved challenging.

Recommendations

Recognising that psychological profiling is a vital component of athlete management, I nonetheless recommend that the process is streamlined given my reduced hours going forward and the limitations of the current method. I recommend that the athlete's psychology score for their main profile is informed by averaging subjective scores on each of the 5C's factors as rated by the athlete, their technical coach, and their JSF coach. I recommend that these ratings be collected quarterly from athletes in their S&C sessions either by myself or other practitioners, or in their "catch-ups" with JSF practitioners in the case of off-island athletes. Similarly, I recommend that ratings should be obtained from coaches quarterly,

although now that the coaches have been familiarised with the concepts within the 5C's model this can be done relatively by email, phone, or informal conversation.

Education

My activities in education have occurred in two distinct streams. The first to emerge was assistant teaching and teaching on the HND Sport course. In February I was invited by the JSF's education and research practitioner to assist her in teaching the physical activity, lifestyle, and health module, focusing on models of behaviour change and behaviour change techniques. I assisted with the teaching of three sessions, and delivered one individually, while further sessions were cancelled due to the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown. While results across the cohort were middling, most students demonstrated a basic understanding of models of behaviour change and behaviour change techniques.

The second vein of education was a programme of Psychological Skills Training to a group of JSF athletes through online tutorials. Needs analysis was informed by the characteristics of the learner group, a survey, a TOPS analysis, and the context of education delivery during the COVID-19 lockdown. I developed and delivered the programme using pre-recorded online tutorials followed up with practical tasks for the client group to complete in their own time. Impact on competition performance appears to have been limited, and feedback indicated that it is crucial to maximise the specificity of the content to the individuals in the learning group.

Recommendations

Given the lessons learned from these education programs, I recommend that future education programmes within the JSF should avoid a blanket approach and should only be used to target a specific assessed need of a specific learner group. Should there be modules within the

HND Sport course where it would be beneficial to bring psychological knowledge to bear this might be advantageous, although it would be challenging for this to be delivered by myself in the context of my new role.

Hear Rate Variability

Midway through the year, I was fortunate enough to obtain two Morpheus HRV monitors for the JSF. Heart rate variability (HRV) is a method for assessing the effects of stress on the body. HRV is a holistic measure of total load, i.e., it reflects the impact of multiple sources of stress on the athlete, not just training, but sleep, nutrition, and stress. HRV therefore represents a tool that can be used by the JSF's lifestyle service to quantify the allostatic load under which the athletes operate. In addition, HRV represents a tool which can be used by S&C and technical coaches to assess athlete's readiness to train on a session-to-session basis. Nonetheless, the HRV project has fallen under the auspices of the psychology service. To date, only one of the HRV monitors has been deployed and is not in frequent use. Therefore, there is significant scope to expand the usage of HRV within JSF services and maximise the return in athlete performance.

Recommendations

I recommend that, to access greater benefits from the JSF's HRV monitors, a meeting of the service leads should be held to (a) ensure that all parties are aware of HRV monitoring and its potential utility in respective service areas, (b) to discuss the purposes for which the HRV monitors should be used and (c) to determine a strategy for deploying the monitors.

SpotlightPROFILE

Following positive feedback for the SpotlightPROFILE from an athlete who had received one

through the English Institute of Sport, it was decided to investigate whether Spotlight could

be added to the range of JSF services. Mindflick, the company who produce Spotlight, agreed

to provide 14 free profiles for use by JSF athletes and their coaches if we agreed to record

and document feedback on the profile's usefulness. To this point, 7 athletes, 7 coaches, 5 JSF

staff and one external partner have been profiled and had their profiles debriefed with them.

In addition, 5 athlete-coach pairs have since engaged with paired debriefs in which they had

fed back and discussed their profiles with each other and examined their collective

preferences. Feedback from those who have been involved has indicated that the perception

of Spotlight's validity is high, and participants have found the process insightful and a useful

opportunity for reflection. It has emerged that the paired debriefs are crucial for ensuring that

insight is transferred into practical considerations for performance enhancement. Ensuring

that participants commit to action points drawn from their own 'counterweights' and their

partners 'wriggle room' has proved effective in this regard. More established coach-athlete

pairs tended to report that while their profiles were accurate, they did not always confer

information that was new, and at times they had already made considerations to accommodate

for theirs and their partners preferences.

Recommendations

Given the positive feedback received so far, I recommend that Spotlight is retained as a tool

which the JSF use to enhance relationship building and communication in athlete-coach pairs

and the team-based sports we support. I would suggest, for example, that individual and

group Spotlights are provided to the coastal rowing quads. I suggest that we continue to use

Spotlight for relationship building proactively rather than remedially, as the former method

has appeared successful so far. However, given the cost of individual profiles and the feedback from more established athlete-coach pairs, I recommend that Spotlight profiles are targeted at where there is a specific need, rather than rolled out as a blanket to all athlete-coach pairs. One particular target group could be athletes who are moving to new coaches or training groups, either when moving to university or for other reasons.

Long-term Development Hierarchy

In recent weeks, as part of the development of the JSF's long term strategy, I have begun constructing a hierarchical framework of long-term psychological development. What has emerged is a trans-theoretical, vertically integrated model which draws on elements of existing mental fitness LTD literature, the 5Cs model, established psychological knowledge and traditional sport psychology practice. The purpose of the model is to guide the developmental focus for psychological qualities for athletes at different stages of maturation to lead to enhanced outcomes for sport performance and global participant development. The model is not a be-all and end-all; it is possible for athletes to achieve success without following the letter of this model, however the model nonetheless provides a guide for what optimal development looks like. Indeed, the model at present is not the finished product, rather it is a cross-section of an evolving idea which will doubtless appear different in future iterations.

Recommendations

I recommend that, when possible, this hierarchy is presented to, and discussed with, the other service leads at a time when similar models have been completed for those service areas. At this point it will be important to ensure that the nature and function of the model is understood, and that the equivalent models from the various service areas are appropriately

integrated to produce a flexible holistic blueprint for the JSF's approach to athlete development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while 2020 was severely disrupted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the JSF's Sport Psychology service grew and provided benefits to supported athletes. Some service areas have enjoyed more success than others, however this has highlighted ways in which less successful projects, such as athlete education and HRV monitoring, need to evolve to realise their potential benefits to athlete's performance. In addition to affecting these adaptations, the recommendations outlined in this report should serve to preserve the most successful elements of the service, while streamlining the service as a whole. This streamlining is crucial for the service, given my reduced working hours going forward. Nonetheless, I am confident that the Sport Psychology service will continue to provide benefits to JSF supported athletes and coaches into the future.

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Teaching Case Study

Background

Higher performing athletes within the JSF had access to 1-1 sport psychology support, however the JSF supports 60 athletes, therefore it was impossible to individually provide regular 1-1 sport psychology services to all these athletes. Nonetheless, it was important that all supported athletes had access to some level of sport psychology support. Therefore, it was decided at the outset of my employment that I would develop group-based educational sessions to deliver to all athletes not entitled to 1-1 support.

In February of 2020 I began preparing a series of in-person workshops designed to educate athletes on the rudiments of PST, aiming to deliver them in April of that year. However, the following month circumstances changed, given the lockdown which was enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was decided that the JSF would continue to operate in this period; staff were tasked with finding ways to add value to athletes continued training while working from home. It was decided that this would take the form of a programme of athlete education, to be designed and delivered by staff on topics such as nutrition, athlete lifestyle and psychology. This would replace the delivery of services that could not be transferred from face-to-face delivery to online delivery for the duration of the lockdown, such as in-person strength and conditioning and physiotherapy. Thus, the development of the program of PST education became my priority. I was aware, at this point, that my relative lack of teaching experience would leave me feeling anxious and uncertain (Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2011). Fortunately, I was able to draw on a colleague who had experience teaching in higher education, as well as my line manager who had significant experience with public speaking, for practical advice on how effectively deliver material

online. I was also able to draw on peers and supervisors' advice on this and the psychology-specific aspects of delivering the programme.

Client Group

Eleven of the sixty athletes supported by the JSF did not participate, ten due to having regular 1-1 sport psychology support with me and thus being excused, and one who was participating in a similar programme with a UK national youth development pathway who was excused to avoid replication.

Thus, the client group comprised of 49 athletes (29M, 20F), from 11 different sporting disciplines, including archery, cycling, fencing, judo, netball, rowing, surfing, stand-up paddleboard, track and field, triathlon, and weightlifting. These athletes raged in age from 15 to 48. All athletes were either semi-professional or amateur, therefore each was engaged in their sport alongside education or a career.

Needs Analysis

My remit was to provide education to the athletes which would enhance their performance in their respective sports. I had free reign to deliver the programme as I saw fit, structure learning as I wished, and to use whatever resources I deemed appropriate. The needs analysis related to determining the appropriate mechanism of delivery, as well as content. I recognise that triangulation of assessment measures is essential, as no single method is without flaws. Therefore, I drew on three sources of information for the needs analysis, namely consideration of contextual factors, feedback from the client group and a group psychometric assessment.

Contextual Factors

Several contextual factors informed my decision-making in the needs analysis stage. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the client group comprised of athletes from a range of different sports. Furthermore, the represented sports varied significantly in terms of the characteristics of the skills involved (Davis, Philips, Roscoe, & Roscoe, 2000). This informed the needs analysis, as it became clear that the education that I was to deliver had to be applicable to preparation for sport generally, rather than specific to a certain sport, or specific to a group of sports that share certain characteristics (Bondarchuk, 2007).

A further point regarding members of the client group is that they have a range of ages and educational backgrounds, and all have dual careers, either in full-time education or employment as well as their training. As a result, I determined that it was necessary that the programme of education should be delivered in brief, non-technical fashion so as to be accessible to the client group.

Finally, delivering this educational programme of education in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown significantly affected the needs analysis. By necessity, the programme needed to be delivered over the internet. This left the options of delivering the education in the form of live online webinars, or pre-recorded tutorial-style videos.

Client Feedback

To inform the needs analysis, I surveyed the client group regarding topics related to sport psychology which they would be most interested to learn more about. A list of topics was developed by consulting other JSF staff and coaches. Members of the client group were then invited to participate in an online survey, in which they rated the topics out of ten to indicate

their level of interest in receiving education on each. In total, 29 members of the client group participated in this survey, the results of which are presented in Figure 1. The client feedback suggested a number of sport psychology topics they were interested in learning more about, which included managing competition nerves, developing self-confidence, effective goal setting, developing motivation, improving concentration, refocussing and distraction control, coping with injury and visualisation. A small minority of individuals responded that education on these topics would not interest them.

Average Ratings of Interest in Topic
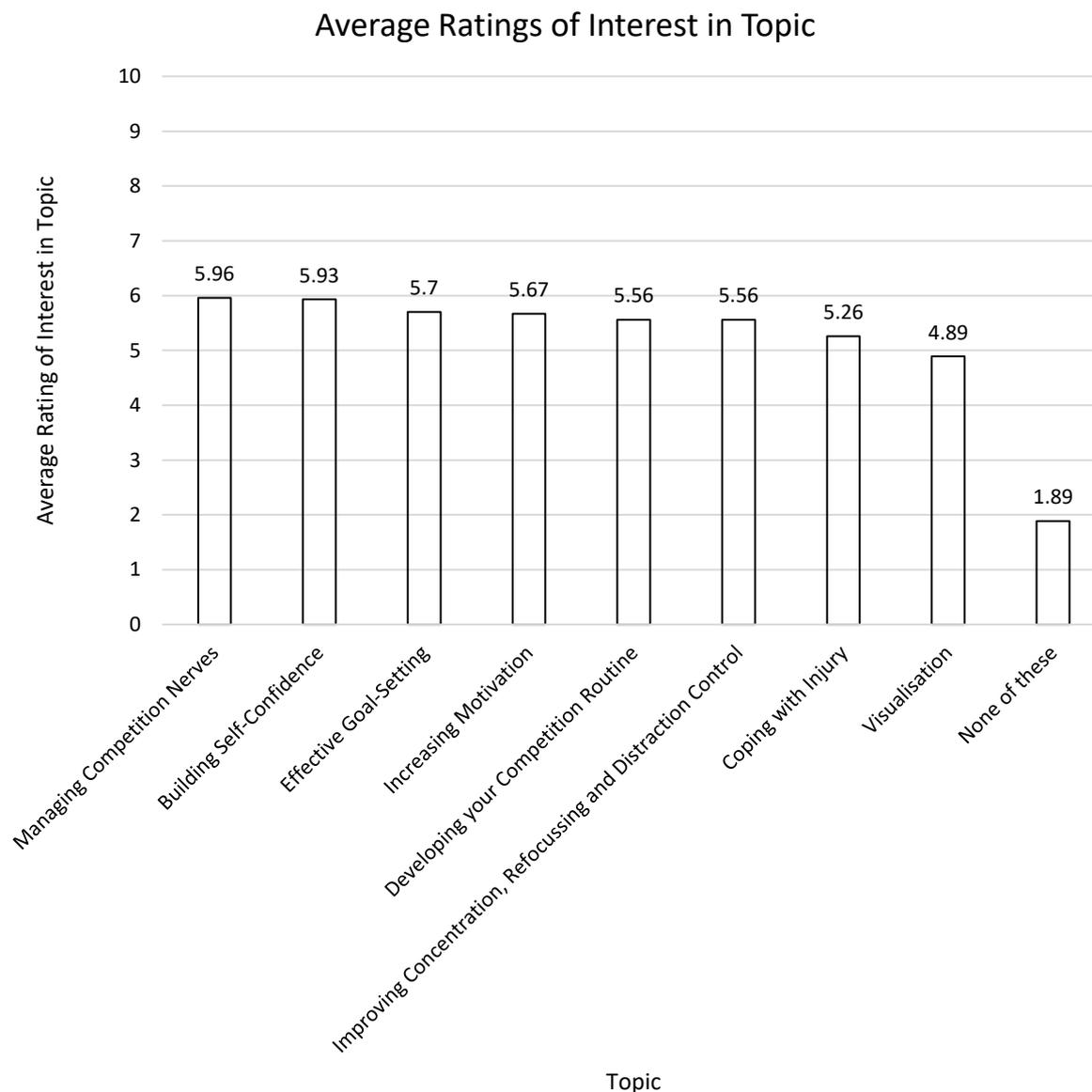
Figure 1: Results of survey on topics of interest.

Psychometric Assessment

Within the certaintist philosophical tradition, psychometrics are viewed as valid and useful measures for intake assessment (Keegan, 2015). I am generally favourable towards the use of psychometrics, as in a teaching and training context they can provide a quantitative indication of the success of an educational programme through pre-post analysis. As such, I decided to try to get a sense of the group's psychological qualities using a psychometric. I selected the

Test of Performance Strategies assessment (Thomas, Murphy, & Hardy, 1999) which has

been developed and validated as a comprehensive measure of athlete's psychological skills

(Hardy, Roberts, Thomas, & Murphy, 2010). The assessment was delivered to the client

group through their Athlete Monitoring app. All 49 members of the client group completed

the assessment, the results of which are displayed in graphical form in Figure 3. Notably, the

client group's weaknesses appeared to be skills based, specifically around relaxation, where

the greatest variation in ability was seen imagery, goal-setting and self-talk.

Figure 2: Results of TOPS analysis.

Group TOPS Averages
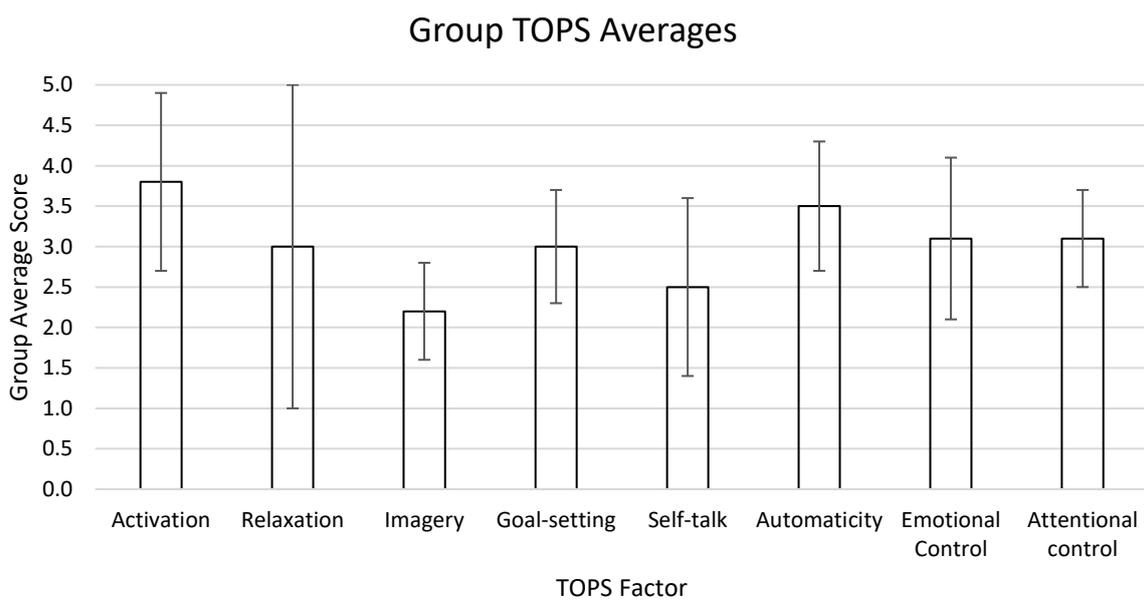
Programme Development

I elected to deliver an education programme based on psychological skills training (Vealey,

2007), specifically targeting the four psychological skills identified as weakest by the group

in the TOPS assessment, as these offered the potential for the greatest return (Shephard & Färe, 1974). I decided to deliver this programme in the form of pre-recorded tutorials that would be sent out to the client group to watch in their own time, to avoid the difficulty of trying to arrange delivery times that worked for all 49 individuals.

Firstly, I developed a draft scheme of work. A scheme of work is important to ensure that an education programme results in optimal outcomes and helps to break the learning outcomes of the syllabus down into manageable components (Wilson, 2014). I identified a five-week timeframe in which to deliver the education programme; the programme was to last the duration of Jersey's six-week lockdown. A five-week timeframe would therefore allow me a week to plan, and prepare the first tutorial, while each following week I would have time to both record a tutorial and prepare another for the following week. Within this timeframe, I deemed there was sufficient opportunity to deliver an introduction and cover the four psychological skills I had selected from the needs analysis.

As noted in the needs analysis, there was a need to ensure that the tutorials were concise and accessible. I therefore decided on limiting the tutorial videos themselves to a maximum of twenty-five minutes. I judged this to be the minimum possible amount of time in which to adequately explain the purpose and practice of a given psychological skill. However, I recognised that information retention from a twenty-five-minute tutorial alone would be poor, perhaps less than 15% (Savoy, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2009). I made two considerations considering this, the first being to ensure that I would integrate activities into the tutorials which the client group could interact with in real time, and the second that I would develop follow-up tasks that the client group could complete in their own time. There is evidence to suggest that both methods promote engagement and retention of information (Westwood,

2008). Notably, I made a point of avoiding the term "homework" to describe post-tutorial tasks, as I was aware that the term can evoke associations with boredom, frustration, or coercion for some individuals, depending on their experience of homework in education (Check & Ziebell, 1980).

Having developed a rough structure, I began designing the content for the scheme of work. I was conscious of a need to relate the psychological skills in the tutorials to performance-enhancing psychological qualities (Dohme, Backhouse, Piggott, & Morgan, 2017). I believed that making this link would be facilitated by using a model to codify the connections between psychological skills and qualities. I selected the 5C's model (Harwood, 2008) for this purpose, the reason being that the 5C's is the profiling tool used by the JSF to assess the psychological qualities of the athletes, hence the athletes were familiar with the model's principles and terminology.

After formulating a structure for the sessions and a model to codify the included concepts, I progressed to devising session plans, namely step-by-step guides that define the content for learning based on specific learning objectives. These specific objectives were informed by my overall objective, that being to educate and motivate the client group to make greater use of PST to enhance their athletic performance. This affected the order of presentation of the specific learning objectives, as there is evidence to suggest that developing an understanding of why a behaviour is beneficial before developing an understanding of how to execute the behaviour increases the likelihood of adoption of that behaviour (Sinek, 2009). Thus, the first objective for each session would be to understand why a particular psychological skill could provide a benefit to the client's performance, with subsequent objectives to develop understanding of how to execute the psychological skill being discussed. Having defined

objectives for the sessions, I drew upon Weinberg and Gould's (2014) established handbook of the theoretical foundations of sport psychology, to derive content with which to develop the clients understanding of why the psychological skills could benefit their performance. In addition, I used Perry (2020) to derive content with which to develop the clients understanding of how to implement the psychological skills covered in the sessions.

Once I had established the content for each session, I had to decide which learning resources to use help me, as the teacher and trainer deliver the education. Resources are important for increasing understanding, creating deeper learning, reinforcing key facts, and simplifying ideas (Reece & Walker, 2006). I used a variety of resources and activities to cater for different learning styles. Learning styles theory suggests that individuals differ in how they learn best (Willingham, Hughes, & Dobolyi, 2015), and the VARK model (Fleming, 2012) identifies four primary types of learning: visual, auditory, reading / writing, and kinaesthetic. Wilson (2014) suggests using a range of teaching methods to accommodate for different learning needs and styles. Whilst there were obvious constraints presented by the need to deliver this education programme as online tutorials, I nonetheless tried to include elements of each of these components in the tutorials. For example, I made sure to include video (visual) components embedded within my background PowerPoint presentation (reading/writing), which I voiced over (auditory) alongside homework that frequently involved practice (kinaesthetic) of the session's psychological skill.

Programme Delivery

Session 1 – Introduction

The purpose of the first session was to equip the client group with a basic knowledge of the nature and purpose of the education programme and an introduction to understanding why psychological skill development benefits sporting performance. The specific learning outcomes for the session were to (1) understand what mental fitness is and why we build it, (2) understand how mental fitness is built and (3) understand what we can do to build mental fitness. I used the term "mental fitness" to be consistent with the terminology of the long-term athlete development model (MacNeill, Benz, Brown, Kabush, & Berg, 2013). I introduced the idea of PST using a video of Drew Brees practicing VMBR, which a teammate recorded who then commentated over the video. Using Drew Brees as an example, I then explained the concept of different domains of training, referring to the four-corner model (Simmons, 2004). This led into a definition of mental training as "the ability to manage thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and cope with the demands of performance sport" (MacNeill, Benz, Brown, Kabush, & Berg, 2013), and an explanation that the development of mental fitness can allow athletes to maximise their competition performance, engage in higher quality and enhance their mental wellbeing. At this stage, I outlined the five components of the 5 C's model, and their corresponding benefits to mental fitness. I concluded the tutorial with an explanation of how individuals can develop their mental fitness, outlining the PST that would be covered in the following weeks.

Task

The task set after this tutorial was a 3-question online quiz, delivered using Google Classroom. This task was set as a very brief knowledge check, and as a means of checking that the client group had completed the tutorial.

Session 2 – Goal setting

The purpose of this session was to develop an understanding of the function and use of goal setting. The learning objectives for this session were to (1) understand why we set goals, (2) understand what the different types of goals are and (3) understand how to set your own goals. I began the session by briefly recapping the 5 C's model which was covered in the previous week's session. To introduce the practice of goal setting, and give an example of its usefulness, I recounted a story of Darrel Pace's goal setting in the run-up to his world-record success at the 1974 US Archery Nationals. Having given this example, I gave a broad definition of goal setting, and related it specifically to potential benefits to commitment, concentration, and confidence within the 5C's model. At this point, drawing on Weinberg and Gould (2014) I explained the relative forms and functions of outcome, performance, and process goals, using the SMART acronym (O'Neill & Conzemius, 2005) to define best practice for setting performance goals. Having explained these types of goals, I then returned to the story of Darrel Pace to give an applied example of a process-performance-outcome goal hierarchy, which led into an explanation of the goal-mapping process (Perry, 2020).

Task

The task set for this session was for the clients to begin producing a goal map of their own, in discussion with their technical coach, for their own medium-term goal. I provided MS Word and Excel templates for them to use. The clients were asked to either return their maps to me, or to bring them to their next monthly athlete management meeting.

Session 3 – Arousal control

The purpose of this session was to develop an understanding of the function and use of arousal control techniques. The learning objectives for this session were to (1) understand why arousal control techniques are beneficial for athletes (2) understand how arousal control

works and (3) understand what arousal control techniques involve. I introduced the idea of relaxation techniques using a video of LeBron James practicing a breathing technique in a timeout before a highly pressurised play. Having given this example, I gave a broad definition of goal setting, and related it specifically to potential benefits to control within the 5C's model. I then presented a chart of the checklist of performance states (Weinberg & Gould, Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology 6th Edition, 2014), and encouraged the client group to complete it and consider their level of arousal at the time of their best and worst performances. I then introduced the concept of individual zones of optimal functioning (Hanin, 2000), and gave a task where the client group indicated on a continuum between 'totally relaxed' and 'at maximal arousal' where they felt their best competition performances occurred, and where they felt they were normally situated when in competition. Following on from this, I was able to introduce the idea that arousal control strategies can be used to adjust athlete's experience of arousal to enhance competition performance. At this stage, drawing heavily on Perry (2020), I outlined how the use of breathing control, music, PMR and intense physical activity can be used as means of modifying arousal levels.

Task

Following this session, I set the task for the athletes to try out each of the strategies and set a Google Classroom quiz to collect information on the task. This included questions on the athlete's preferences for music for "psyching up" or "calming down", their preferences for order of relaxing muscle groups within PMR, and an outline of an intense warm-up for increasing arousal.

Session 4 – Imagery

The purpose of this session was to develop an understanding of the function and use of visualisation. The learning objectives for this session were to (1) understand why visualisation can be beneficial for athletes (2) understand how visualisation works and (3) understand what visualisation involves. Being aware of the scepticism surrounding visualisation (Weinberg & Comar, 1994), I wanted to ensure that the story I used to introduce the idea pertained to a well-known, highly successful athlete. Thus, I decided to draw on Wayne Rooney's apparently meticulous approach to pre-match visualisation (Jackson, 2012) as an example that would be well recognised. Having presented extracts from Jackson's article, over video of Rooney's exploits, I then gave a broad definition of visualisation, and related it specifically to potential benefits to commitment, concentration, control, and confidence within the 5C's model. Following this, I explained three potentially beneficial ways in which visualisation could be used by the client group.

- Firstly, I explained to the athletes that visualisation could be used to reinforce skill acquisition. Based on this, I suggested that they might use visualisation after training in technical sessions in which they had focused on developing a particular skill, to reinforce their skill learning.

- Secondly, I suggested to the athletes that they use visualisation as an adjuvant to "what if" scenario planning. I explained that there was value in pre-emptively anticipating various scenarios which may arise during the experience of competition, and to consider the ways in which they could best react to these situations. Having done so, I encouraged the athletes to then visualise themselves reacting in this optimal way, as a method of mental rehearsal.

- Finally, I explained to the athletes what most common variation of visualisation is to visualise themselves performing well, or executing their game plan, immediately before competition. I explained that this is a method of both focusing their minds on

performance-relevant stimuli, and perhaps of giving themselves a boost to their confidence, in the immediate run-up to competition.

Task

The task I set for this session was for the athletes to experiment with at least one application of visualisation in their training, or to think about a way in which they could utilise visualisation within a competition cycle. I asked that they give a brief description (limited to 200 words) of a method which they had tried, or intended to try, as a response to a single-question Google Classroom quiz.

Session 5 – Self-talk

The purpose of this session was to develop an understanding of the function and use of self-talk. The learning objectives for this session were to (1) understand why self-talk can be beneficial for athletes (2) understand how self-talk works and (3) understand what self-talk involves. I opened the session with a video of an elite athlete using the skill, this time using the women's pole-vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva's example of the use of self-talk, to turn a near-disastrous performance at the Athens 2004 Olympics into a world-record outcome. Following this, I gave a broad definition of self-talk, and related it specifically to potential benefits to concentration within the 5C's model. At this stage, I explained the basic principle of how self-talk can be used for as a means of cognitive restructuring (Weinberg & Gould, 2014), which then led into an activity which comprised most of the session. I asked the client group to pause the video and write down any negative or unhelpful "inner voice" statements, intruding thoughts, or other distractions which they frequently experienced in training or competition. I then gave an overview of the guidelines for effective self-statements (Mikes, 2014), and encouraged the client group to reframe each item on the lists they had produced

into an instructional, process-focussed self-statement, which they could then deploy in training or competition as appropriate.

Task

The task for this session was for the client group to upload the activity from the session to the Google Classroom, or to send it to me. I had also uploaded a copy of the Consultant Evaluation Form (Partington & Orlick, 1987), which I asked the group to complete and return to me as feedback on the education programme.

Evaluating Programme Effectiveness

Several methods of objective and subjective feedback can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of an education programme (Eubank & Forshaw, 2019). I elected to triangulate methods of evaluation, to include both objective and subjective information. As such, I obtained feedback from a follow-up TOPS analysis, peer feedback from my manager, and a consultant evaluation form which was completed by each client.

Consultant Evaluation Form

Feedback from the Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF) suggested that the effectiveness of the programme was poor to moderate. The first question asks for ratings on items relating to consultant characteristics. On average, consultant characteristics were rated at 4.47/10. However, there was notable variation in the average ratings for each item. Items relating to personal qualities (e.g., "proved to be trustworthy," "had a positive, constructive attitude") generally were generally rated more highly, whereas items relating specifically to the programme were scored lower (e.g., "seemed willing to provide an individual mental training program based on my input and needs," "tried to help me draw upon my strengths in order to

make my best performance more consistent"). The exception to this trend was the item for

"provided clear, practical, concrete strategies for me to try out in an attempt to solve

problems, or improve the level and consistency of my performance," which was the second

most highly rated item. Ratings from question one of the CEF are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Average results from the returned Consultant Evaluation Forms.

Consultant Evaluation Form Feedback
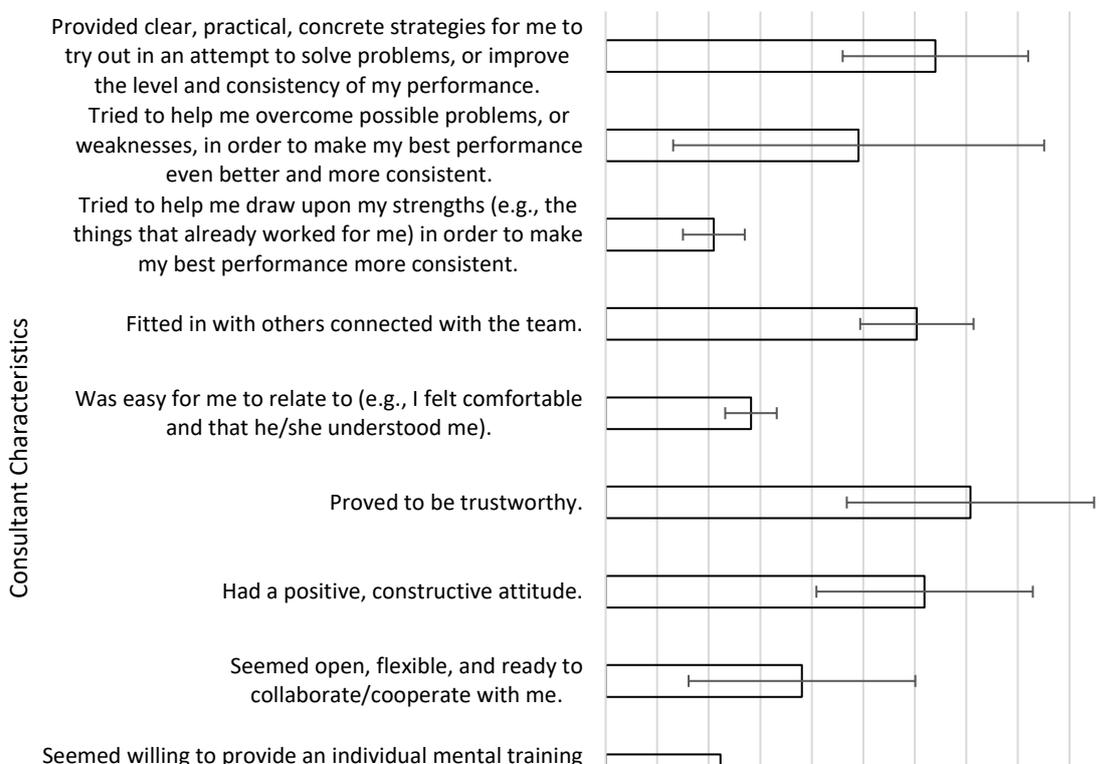
The second CEF question relates to effectiveness of the consultant. Regarding the rating of consultant effectiveness, the average rating from across the client group was 1.83 on a scale of -5 to 5. The final question asks for recommendations to improve the quality or effectiveness of the education programme offered. Qualitative comments focused clearly on the theme of generality and specificity, particularly that clients had found it difficult to apply the psychological skills from the sessions to their specific events. For example, quotes included "I'm not sure what to visualise for my event," "I can't do the skills in my races, only beforehand and I'm not sure if this will help as much?" and "… can't use PMR on the water!"

Peer Feedback

I received feedback from my line manager regarding my communication and teaching style. My line manager has extensive feedback on public speaking; therefore, I sought his feedback as someone well placed to critique my presentation ability. My line manager gave positive feedback on my starting of each session with the "why" – why the mental skill in question might bring them performance benefits. In addition, he gave positive feedback on the use of stories to grab attention at the beginning of each session. On this point, he advised that I could have improved by making sure to close the tutorials with a dynamic ending, as well as including an "attention grab" at the beginning. He further advised me that I could improve my delivery by slowing down my rate of speaking, pausing for breath more frequently, and making sure to smile. My line manager advised me that this would give an appearance of increased confidence, which enhances the effectiveness of delivery.

TOPS

In July of 2020, I conducted a follow-up TOPS analysis to see if it would indicate any client change in psychological skill use over a month after the completion of the education programme. At this stage most of the client group (43/49) had been able to return to normal or close-to-normal training due to an easing of COVID-19 restrictions. Thus, it would have been possible for athletes to begin integrating PST into their training and competition practices. I sent the TOPS questionnaire out to the client group through their Athlete Monitoring app. When returned, the TOPS analysis indicated that there had been increases in relaxation, imagery, and self-talk scores. The full results of this analysis are presented in Figure 4.

Group TOPS Averages
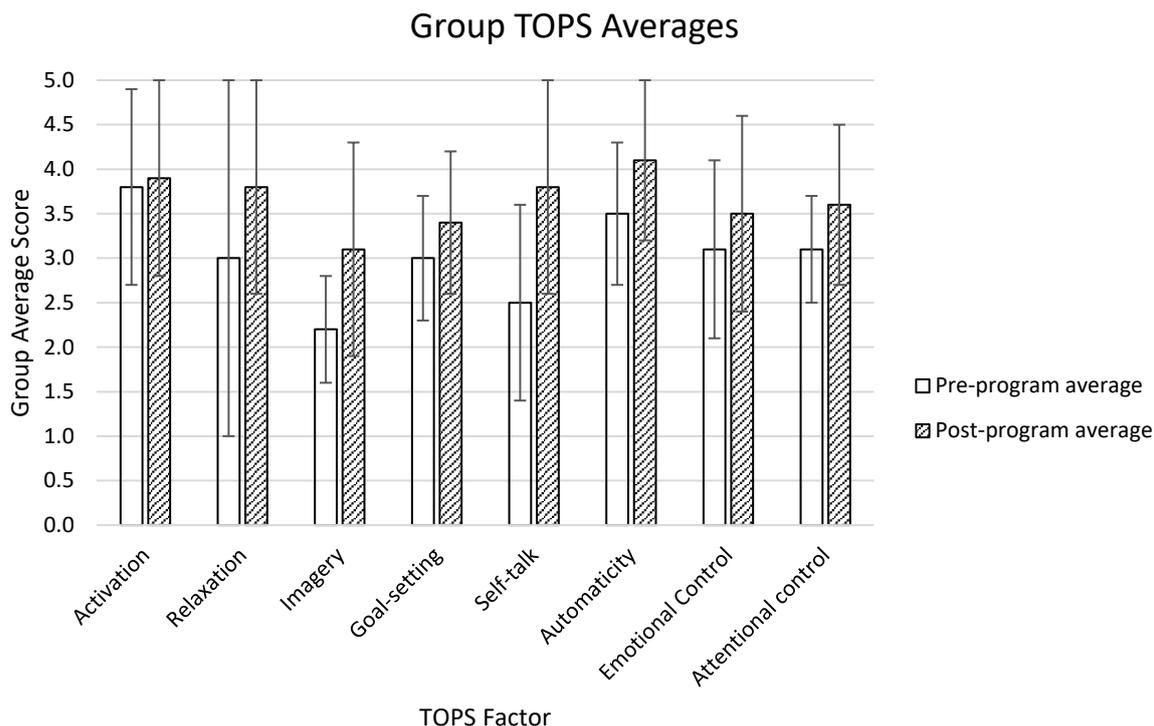
Figure 4: Results of the follow-up TOPS analysis.

Critical Evaluation

The most pertinent critique of this education programme stems from the feedback from the CEF returned by the client group. The feedback suggested that the client group struggled with relating the content of the sessions to the practice of their sport. My reflection on this is that I should perhaps not be surprised. As stated in my needs analysis I designed the sessions to be general in nature. Due to the nature of the client group, it was difficult to make the sessions more specific while still ensuring that the content was relevant to the entire group. However, this was not perceived well by the client group, even though we know that it is necessary to develop general skills before specific skills (Bondarchuk, 2007).

Interestingly, the three-month follow-up TOPS analysis suggested that, despite the poor feedback from the CEF, there had been significant increases in PST use among the client group. This suggests that the client group, given time, were able to make increased use of

PST in their training, indicating that the education programme was not without merit. On

reflection, I wonder if the reason the athletes have been shown to make improvements in PST

use was that they had been afforded time to find ways to individually embed PST into their

training practices. This would be consistent with the governing principles of self-

determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which suggests that the motivation for a specific

behaviour will be up regulated if the individual performing the behaviour is afforded greater

autonomy. Thus, being given the opportunity to make use of the PST techniques in a way that

they saw as appropriate, the client group may have experienced increased motivation to use

and improve these techniques.

A further criticism of the education programme regarding SDT is that the nature of the

delivery of the sessions did not allow for relatedness between members of the client group, as

everyone watched them in isolation. One could argue that it would have been more effective

to deliver the sessions as live group workshops, whereby interaction between the client group

would have been possible. On the other hand, I believe that I took the correct option in

choosing to pre-record the sessions, as there would have been significant logistical challenges

with gathering all of the client group together at the same time given their varied timetables.

Through the feedback from the evaluation of effectiveness and the critical analysis of the

education programme, I have learned two key lessons that I will take forward to inform my

future teaching and training work.

1. Specificity is key to buy-in
    i.   Making it clear to the client group how PST will benefit them *in the context of
         their sport* will likely lead to increased buy-in.

2. Session delivery should respect the principles of self-determination.

     i.   Sessions should allow clients to relate and learn from each other, develop a sense of competence, and be afforded independence to find the best way to apply PST individually.

Having reflected on these lessons, I decided to plan a future PST education session to exemplify how I might operate differently in future given what I have learned.

Purpose

The purpose of this hypothetical session would be to develop the use of pre-performance routines.

Context

This hypothetical session would take place in the JSF facility, under the assumption that no COVID-19 restrictions were necessary. I would ask the client group to bring with them any implements or equipment which are used in their events.

Client Group

For this session, I would ensure that the client group consisted of athletes whose events are characterised by closed-skill actions (Davis et al., 2000).

Session

I would begin the session by asking an experienced athlete in the group (who I would have obtained consent from beforehand) to describe their pre-performance routine. Following this,

I would break the client group up into small groups and ask them to generate ideas as to what benefits this routine brought to that athlete, and then feed them back to the group. Subsequently, I would briefly summarise the key points of Singer's (2002) 5-step model for constructing pre-performance routines. However, I would try to keep this didactic teaching to a minimum. Instead, with the remainder of the session I would allow the client group to begin constructing and practicing their own pre-performance routines, based on what they've learned and to use their sport specific implements / equipment to facilitate simulation. Using group discussions and allowing individual interactions would foster a sense of autonomy in the session, whilst giving the athlete's time to experiment and develop their own pre-performance routines would allow for growth of competence and autonomy. In this way, the session would likely appeal more to the athletes participating and deliver more sport-specific education in an environment more conducive to effective learning.

Conclusion

This case study describes how I delivered a programme of PST education to a group of athletes through online sessions. Needs analysis was informed by the characteristics of the client group, a survey, a TOPS analysis, and the context of education delivery during the COVID-19 lockdown. I developed and delivered the programme over five sessions, using pre-recorded online activity followed up with practical tasks for the client group to complete in their own time. I evaluated the effectiveness of the programme based on a follow-up TOPS assessment, consultant evaluation forms from the client group, and the observations of my manager. Reflecting on the experience, I learned that it is crucial to maximise the specificity of the content to the individuals in the client group, and to foster a sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy in the participants.

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Teaching Diary

Introduction

An individual's approach as a teacher and trainer significantly impacts the substance and content of what they teach and can therefore significantly impact educational outcomes for the learner group. In the context of education, systems of teaching knowledge, skills, and values (Ahmad, 2008), it is crucial that the teacher understands, reflects on, and continuously develops their approach. Thus, the purpose of this diary is to explain and justify my approach as a teacher and trainer in the context of education. Specific reference will be made to teaching context, delivery modality, session structure and content, and teaching style. Examples will be drawn from two distinct threads of my experience, firstly from a programme of lessons delivered to a cohort of students on a Higher National Diploma course in Sport at a local higher education college, and secondly from the programme of mental skills education delivered to performance athletes on the Jersey Sport Foundation (JSF) Performance Programme that formed the basis of my Teaching and Training case study. The synthesis of this discussion is the characterisation of my style as pragmatically adaptable, with a preference for teaching in-person in longer sessions, using mixed-style enquiry-based learning.

Teaching Context

The effectiveness of a teacher's approach to education is often dependent upon the context in which that education takes place. In my experience thus far, I have delivered education in markedly different contexts, where differences in educational objectives, learner group composition and educational settings have been stark. Thus, I have developed an adaptable approach to teaching.

As an example, when teaching the college students, I was confronted with a learner group who were relatively homogenous in age and had prior knowledge of the subject, and whose objective was passing as assessment to obtain a qualification. As such, I tailored my approach to this context by ensuring learning activities engaged the student's prior knowledge to ensure an appropriate level of challenge (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). In addition, I made sure to keep the content of education tightly focused on the learning objectives to the level at which they needed to be learned to allow the group to pass their assignment. Furthermore, given that the students had all completed some study in the area previously, I was able to teach using technical terms in confidence that I would be understood.

When teaching the JSF athletes, the context was significantly different, thus I had to adapt my teaching approach. For example, the athletes that I was teaching were relatively heterogeneous in their ages, educational background, athletic experience, and prior knowledge of psychology. As such, I adapted my teaching approach to ensure that I assumed as little prior knowledge as possible, as if I had done some of the group would have been left behind (Taber, 2001). In addition, the learner's priorities were different; rather than passing an assessment the athletes were engaging in education to enhance their competitive performance. Therefore, I made sure that the learning objectives for the sessions were tightly focused on enhancing performance outcomes. Furthermore, given that the athletes in the group were of different ages and educational backgrounds, I had to adapt my language to the context by ensuring that I avoided using technical language, and by defining key terms.

These examples demonstrate illustrate two markedly different educational contexts. The approach which was appropriate in one context would have been wildly inappropriate in the other. This reflects the importance of adaptability in my approach to teaching and training.

Like many other educators in the field of sport and exercise psychology, I am required to deliver education in a range of varied contexts, thus it is important that my approach to education is not rigid, but rather is adaptable to ensure education is appropriate to the context. Thus, I have worked to develop an approach to teaching and training that is appropriately adaptable to varied educational contexts.

Delivery Modality

While traditionally education has primarily been delivered in a classroom context, where learners are physically present with their teacher, advancements in digital technology have allowed educators to explore other teaching modalities. As a teacher and trainer, I have used both traditional in-person teaching methods, as well as online teaching. I aim for an integrated approach regarding teaching modality, building on the previous theme of adaptable teaching, to best suit the context at hand and effectively utilise the strengths of the different modalities whilst mitigating against their limitations.

My work with the college students is an example of in-person teaching. Notable advantages of this modality are that it allows for cooperative learning, a type of group work structured in assigned groups of students in which the teacher has already analysed and assessed individuals to create the most effective group based on social dynamics within the group itself (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Using cooperative learning has advantages over individual learning in terms of social interaction, transfer of ideas, and group leadership skills, if used correctly (Davis, 1999). In addition, for learners being taught in a room with others physically present fosters a sense of "togetherness" or relatedness, which promotes engagement and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A potential pitfall here is that with several learners physically present, the possibility of distraction due to chatter is created. In addition,

there is a degree of logistical inconvenience inherent to in-person teaching, as the teachers and learners must all be physically present at a predetermined place and time.

For most of the year 2020, in-person teaching was challenging due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was one of the reasons why the education for the JSF athletes was delivered online. Sessions were delivered in the form of pre-recorded activity, which the learners accessed via the internet. An obvious advantage of this modality is that it was physically safer in the remote context, as classroom contact increases the likelihood of pathogenic transmission of Covid. However, an inherent disadvantage of teaching in this way is that the feeling of "togetherness" and opportunity for cooperative learning is lost. There is a case for conducting real-time education online using videoconferencing software (Strawn, 2021), however there is evidence to suggest that social connectedness is reduced in real-time videoconference communication regardless (Jiang, 2020). In addition, real-time online education still requires that the learners and teacher are all available at the same time (which proved challenging in the case of the JSF athletes). Nonetheless, there are advantages of pre-recorded online education. Learners may engage with the material at a time and rate of their choosing, allowing them to fit education more conveniently around their daily lives and "chunk" (Gobet, et al., 2001) their learning as they feel is best. There is an argument that, while the lack of relatedness inherent to teaching through pre-recorded tutorials negatively impacts learner motivation, this may be mitigated by increased learner autonomy in how they choose to engage with their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Engaging both in-person and online pre-recorded education delivery modalities has influenced my teaching approach, as experiencing the advantages of each has demonstrated the value of integrating both. For example, if lecture-based teaching is necessary, or

appropriate, then this can be delivered through a digital modality so learners can have autonomy in how they engage with it. However, if cooperative learning is more appropriate, then I would utilise in-person teaching. This use of different modalities is consistent with the theme of adaptability, as the optimal modality, or combined use of modalities, can be utilised based on what is appropriate for the context. Thus, multimodal teaching has become a key part of my approach as a teacher and trainer.

Session Structure

An educator's approach can be significantly shaped by the structure and length of education sessions. A balance must be struck between longer sessions, which allow time for a greater diversity of forms of learning (Tomcho & Foels, 2012), and shorter sessions which demand less of the learners time and attentional resources (Bradbury, 2016). My preference is for sessions which are long enough to utilise a variety of teaching and learning methods. However, if the need arises, I can be pragmatic and restrict session length to the bare minimum.

When teaching the college students, I was assigned a lecture slot of four hours. My immediate impression was that this was a long period which would be demanding in terms of attentional resources from the learners. However, I knew that distributing learning across various learning activities would likely both optimise learner attention (Bradbury, 2016) and enhance learning outcomes (Ruch, 1928). Thus, the length of the sessions was advantageous as I was able to incorporate inquiry-based learning and learning activities that catered to different learning styles (Fleming, 2012). In addition, as even with this diversity the sessions did not take four hours, I was able to allow the learners an hour at the end of each session to work on their projects on which they would be assessed. This gave them the opportunity to

ask me questions as they arose, and to collaborate under supervision, which also served to discouraged blatant plagiarism.

By contrast, when delivering education to the athletes, sessions were significantly restricted in length. This restriction was self-imposed; I decided to keep each session within thirty minutes given that they were delivered in the form of pre-recorded activity, and thus opportunities for interaction, collaboration and variety of learning activities were limited. Aware that this lack of variety might lead to boredom over longer periods of time, I was forced to ensure sessions were kept short, and that I delivered the content as directly as possible. Due to the shortness of the sessions, I decided that I would include "homework" tasks as an opportunity for more autonomous learning (Cooper, 1989) outside the sessions themselves. This gave the athletes opportunities to experiment and express themselves slightly more, although feedback indicated that being able to do this in a way that was integrated into the sessions such that they could collaborate or ask questions of me immediately would have been beneficial for the learner group.

In summary, I generally prefer an approach to education that allows for sessions which are longer in duration, as this allows scope for a greater diversity of learning activities within each session. There is evidence to suggest that such diversity is beneficial for students. Nonetheless, if circumstances mean it is impossible to hold sessions of an extended duration, I am not opposed to restricting the length of the sessions, adopting a more direct style of teaching, and encouraging autonomous learning outside of the session itself. This once again reflects the theme of pragmatic adaptability; while my preferred approach to education requires sessions of an extended duration, if such sessions are impossible, I am capable of deviating from this preference.

Teaching Style

An educator's teaching style is a pivotal aspect of their teaching philosophy and addresses how information is taken in by learners (Ahmad, 2008). My two priorities with regards to teaching style are ensuring that different learning styles are addressed, and that students are engaged with their learning.

My preference, in general, is to teach using inquiry-based learning, a form of active learning that starts by posing questions, problems or scenarios for learners to solve (Ahmad, 2008). It contrasts with traditional education, which generally relies on the teacher presenting facts and their own knowledge about the subject. There is evidence to suggest that inquiry-based learning produces better learning outcomes than traditional lecture-based teaching (Butler, 1992). When teaching the college students, I employed inquiry-based learning strategies such as case studies, group projects and research projects. In this way, students were able to explore the topics in a manner which allowed them autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), thus promoting their engagement.

In contrast, when teaching the athlete group my style was more lecture-based, and teacher-led. This was a consequence of delivering the education through pre-recorded sessions. This presents a critique of this programme of education, as there is evidence to suggest that information retention from a twenty-five-minute session alone might be poor, perhaps less than 15% (Savoy, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2009). Therefore, I did my best to ensure that despite employing a more teacher-led approach, I was accounting for different learning styles. Learning styles theory suggests that individuals differ in how they learn best (Willingham, Hughes, & Dobolyi, 2015). The VARK model (Fleming, 2012) identifies four primary types of learning: visual, auditory, reading / writing, and kinaesthetic. Wilson (2014) suggests using

a range of teaching methods to accommodate for different learning needs and styles. Whilst there were obvious constraints presented by the need to deliver this education programme online, I nonetheless tried to include elements of each of these components in the sessions. For example, I made sure to include video (visual) components embedded within my background PowerPoint presentation (reading/writing) which I voiced over (auditory), alongside homework that frequently involved practice (kinaesthetic) of the session's content.

To summarise, I have a general preference to focus my teaching style on inquiry-based learning and a variety of learning styles. This is because there is evidence to suggest that inquiry-based learning is more effective than traditional teacher-led methods, although sometimes it is necessary to adopt a teacher-led style due to teaching modality or context. Nonetheless, it is important in these instances to promote learner engagement as much as possible by accommodating different learning styles.

Conclusion

The experiences of teaching the college students and JSF athletes provide parallel case studies for the different styles, contexts, modalities, and session structures in which I have delivered education. I have worked to develop an approach to teaching and training that is appropriately adaptable to varied educational contexts. As a result, multimodal teaching has become a key part of my approach as a teacher and trainer, although I retain a preference for in-person teaching where possible. This is because I have a general preference to focus my teaching style on inquiry-based learning and catering to a variety of learning styles. This approach to education requires sessions of an extended duration, however if such sessions are impossible, I can deviate from my preferred approach. While I have developed this approach

to education, I nonetheless have been able to adapt my style where the context has demanded it, thus displaying an element of pragmatic adaptability.

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Systematic Review

The Efficacy of Psychological Skills Training for Enhancing Performance in Sport: A Review

of Reviews

Abstract

Psychological skills training (PST) is one approach within sport psychology to enhance athletic performance. A significant amount research documents the efficacy of PST for enhancing performance which has led to numerous reviews. Such is the volume of reviews, that a "review of reviews", or overview, is warranted. This overview aimed to examine reviews summarising the evidence that PST enhances performance in sport. Six online databases were searched electronically, and thirteen journals were searched manually, following which accumulated articles were forward- and backward-searched. A total of 30 systematic, meta-analytic, and narrative reviews were included that (a) reviewed studies involving the application of PST to athletes, and (b) summarised the effects of PST interventions on sport performance, or a motor performance-based surrogate of a sporting task. Data regarding review characteristics, PST interventions reviewed, and outcomes were extracted. Included reviews were assessed using the AMSTAR 2 instrument. 90% of the reviews concluded that PST interventions can enhance performance; however, 97% were rated as critically low in quality. Critically low-quality reviews should not be relied on to provide an accurate and comprehensive summary of the available studies, thus the conclusion of this overview is that practitioners must be cautious when making claims about the review-level evidence for their PST interventions. It is suggested that prospective reviewers ensure they draw on current and accepted review methodology so that readers have clarity about the efficacy of the reviewed PST interventions in future research.

Keywords: psychological skills training, mental skills training, sport performance, overview, umbrella review

Introduction

Psychological skills training (PST) is a popular method which involves teaching athletes methods to help them to enhance the quality and consistency of their performance (Weinberg, 2019). Practitioners debate the definition of a psychological skill, for example Behncke (2004) refers to psychological skills as cognitive-somatic techniques, such as imagery, relaxation, and self-talk, whereas others include trait-like components such as confidence, motivation, and focus (Vealey, 2019). To clarify the issue, Dohme et al. (2017) systematically reviewed terms used in empirical studies to describe psychological components purported to facilitate athletic performance. Dohme et al. (2017) defined psychological skills as "an athlete's ability to use learned methods to regulate or enhance their psychological characteristics" (p. 158-159), and it was this definition that was adopted for the present review. Conversely, they defined psychological characteristics as "trait-like dispositions that can be regulated or enhanced through systematic development despite their relative stability" (p. 158-159). For example, psychological skills such as imagery may be used to enhance psychological characteristics, such as self-confidence (Dohme et al., 2019).

As the use of PST by athletes has increased, the research examining the efficacy of these PST interventions has rapidly expanded. Confronted with a large volume of research on PST interventions, authors have reviewed the studies to summarise, synthesise, and simplify the evidence of the efficacy of PST in sport (e.g., Agosti & Sirico, 2020; Brown & Fletcher, 2017; Tod, Hardy & Oliver, 2011).

The rapidly increasing number of reviews comprise of narrative, systematic, and meta-analytic reviews. Although well intentioned, this rapid increase in the number of reviews has limitations. Firstly, it compounds the problem stakeholders already face in sorting through

multitudes of evidence. Secondly, these reviews often present conflicting results. For example, Brown and Fletcher (2017) concluded that PST techniques such as imagery and relaxation enhance sport performance, whereas Pelka et al. (2016) concluded that these PST techniques did not enhance performance. Conflicting conclusions from reviews about the same topic suggest a need to critically appraise the reviews themselves to identify causes of these inconsistencies. For example, the reviews might focus on different populations, outcomes, inclusion criteria, and comparators, or their quality might be limited, affecting the inferences made from the reviews. Importantly, stakeholders in sport make decisions on the basis of reviews, so it is critical to examine what is leading to these inconsistencies among reviews so that they can develop a better understanding of the effectiveness of PST in sport.

One method of appraising reviews is to conduct a "review of reviews" (i.e., an overview). Overviews systematically document evidence from existing systematic reviews on a topic with the goal of generating results to give a high-level overview (Higgins, et al., 2019). An overview represents one of the highest levels of evidence synthesis currently employed, and they are influential in health and biomedical literature (Fusar-Poli & Radua, 2018) because they provide 'user-friendly' summaries of research relevant to a decision, without decision makers needing to assimilate the results of multiple reviews themselves (Hartling, et al., 2016). In addition, an overview can provide an opportunity for stakeholders and policy makers identify the reasons why extant reviews may differ in their findings and quality and take these reasons into account when they read reviews and use them to make decisions. Faulkner, Fagan, and Lee's (2021) search found only two overviews in sport and exercise psychology (Biddle, Atkin, Cavill, & Foster, 2011; Biddle, Ciaccioni, Thomas, & Vergeer, 2019), both on physical activity. To the authors' knowledge, there are no overviews on PST in sport.

An overview of reviews on PST for performance enhancement could make several key contributions. Firstly, it would summarise the extant literature to provide a 'user-friendly' summary of research relevant to whether or not to use PST, without needing to assimilate the results of multiple reviews. Secondly, an overview of this area would be an opportunity to assess the overall quality of the extant literature, so that practitioners of PST can be aware of the quality of the evidence behind their practice. Finally, an overview could bring insight into why existing reviews have inconsistent results by examining variations in methodology and quality of evidence between reviews.

As such, the aim of this overview was to examine the review literature on PST's effectiveness in enhancing sport performance and provide a clear and thorough understanding of the topic. More specifically, this overview's objectives included examining (a) the types of PST interventions included in the reviews, (b) the conclusions of the reviews, and (c) the quality of the review literature. Achieving these objectives indicate which PST interventions have been examined in the review literature, what evidence there is that they enhance performance, and how reliable that evidence is.

Aims of the current study

The objectives for the review were developed using the population, intervention, comparator, outcomes (PICO) framework (Schardt, Adams, Owens, Keitz, & Fontelo, 2007). Specifically, this overview summarised reviews investigating the relationship between athletes' (P, an individual who participates in competitive sport; Swann, Moran, & Piggott, 2015) use of PST (I, learned methods to regulate or enhance athlete's psychological characteristics; Dohme et al., 2017) and their performance (O, the execution of actions necessary to complete a task; Swann et al., 2015) in sport in comparison with controls (C), where included.

Methods

Protocol and Publication Standard

Prior to conducting this review, the protocol was made available on the Open Science Framework (OSF)[1]. We used the Preferred Reporting Items for Overviews of Systematic Reviews pilot tool (PRIOSR, Bougioukas et al., 2018) as the publication standard for this overview (available on the OSF[2]). The PRIOSR ensures the complete and transparent reporting of overviews to facilitate interpretation.

Eligibility Criteria and Outcomes of Interest

Articles satisfying the following criteria were included:

(a) Systematic, meta-analytic, and narrative reviews, where the primary purpose was to review the literature. The authors elected to include narrative reviews in the search because it was felt that, while narrative reviews traditionally do not answer directional research questions about intervention efficacy like that of the present overview, they provide interpretation and critique, and contribute by deepening understanding (Greenhalgh et al., 2018), which may be valuable for addressing the objective of the overview. Furthermore, narrative reviews were more common than other approaches in older literature, therefore valuable earlier information could be missed if they were omitted.

(b) Articles which reviewed studies involving the delivery of PST (as defined by Dohme et al., 2017) as an intervention to athletes to improve performance in sport.

(c) Articles which summarised the effects of PST interventions on a measure of sport performance, or motor performance-based surrogates of a sporting task. These

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[1] Protocol - https://osf.io/tg7wv
[2] Reporting Standard - https://osf.io/qkshp

measures of performance were the specific outcome of interest. Motor performance surrogates were considered because athletes use PST to enhance motor skill performance, as well as competitive performance (Tod et al., 2015).

(d) Articles written in English, the only language read by the authors.

(e) Articles which were either published or unpublished (e.g., unpublished dissertations, conference abstracts, preprints etc.).

Information Sources and Search Strategy

Search Term Generation

Search terms were generated using 'Pearl growing' (Booth, 2016); an approach to systematic literature searching which identifies relevant literature. A review which met the inclusion criteria (Brown & Fletcher, 2017) was identified, and relevant search terms were extracted from the main text. This paper's reference list and 'cited by' list were then screened for reviews which met the inclusion criteria, from which relevant search terms were also extracted. This process continued iteratively until no more relevant search terms could be identified. The final search terms are presented in Table 1.

Search Terms	Descriptors
1. PST	"self-talk" OR "self talk" OR "inner dialogue" OR "arousal control" OR "relaxation" OR "activation" OR "PMR" OR "emotion control" OR "breath*" OR "mindfulness" OR "imagery" OR "visualisation" OR "mental rehearsal" OR "goal setting" OR "performance profiling" OR "performance routine*" OR "pre-performance routine*" OR "anxiety" OR "stress" OR "reflection" OR "self-aware*" OR "self aware*" OR "attention" OR "focus" OR "attentional shift" OR

"biofeedback" OR "associative attention" OR "dissociative attention" OR "refocus*" OR "mental skills training" OR "psychological skills training" OR "MST" OR "PST" OR "psychological intervention*" OR "intervention"

2. Review   "systematic review" OR "narrative review" OR "meta-analysis" OR "review"

3. Sport Performance   "athlet*" OR "sport*" OR "perform*"

Combination   #1 AND #2 AND #3

Table 1: Search terms for online database search.

Search Dates

The initial search was carried out in August 2019. The search was repeated in December 2021 and September 2022 so as to include more recently published articles.

Electronic Search

An electronic search was then conducted using the search terms shown in Table 1 via the following electronic databases: (a) PsycINFO on OVID (b) SPORTDiscus on EBSCO (c) PubMed on MEDLINE (d) SCOPUS on Elsevier (e) and WebOfScience.

Additional Search Strategies

Three additional search strategies were used; manual, forward, and backward searches. If the electronic search returned three or more eligible reviews from a single journal, that journal's table of contents was screened manually. In addition, the tables of contents of the following journals, which the authors were aware had previously published literature on PST interventions in the context of sport, were also manually screened:(a) *Case Studies in Sport*

and Exercise Psychology (b) *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (c) *International Journal of Sport Psychology* (d) *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (e) *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (f) *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* (g) *Journal of Imagery Research in Sport and Physical Activity* (h) *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* (i) *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* (j) *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (k) *The Sport Psychologist* (l) *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review* (m) *Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology.*

Additionally, the reference lists of the eligible articles which were screened as full texts were backward- and forward-searched for further potentially relevant articles. Backward searching is the process of examining the works cited by an author to establish what research has influenced the author. Forward searching is where articles that cite an original article or work after it has been published are identified. This type of search focuses on the publications created after an article's publication.

Data Management and Selection Process

Records from the searches were stored using Endnote X7 before being exported to Rayyan (Ouzzani, Hammady, Fedorowicz, & Elmagarmid, 2016) for screening and duplicate removal. The first author screened titles and abstracts and reviewed full texts for eligibility according to a standardised process illustrated in a flowchart which is available on the OSF[3]. The second author (blinded to the first author's inclusion decisions) randomly sampled 20% of the full-text assessed papers and independently assessed their eligibility using the flowchart described above. Disagreements between the two authors were resolved by the third author.

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[3] Inclusion Flowchart - https://osf.io/86fah

Data Collection Process and Data Items

Data were extracted from included articles via a piloted standardised form, available on the OSF[4]. Extracted data included: (a) authors' names, (b) publication date, (c) publishing journal (or document type if unpublished), (d) review objectives, (e) review methodology, (f) number of studies reviewed, (g) critical appraisal tool, (h) psychological skill(s) reviewed, (i) authors' conclusions, (j) performance enhancement effect, (k) controls, (l) manipulation checks, and (m) funding.

Assessment of Methodological Quality

We used the "Assessing the Methodological Quality of Systematic Reviews" tool (AMSTAR 2) to analyse the methodological and evidence quality. The AMSTAR 2 is a valid and reliable appraisal tool (Shea, et al., 2017). The methodological and evidence quality of the included reviews were assessed by the first author using a piloted standardised form available on the OSF[5].

Data Synthesis

Data regarding review selection, review characteristics, and assessment of methodological quality and quality of evidence are described narratively. Data regarding the interventions described in the included reviews and their outcomes are synthesised in text and supported by the relevant tables.

Results

Review Selection

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[4] Extraction Sheet - https://osf.io/rq2cf
[5] AMSTAR 2 Assessment Tool - https://osf.io/5q6y2

The literature search returned 904 records. After screening titles and abstracts, 77 papers had their full-text assessed. After full-text screening, 30 reviews met inclusion and exclusion criteria (Figure 1 for PRISMA flow diagram). A list of excluded articles with reasons is on the OSF[6]. Agreement between the first and second authors was 90% and, after mediation by a third author, all disagreements were resolved in favour of inclusion.

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[6] Excluded Reviews - https://osf.io/yztpk

Identification

Records identified through
database searching:
(n = 852)

PsycINFO on OVID: 10

SPORTDiscus on EBSCO: 150

PubMed on MEDLINE:0

SCOPUS on Elsevier: 257

WebOfScience: 335

Additional records identified
through other sources:
(n = 55)

Records after duplicates removed:
(n = 854)

Screening

Records screened:
(n = 854)

Records excluded:
(n = 776)

Eligibility

Full-text articles
assessed for eligibility:
(n = 78)

Full-text articles excluded,
with reasons:
(n = 47)

PST not mentioned (n = 8)

Performance not DV (n = 24)

Not secondary research (n = 5)

Not sport (n = 7)

Not English (n = 1)

Other (n = 2)

Included

Articles included in
qualitative synthesis:
(n = 30)

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow diagram illustrating literature research and selection process.

Review Characteristics

Review Types

Characteristics of the 30 reviews are summarised in a table, on the OSF[7]. Of the 30 reviews, 14 were systematic reviews without meta-analysis, 11 were systematic reviews with meta-analysis, and 5 were narrative reviews. Of the systematic reviews (with or without meta-analysis), the number of included studies ranged from 7 to 66 ($m = 34.12$, $SD = 18.50$).

Publication

28 of the reviews appeared in academic journals with two (Moore, 2003; Oppermann, 2013) that were unpublished doctoral dissertations. Of the published reviews, 12 appeared in sport psychology journals, 12 in sport science journals, 4 in mainstream psychology journals, and 1 each in journals dedicated to psychophysiology and performance enhancement.

Review Objectives

The reviews reported various objectives. The most common was to present a synthesis of the literature on a particular psychological skill (e.g., Hinshaw; 1991). Other objectives were more focused on the effects of a psychological skill on performance (e.g. Landers & Feltz; 1983).

Comparison Groups

Reporting of the comparison groups used in the primary studies was mixed. Ten reviews did not record employed comparison groups. Five reviews stated all reviewed studies used control groups, but gave no further details. The remaining reviews described various types of comparison groups, including "do your best controls", waiting list controls, attentional

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[7] Evidence Table - https://osf.io/634q2

controls (e.g., a non-relevant video) and no-instruction controls. Table 2 presents the frequency of which different comparison groups were mentioned across the 30 reviews. 20 reviews mentioned at least one study for which the comparison group was not described.

Comparison Type	Number of Mentions
Motivational control	6
Pre-post design with no control	3
Single Subject control	1
No control	4
Simple control	1
Direct control	1
No contact	1
No goal	1
No treatment, with physical practice	1
No treatment, without physical practice	1
Alternative treatment	2
Attentional control	2
Placebo	2
Negative treatment	1
No instruction	1
Not stated	20

Table 2: Frequency of which different comparison groups were mentioned in relation to the studies across all of the included reviews.

Manipulation Checks

Reviews were inconsistent in documenting manipulation checks. Only Bühlmayer et al. (2017) stated that manipulation checks were performed on all of the experimental groups in the included studies. Six reviews stated that manipulation checks were performed on some

but not all experimental groups in the reviewed studies. None of the included reviews described if manipulation checks were performed on the comparison groups.

Methodological Quality and Quality of Evidence

Each review's rating is presented for each of the AMSTAR 2's sources of bias. Figure 2 presents the percentages associated with each source of bias. The full AMSTAR 2 assessment is available on the OSF[8].

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[8] AMSTAR 2 Assessment - https://osf.io/8cu5n
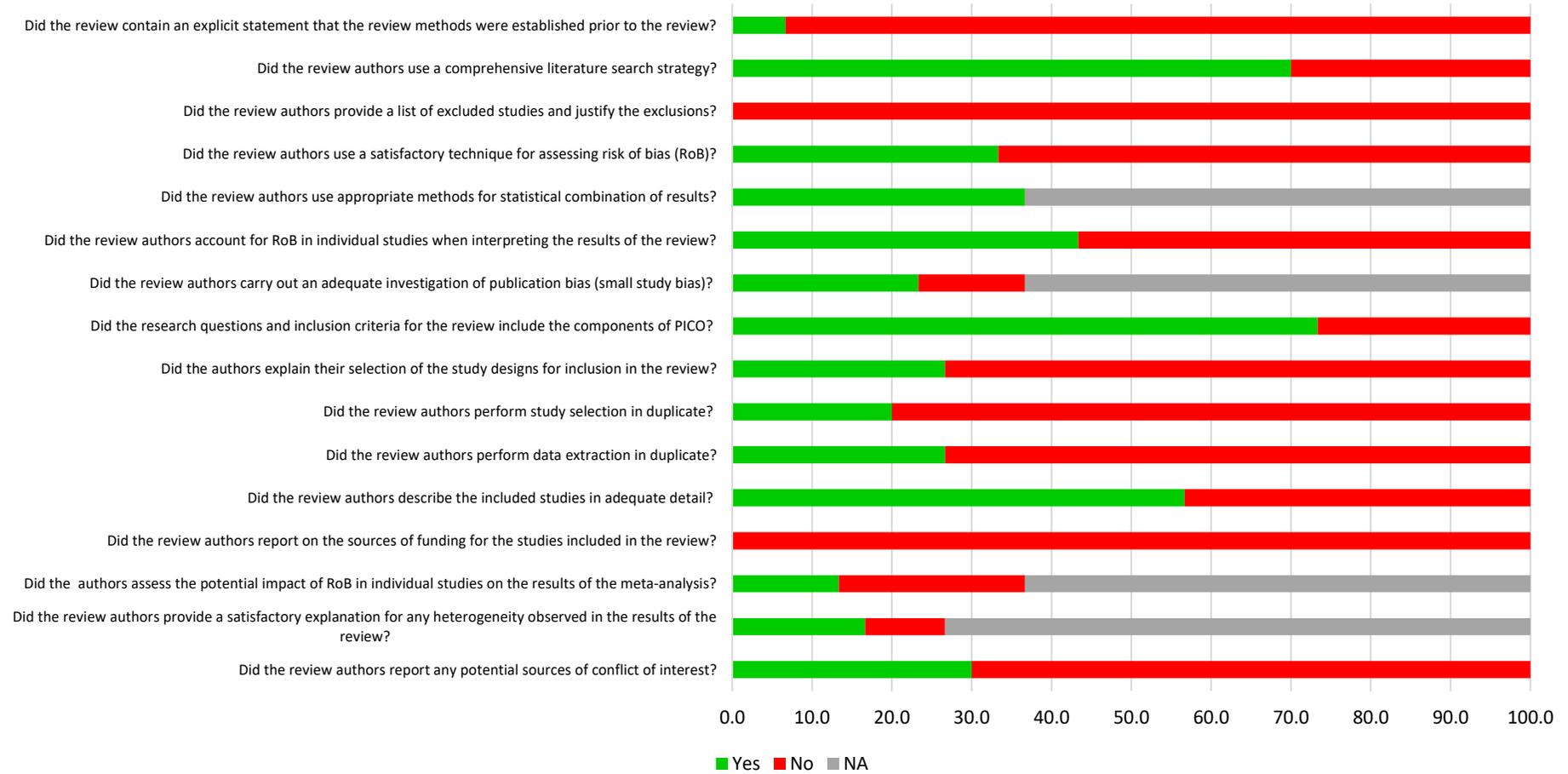
Figure 2. Percentages of reviews satisfying the criteria of the AMSTAR 2 assessment tool.

Using the AMSTAR 2, 1 review was rated low quality, and 30 reviews were rated as critically low quality. Interested readers can find the protocol for generating the confidence ratings in Shea et al. (2017). Only one review indicated that its methods were established prior to conducting the review. 21 reviews deployed a comprehensive literature search strategy, and those that did not were typically narrative in nature and did not describe any search strategy. None of the included reviews provided a list of excluded studies with justifications of exclusions. 10 reviews used satisfactory techniques for assessing risk of bias. 18 reviews did not account for risk of bias when interpreting their review results. In 22 reviews, the research questions and inclusion criteria did not conform to PICO. 8 reviews *explained* their selection of study designs for inclusion (as opposed to merely *describing* it). Less than a third of authors performed study selection (n=6) or data extraction (n=8) in duplicate. 17 of the reviews described the included studies in adequate detail. No authors reported sources of funding for included studies. Finally, 10 reviews included statements pertaining to funding or conflicts of interest, of whom none declared any such conflicts.

Several AMSTAR 2 criteria applied only to meta-analytic reviews (n=11). In these cases, all reviews used appropriate methods for statistical analysis. 7 reviews investigated publication bias. 5 reviews assessed the potential impact of risk of bias in individual studies on the results of their meta-analyses, or adequately explained observed heterogeneity.

Synthesis of Results

Interventions

45 psychological skills training interventions appeared in the reviews (frequencies are presented in Table 3). Interventions were placed in one of 10 categories based on broad definitions of the method the athlete used to execute the skill. Nine such categories of

interventions were identified, and a separate category was identified for multi-method interventions.

Four interventions involving a multisensory mental image were mentioned (Category 1): mental practice (5 reviews), imagery (12), mental rehearsal (1), and motor imagery (1). Four interventions centred on modifying the words that individuals use to speak to themselves (Category 2): were self-talk (8), self-efficacy statements (1), cognitive reappraisals (1), and cognitive restructuring (1). In category 3 were 2 interventions where individuals were exposed to anxiety-inducing stimuli: stress inoculation (2) and systematic desensitisation (1). Eight reviews mentioned goal setting (Category 4). Category 5 contained 10 interventions involving deliberate modification of breathing rate and/or muscle tension: preparatory arousal (3), relaxation (4), Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) (3), arousal management (1), arousal regulation (1), breathing techniques (1), applied tension release (1), autogenic training (1), danjeon breathing (1), and left-hand contractions (1). The majority of these were mentioned once in the same review (Pelka, et al., 2016). Category 6 included five interventions involving deliberate efforts to direct visual or mental attention toward something: attentional focus (1), associative attention (1), dissociative attention (1), attentional focus manipulation (1), and quiet eye training (2). Eight interventions based on biofeedback (category 7) were mentioned in the reviews: electromyography (EMG) biofeedback (2), electroencephalography (EEG) biofeedback (1), heart rate biofeedback (1), heart rate variability (HRV) biofeedback (1), skin temperature biofeedback (1), postural biofeedback (1), multimodal biofeedback (1), and neurofeedback (1). Many of these interventions were mentioned only once, and in the same review (Oppermann, 2013). Five reviews mentioned hypnosis (Category 8). Category 9 includes mindfulness-based interventions (1), mindfulness practice techniques (1) and mindfulness and acceptance

approaches (1). Category 10 comprised 7 multi-method interventions: visuomotor behaviour rehearsal (VMBR; 1), Activation (1), Pre-performance routines (2), Multimodal Performance routines (1), Cognitive self-regulation (1), Realistic self-evaluation (1), maintaining a sense of balance (1), and multicomponent interventions (1).

Category Number	Description of Method	Psychological Skill (as described in review)	Number of Reviews of Psychological Skill
1	Projecting a multisensory mental image of something.	Mental Practice	5
		Imagery	13
		Mental Rehearsal	1
		Motor Imagery	1
2	Modifying the words that a person uses to speak to themselves, either aloud or internally.	Self-talk	9
		Self-efficacy statements	1
		Cognitive reappraisals	1
		Cognitive restructuring	1
3	Deliberate exposure of a person to an anxiety-inducing stimulus.	Stress inoculation	2
		Systematic desensitisation	1
4	Systematic development of a target or targets	Goal setting	9

	which an individual aims to achieve.		
5	Deliberate modification of breathing rate and/or muscle tension.	Preparatory arousal	3
		Relaxation	4
		Progressive muscle relaxation	3
		Arousal management	1
		Arousal regulation	1
		Breathing techniques	1
		Applied tension release	1
		Autogenic training	1
		Danjeon breathing	1
		Left-hand contractions	1
6	Deliberate efforts to direct visual or mental attention toward something.	Attentional focus	1
		Associative attention	1
		Dissociative attention	1
		Attentional focus manipulation	1
		Quiet eye training	2
		Transcendental meditation	1
7	Making use of technology to receive feedback	EMG Biofeedback	2
		EEG Biofeedback	1
		HRV Biofeedback	1

	on a physiological function which the individual is attempting to exert control over.	Heart rate Biofeedback	1
		Skin temperature biofeedback	1
		Postural biofeedback	1
		Multimodal biofeedback	1
		Neurofeedback	1
8	Induction of a state of consciousness in which a person is more responsive to suggestion.	Hypnosis	5
9	Focusing awareness on, and acceptance of the present moment.	Mindfulness based interventions	1
		Mindfulness practice techniques	1
		Mindfulness and acceptance approaches	1
10	Multi-method interventions	VMBR	1
		Activation	1
		Pre-performance routines	2
		Multimodal Performance routines	1
		Cognitive self-regulation	1
		Realistic self-evaluation	1

Maintaining a sense of balance	1
Multi-component interventions	1

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence of PST interventions in the included reviews, categorised based on description of the method performed by the athlete.

Outcomes

Performance measures are summarised in a Table available on the OSF[9]. These measures included motor skill learning, motor skill performance, a combination of both, and simply "performance." 27 reviews reported a positive effect of PST on a measure of performance in comparison to controls. Eleven meta-analyses presented quantitative evidence of a PST performance enhancement effect. Effect sizes for visualisation interventions ranged from $d =$ .43 (Simonsmeier et al., 2020) to .68 (Hinshaw, 1991). The only effect size for self-talk was .48 (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011). For goal setting, effect sizes ranged from .34 (Kyllo and Landers, 1995) to .54 (Meyers et al., 1996). The effect size for quiet eye was 1.53 (Lebeau et al., 2016). Mindfulness had an effect size of 1.35 (Bühlmayer et al., 2017). The biofeedback effect size was .72 (Oppermann, 2013). Meyers et al. (1996) found an effect of .73 for relaxation and 1.23 for arousal increase interventions. Brown and Fletcher's (2017) meta-analysis contained several psychological and psychosocial interventions and reported an effect size of .57.

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[9] Review Outcomes - https://osf.io/53wdn

Three systematic reviews used vote-count to summarise findings. Morgan and Mora (2017) reported that in 85.71% of the studies they reviewed (n = 6), heart rate variability biofeedback enhanced psychophysiological variables that improved sport performance. Tod et al. (2015) reported relationships between strategy use and strength performance of; imagery 63%, goal setting 65%, self-talk 61% and preparatory arousal 63%. Tod et al. (2011) reported that 75% of studies of positive self-talk supported the presence of an enhancement effect on general performance, whereas 100% of studies suggested negative self-talk resulted in decrements to general performance.

Eighteen reviews synthesised evidence narratively, concluding that a range of PST interventions enhanced performance. For example, Alexander et al. (2019) concluded that imagery has the potential to positively influence performance in powerlifting. Several narrative reviews reported that multi-method PST interventions enhanced performance (e.g., Rumbold et al., 2012).

Three reviews presented mixed or no evidence for performance enhancement and were systematic reviews without meta-analysis. Gröpel and Mesagno (2017) reported that pre-performance routines, quiet eye training, left-hand contractions, and acclimatisation training consistently enhanced performance, but found mixed evidence for analogy learning and no evidence for goal setting, neurofeedback training, and reappraisal cues. Similarly, Pelka et al. (2016) concluded that biofeedback and hypnosis can positively influence performance consistently; however, the other techniques that were proven effective in clinical environments (PMR, breathing techniques, applied tension release, imagery, autogenic training, transcendental meditation and Danjeon breathing) did not consistently enhance

performance. Finally, Moore (2003) indicated that imagery, goal setting, self-talk, and arousal regulation did not meet the standards required for designation as efficacious interventions.

Discussion

This is the first overview investigating the efficacy of PST to enhance sport performance. In this article, the findings of 30 narrative, systematic, and meta-analytic reviews were synthesised. In general, there was varied evidence from the included reviews to suggest that PST can enhance skill execution. There are limitations to this evidence, including the mixed reporting of comparison groups, the lack of manipulation checks, and the use of vote counting to synthesise the findings. In addition, indications from the AMSTAR 2 assessment suggested that much of the review literature lacked rigour and tells us little about the quality of the primary research (i.e., reviewers have seldom critically appraised primary research according to recognised procedures or standards).

The included reviews gave varied evidence regarding the effect of PST interventions on performance. Some of the included reviews presented quantitative evidence of PST enhancing performance, with effect sizes, ranging from small to large. Additionally, three vote counts indicated that PST enhances performance. Also, all five included narrative reviews concluded that PST enhances performance across several contexts. Conversely, three systematic reviews presented mixed or no evidence for performance enhancement. There are multiple potential reasons for this discrepancy.

It may be that PST does not help all athletes enhance competitive performance. Paralleling other psychological interventions, PST may help some people, and have no effect on others (Paul, 1967). The challenge would be to identify which moderating variables might produce

divergent effects. For example, researchers and reviewers may investigate whether skill level (Swann et al., 2015) or the type of skill (Davis et al., 2000) moderates the effect of PST on performance.

Alternatively, the variation in results may be due to the critically low quality of the included reviews. 29 of the 30 included reviews were rated as critically low in quality using the AMSTAR 2 tool, meaning that they have "more than one critical flaw and should not be relied on to provide an accurate and comprehensive summary of the available studies" (Shea, et al., 2007). There are several potential reasons for this preponderance of critically low ratings. Many of the reviews predate even the original AMSTAR checklist (Shea, et al., 2007), and the science of reviewing has advanced since they were written. Nonetheless, many of the unmet AMSTAR 2 criteria require relatively little effort to satisfy. For example, no authors provided a list of excluded studies along with exclusion reasons or reported sources of funding. Similarly, only one review stated that the review methods were established prior to conducting the review (Oppermann, 2013). Such missing details suggest that authors may be unaware of the criteria their reviews will be assessed against. If reviewers became aware of the accepted review methods and standards, then their conclusions would carry greater validity and provide more useful information for stakeholders in the sporting world.

It would have been instructive to understand how the distribution of AMSTAR 2 quality ratings of reviews of PST compare with other overviews within sport psychology, as this might give some indication of the relative strength or weakness of the PST literature in comparison to other areas in sport psychology. However, the existing overviews within sport psychology (Biddle, Atkin, Cavill, & Foster, 2011; Biddle, Ciaccioni, Thomas, & Vergeer, 2019) did not use the AMSTAR 2, therefore such comparisons are not possible at this time.

Nonetheless, it would be of benefit for prospective authors of future overviews to consider
using the AMSTAR 2, so that such comparisons are possible in future.

A noteworthy methodological issue in the included reviews was the reporting of comparison
groups. 50% of the reviews either gave no details regarding the comparison groups used in
the research or provided limited details about the types of control groups. Readers must be
aware of what PST interventions are being compared with, to make informed interpretations
of any performance enhancement effect. For example, an intervention might have no effect,
but the "control" decreases performance. Without accurate description of the control this is
impossible to determine, leading to an increased risk of type I errors. When reviewers did
report the type of comparison, often groups such as "alternative treatment" or "motivational
control" were reported with no further consideration. Such reporting leaves readers unaware
of whether increases in performance are due to the intervention, placebo, or other extraneous
factors.

A related issue is the lack of details about manipulation checks. Although a few reviews
reported whether studies included manipulation checks on interventions, none reported
whether manipulation checks were performed on controls. Researchers have indicated that
control participants spontaneously use psychological skills (Hardy et al., 2005). Such groups,
where participants spontaneously use interventions, are more correctly termed contrast
groups (APA Board of Scientific Affairs, 1999). Contrast groups do not provide a consistent
baseline measure for comparison, increasing the risk of type II errors. When reviewing the
efficacy of PST interventions compared to controls, authors can help readers by reporting on
manipulation checks used on the contrast groups and discuss this information as part of their
interpretations.

When exploring PST efficacy, meta-analyses have benefits beyond other review types; they can examine the strength (or lack thereof), direction, and precision of the intervention effectiveness (Riemsma, et al., 2003). They can correct for low statistical power, a situation likely to occur in studies of elite sports performers, who are by definition a small population and challenging to recruit. Other types of reviews do not allow for such corrections (Riemsma, et al., 2003). It is recommended that authors seeking to quantify the effects of PST interventions on sporting performance should adopt meta-analytic methodology.

Some of the included reviews used vote counting to synthesise their findings, which is a flawed method (Higgins, et al., 2019). At least two problems can occur with vote counting (Tod, 2019). First, problems occur if subjective decisions or statistical significance are used to define 'positive' and 'negative' studies (Shuster, 2011). Second, vote counting does not account for the quality of the studies, the size of the samples, or the size of the effect (Shuster, 2011). As noted previously, authors seeking to quantify the effects of PST interventions on sporting performance should ideally adopt meta-analytic methodology. However, where this is not possible, authors should refrain from resorting to vote counting, due to the limitations of this method outlined above, and instead offer narrative summaries of the evidence they have accumulated.

Many PST interventions were reported in the reviews, which were categorised under descriptions of the behaviour being performed, to facilitate readers' understanding, and provide a "friendly front end" to the literature on the efficacy of PST. Creating umbrella categories of PST interventions helped address the significant heterogeneity in the terms describing PST interventions in the reviews. Such heterogeneity in describing PST interventions risks complicating an already large literature base, and confusing readers. A

potential solution could be further systematic reviews like Dohme et al.'s (2017) review. A systematic review categorising and defining PST interventions could be the first step towards forging a common language for PST.

Limitations

This overview included only English language reviews. Nonetheless, only one article was screened out as a consequence of being written in another language. Furthermore, evidence suggests that English-language restrictions do not always introduce biases (Morrison, et al., 2012).

The present overview could be critiqued for including narrative reviews. Conventional systematic reviews address narrowly focused questions; their key contribution is summarising data. Conversely, narrative reviews provide interpretation and critique; their key contribution is deepening understanding (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Nonetheless, it was felt by the authors that while narrative reviews traditionally serve different purposes, they may nonetheless contain information valuable for addressing the objective of the overview. Indeed, it emerged that all of the five narrative reviews which were included in this overview presented evidence of positive effects for PST on performance. That all of the non-supportive results for performance enhancement effects emerged from the included systematic and meta-analytic reviews suggests that narrative reviews may not be sensitive enough to capture non-supportive results. Based on this of low sensitivity, the authors recommend that prospective reviewers avoid narrative reviews as a methodology, where possible, when seeking to quantify performance enhancement effects of PST. Instead, as previously discussed, it is recommended that authors seeking to quantify the effects of PST interventions on performance consider adopting meta-analytic methodology.

A related potential limitation of this overview pertaining to the assessment of methodological quality was that the AMSTAR 2 was not designed to assess the methodological quality of narrative reviews. In other words, it may be somewhat unfair to compare the methodological quality of a narrative and systematic reviews with the AMSTAR 2; however, this was deemed necessary in order to give a consistent evaluation of methodological quality and quality of evidence across the included reviews.

Implications

The current findings present stakeholders in sport with a dilemma. The reviews largely conclude that PST can enhance sporting performance but are typically of critically low quality. A review of critically low quality should not be relied on to provide an accurate and comprehensive summary of the available studies (Shea, et al., 2017). Therefore, one could conclude that there is insufficient high-quality evidence to support using PST to help athletes enhance performance. Such a decision represents a value judgement and scientific evidence is just one factor practitioners need to consider when working with athletes. Other factors include client preferences, context and available resources (APA, 2006). The current review has provided a "friendly front end" to assist practitioners in their decision making. With regards to the academic implications, an unequivocal outcome of this overview is that reviewers of the PST literature will benefit from drawing on current and accepted review methodology so that stakeholders in sport have clarity about the efficacy of the PST interventions for their own decision making.

Conclusions

This overview summarised evidence from narrative, systematic, and meta-analytic reviews on the relationships between PST and performance in sport, with the aim of providing a

"friendly front end" to the review literature on the subject. The included reviews varied in methodology, outcomes and the terms used to describe psychological skills. The vast majority of reviews were rated as critically low in quality using the AMSTAR 2 assessment tool, suggesting that they should not be relied on to provide an accurate and comprehensive summary of the available studies. In light of this, practitioners must be cautious when making claims about the review-level evidence for their PST interventions. Prospective reviewers would benefit by drawing on current and accepted review methodology so that readers have clarity about the efficacy of the reviewed PST interventions. Finally, future authors may consider conducting reviews aiming to define and categorise PST interventions, with the aim of providing clarity to stakeholders in sport by developing a common lexicon.

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Empirical Paper 1

Exploring the efficacy of spotlight personality profiling for enhancing coach-athlete

relationships in sport.

Abstract

The ability to create and foster effective partnerships between coaches and their athletes is viewed with increasing importance in elite sport. This warrants interest in tools and interventions which may enhance the effectiveness of coach-athlete relationships. One such tool is the 'Spotlight' psychometric tool developed by Mindflick®. The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of using the Spotlight profile as an intervention to improve relationships in athlete-coach pairs. A sample of coach-athlete pairs completed the Spotlight psychometric tool, the results of which were then debriefed to them, initially individually and then as a pair. Participant's median scores on the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire were analysed pre-and post-intervention using a Wilcoxon Sign Test. Participants were also interviewed post-intervention, following which their accounts of the effects of the Spotlight intervention on their coach-athlete relationships was subjected to a thematic content analysis. The Wilcoxon Sign Test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in mean CART-Q scores pre- and post-intervention. However, themes concerning 'increased insight into self and partner', and 'accelerated the development of a shared framework for working together' emerged from the thematic analysis. These results suggest that the Spotlight intervention may have some beneficial impact on the relationship between coaches and athletes in certain contexts. Further research using other methodologies are suggested in the context of the limitations of the present study.

Introduction

In performance sport, the relationship between the coach and the athlete is key; there is abundant anecdotal and empirical evidence to highlight that neither the coach nor the athlete can succeed without the other (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). This relationship between athlete and coach provides the vital means by which both have their needs expressed and fulfilled (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), and thus is at the core of both sporting achievement and the mastery of personal qualities such as leadership, determination, confidence and self-reliance (Jowett, 2005). While historically coaching could be characterised as having been preoccupied with developing athletes' physical, technical and tactical skills (Miller & Kerr, 2002), it is now recognised that the coach–athlete relationship is the foundation of effective coaching and a key driver in developing the necessary skills for athletic performance (Jowett, 2005). Therefore, the ability to create and foster effective partnerships between coaches and their athletes is viewed with increasing importance.

A characteristic of an effective coach-athlete relationship is quality communication (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). When coaches clearly communicate expectations, goals, standards, and feelings to their athletes, and athletes communicate their goals, frustrations, and feelings to their coach, the effectiveness of the working relationship is enhanced. One way in which the coach-athlete relationship can be developed is through the development of more adaptable communication, by both coach and athlete (Duran, 1983; Williams, 2005). To adapt one's communication effectively is to recognise the other's preferences and then shape communication in a way that helps them to understand and appreciate it. By framing communication based on another individual's personality preferences in this way, the effectiveness of communication can be increased (Hirsh, Kang, & Bodenhausen, 2012).

Furthermore, better understanding the world view and perspectives of a coach or athlete counterpart can also enhance coach-athlete relationships. Indeed, adaptability is fundamental in emotional intelligence, helping individuals to tune in to the needs and perspectives of others, enhancing the ability to understand them (Goleman, 2005). This is because, with increased adaptability, individuals are better able to shift perspectives on situations, putting themselves "in the shoes" of others.

'Spotlight' is a psychometric tool developed by Mindflick® to help individuals increase their self-awareness by identifying their behavioural and mindset preferences. By exploring personality preferences, individuals can build self-awareness, recognise their character strengths, blind spots and biases, and begin to understand how these may affect the way they act in certain contexts (Burnell, Ong, Pitt, Butt & Eubank, 2023), and the way in which others may perceive them. Furthermore, initial research by (Burnell et al., 2023) has indicated that Spotlight profiling can improve interpersonal communication skills in individuals in performance domains, which may lend itself to developing more effective relationships.

Spotlight uses two models, COPE and FLEX to explore an individual's personality preferences. The COPE model was developed based on Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST; Gray, 1970; 1982), which assesses the set of personal characteristics that describe an individual's preferences when it is perceived that something can be won (reward) or lost (threat). These preferences are distilled into four "mindset preferences;" Contained, Optimistic, Prudent and Engaged. The FLEX model was developed based on extraversion and agreeableness; two traits in Goldberg's (1990) five-factor model. By combining characteristics associated with each end of the scale of these two traits, four distinct behavioural style preferences are generated; Forceful, Logical, Empathic, and eXpressive.

Each of these four styles is associated with a set of personal characteristics that describe an individual's "behavioural preferences."
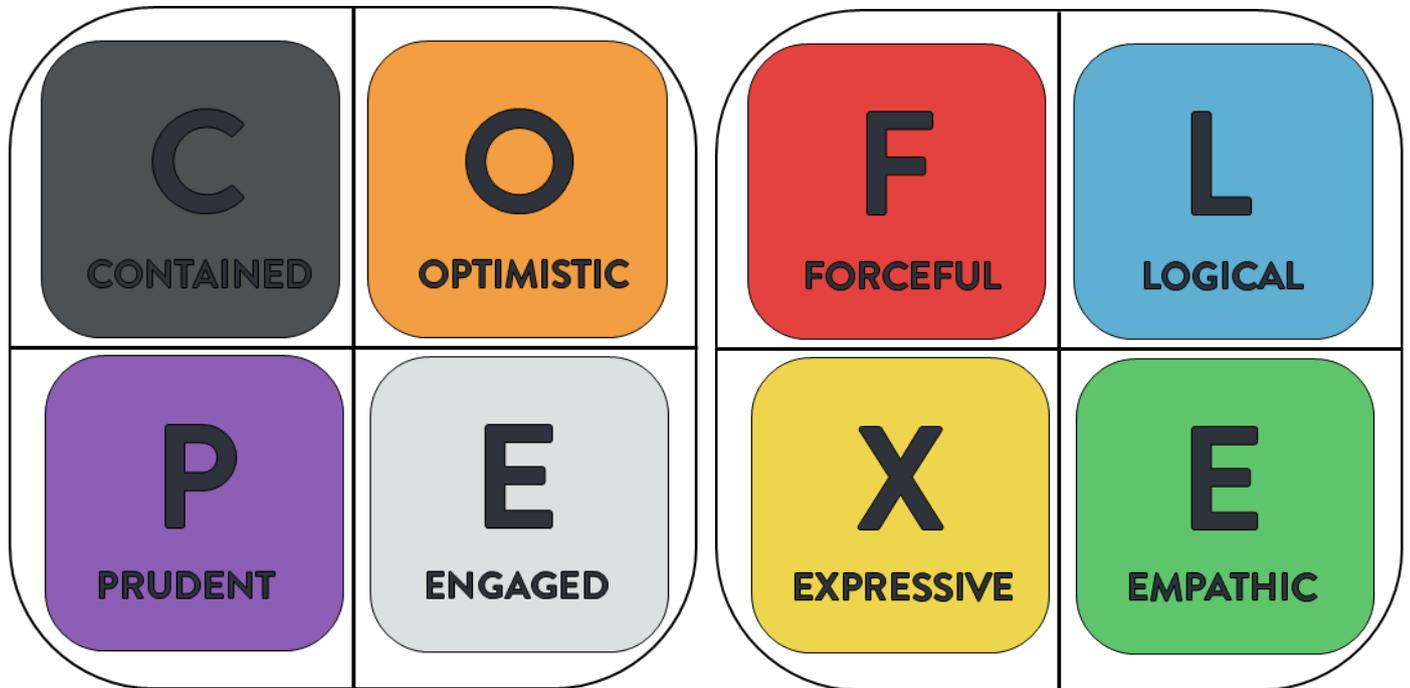
Figure 1: COPE and FLEX frameworks.

Based on an individual's mindset and behavioural preferences on the COPE and FLEX models, a Spotlight psychometric report is generated to visually detail the individual's 'Spotlights' and their positioning in the COPE and FLEX models. This is followed by information about that individual's preferences in certain situations based on their Spotlights, including "Strengths," "Take Cares," "Counterweights" and "Wriggle Room." The "Strengths" section focuses on maximising existing strengths to facilitate personal development. It helps individuals recognise strengths associated with their assessed mindset and behavioural style, enabling them to enhance their impact across various situations. The subsequent "Take Care" section warns users that changing contexts may render their strengths

less useful, emphasising the need for adaptability. The "Counterweights" section explores areas outside assessed preferences, promoting adaptability and balance by skilfully utilising counterweights. The concluding "Wriggle-room" section provides guidance for those working with the individual, detailing how to optimise their performance. For more information on the structure of the report, readers should refer to Burnell et al. (2023).

One of the fundamental purposes of the Spotlight profile is to clarify an individual's behavioural and mindset preferences. In a sporting context, this information can increase an athlete or coaches' awareness of their own preferences. Furthermore, the individual can then share this information with their counterpart, helping their counterpart to recognise their preferences and then shape communication in a way that helps them to understand and appreciate it. This could stimulate differing scenarios based on the athletes and coaches' respective preferences. For example, it may emerge that the coach and athlete have markedly different preferences for mindset and behavioural style (for example, Logically Prudent and eXpressively Optimistic). Should this be the case, this could provoke potentially useful conversations about the respective strengths of those preferences, and how they might be reconciled in the context of that relationship. By contrast, it may be the case that certain athletes and coaches have very similar preferences (for example, an athlete-coach pair both having a first performance preference of Forcefully Engaged). In this scenario, useful insight might be gained by discussing what potential blind spots might emerge because of the pair having similar ways of working, and how these blind spots might be safeguarded against. This process may serve to enhance the coach-athlete relationship, facilitating enhanced athletic performance in the future. Determining whether this is the case is the focus of the paper, and poses the research question "what is the effect of using the Spotlight profile as an intervention to improve relationships in athlete-coach pairs?"

Answering this question presents some methodological challenges. Research which seeks to explore the extent to which an independent variable influences a dependant variable (in this case coach-athlete relationship influencing sporting performance) tends to lend itself to quantitative analysis (Cooper, et al., 2012). However, the quality of relationships tends to be researched using qualitative methods, where accessing the thoughts and feelings of research participants is prioritised over quantification. Nonetheless, exploring both aspects is deemed critical for answering the present paper's research question.

Considering this apparent dilemma, the researchers adopted a pragmatic perspective, whereby the need for understanding participant's experiences and production of practical knowledge supersedes strict adherence to a particular methodological philosophy (Giacobbi et al., 2005). This perspective allowed for flexibility around the methods which the researchers could employ such that they can best provide answers to relevant real-world questions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In the context of the current study, this allowed for a mixed-methods approach to be deployed, wherein both quantification of the strength of coach-athlete relationships, and in-depth exploration of participant's experiences of those relationships could occur.

Method

Participants

An opportunity sample of participants was recruited from athletes and coaches who were engaged with the Jersey Sport Foundation's High-Performance Programme. Six athlete-coach pairs, totalling 12 participants, took part in the study. This comprised of 6 athletes (1 male, 5 female) with a mean age of 25.50 (SD=6.28) and 6 coaches (5 male, 1 female) with a mean

age of 43.34 (SD=8.31). On average, the athlete-coach relationships pairs had been working together for 3.25 years (SD=1.78). Each athlete met the criteria to be defined as at least "competitive elite" according to Swann, Moran and Piggott's (2015) classification. The sports in which the athlete's participated were 400m, archery (compound), heptathlon, high jump, judo, and para-powerlifting. All participants completed the intervention. However, two athlete-coach pairs withdrew from the study following the final debrief. Both pairs gave consent for their reasons for withdrawal to be included in this paper. For one pair, this was because the relationship between the coach and athlete broke down, and the pair declined to continue in the study together. For the other pair, the withdrawal was due to the coach stepping down from his position as the athlete's head coach and feeling that continuing in the study as the athlete's coach would undermine the succeeding coach. The new coach was invited to participate in the study but declined to do so. Therefore, the data presented in this paper represents that collected from the four athlete-coach pairs post-intervention.

Procedure

Participants were contacted through their Jersey Sport Foundation coaches and asked for informed consent to participate in the study. They were then administered the pre-intervention psychometric in paper form and were sent a URL link for the Spotlight psychometric via email. When a participant had completed the Spotlight psychometric, they were individually contacted by the first author via email, who then conducted the individual Spotlight debrief protocol with them either in-person or using Microsoft Teams videoconferencing. The following process of individual and paired debriefing of the information in the participant's Spotlight profiles is onwards referred to as the "Spotlight Intervention." This process was developed collaboratively by the researchers and Mindflick® and was piloted with a

volunteer coach-athlete pair associated with the Jersey Sport Foundation before the study began.

Individual Debrief

The purpose of this debrief was to foster an understanding of the COPE and FLEX models in the participant, to identify key areas of their Spotlight report, and to encourage the participant to reflect on which sections of their report might be most valuable to share with their counterpart. The protocol involved, initially, explaining the COPE and FLEX models, what each preference meant and what the expression of that preference might look like in the performance sport context. Following this, the participant's own Spotlight profile was shared with them, and they were encouraged to reflect on whether they felt this matched their expectations. Subsequently, the "Strengths," "Take Care," and "Counterweights" sections of the participants Spotlight report were explored with them. The researcher would conclude the debrief by encouraging the participant to read the remaining sections of the report and highlight any sections they felt would be beneficial to share with their counterpart or note any questions they might have for their counterpart about their profile.

Pair Debrief

Once both athlete and coach in a pair had completed an individual debrief, both were contacted again via email and invited for a pair debrief. The purpose of this debrief was to allow the participants to share points from their own profiles that they thought were salient to their relationship, to ask questions about each other's profiles, and to explore their combined preferences. The process began by inviting the participants to share areas of their Spotlight reports which they felt were salient, or to ask questions regarding their counterpart's profile. Following this, the pair's "team" Spotlight was shared with them, with the accompanying "Strengths" and "Take Care" sections. The dyad was then invited to discuss between them

how this information could be used in their own specific context. Finally, the dyad's "Empty Chair" section (which details potential perspectives that they might be less likely to take, based on their performance preferences) was shared with them, and they were invited to discuss how they could use the information from this section to enhance their effectiveness as a coach-athlete unit.

Once the pair debrief had been completed, the athlete-coach pairs were left for a month to allow any potential changes from the intervention to be implemented and realised. One-month post-intervention, the pairs were then contacted again by email to arrange post-intervention data collection.

Measures and Analysis

Before the intervention took place, all coaches and athletes completed the appropriate form of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). This was collected from the participants again one-month post-intervention. Pre-post data from the CART-Q measure was analysed for significant differences in median scores using a Wilcoxon Sign Test.

In addition, one-month post-intervention, each coach-athlete pair jointly participated in a recorded interview discussion. Discussion in these interviews was focused on whether the intervention had given the participants insight into themselves or their counterparts, and whether their perceptions of each other's mindsets and behavioural styles may have changed. Building on this, the researcher explored how completing the Spotlight intervention may have affected their relationship or might have enhanced their effectiveness as a working unit. The

final point for discussion was whether they would recommend the Spotlight intervention to anyone else, and if so in what context.

Transcripts from the interview discussions were analysed using thematic content analysis (Anderson, 2007). Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data. A TCA portrays the thematic content of interview transcripts by identifying common themes in the text. The researcher groups and distils from the texts a list of common themes to give a voice to the collective experience of the participants. Every reasonable attempt is made to group themes in a manner that directly reflects the whole text. While sorting and naming themes requires some level of interpretation, "interpretation" is kept to a minimum (Anderson, 2007). TCA can provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data, and is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Considering this, TCA was favoured over more interpretive approaches which seek to interpret individual experiences, opinions, and accounts, as this makes it more challenging for researchers to generalise the results.

Results

Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test

A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the median post-Spotlight Intervention CART-Q scores were not statistically significantly different to the median pre-Spotlight Intervention CART-Q scores $Z=-1.4368$. N (7) is not large enough for the distribution of the Wilcoxon W statistic to form a normal distribution. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate an accurate p-value. The value of W is 5.5. The critical value for W at N $= 7$ ($p < .05$) is 2, therefore the

result is not significant at $p < .05$. This indicates that there was not a statistically significant change in median Cart-Q scores post-intervention.

	Mean	Median	SD
Pre-Spotlight Intervention	70.74	71.00	5.65
Post-Spotlight Intervention	67.50	71.00	8.73

Table 1: Means, medians and standard deviations scores on the CART-Q measure pre- and post-Spotlight intervention.

Thematic Content Analysis

Data was collected from the athlete-coach pairs in the form of a structured interviews. The transcription was analysed using thematic content analysis (TCA; Anderson, 2007). Once collected, the data was analysed following the guidelines prescribed by Smith and Sparkes (2007). Initially the transcript was labelled with a set of descriptive codes. Clusters of codes were then identified, and labelled as themes, which constitute common trends in the participant's experience. Thematic content analysis of the participant's data yielded four key themes. These were: insight into self, insight into partner, shared framework for working together, and perceptions of where Spotlight is best deployed.

Insight into self

Participant's narratives indicated that the Spotlight intervention enhanced their insight into themselves. Some of these insights were novel to the participants, for example as one coach discussed:

"...it's something I haven't really thought about. It was saying for the characteristics that if I don't have all the information, I'll likely not act. And that's something that I do do, but I wasn't aware of it though. It's just part of my make up."

Elements of participant's narratives indicated that reviewing their own Spotlight reports articulated aspects of themselves that they were not consciously aware of prior to the intervention. This knowledge seemed to enhance the participant's insight into themselves, at times giving indications of where their preferences may be over-played, to the individual's detriment. For example, one athlete participant commented:

I think it's just made me kind of more aware. One of my things said that I try and balance way too much at a time, and it makes me more aware of when I know I'm kind of pushing it too much. I think back to that's what I do, and I need to kind of be more aware.

Some participants were able to utilise this new insight into self and take action to ensure that specific behavioural or thinking styles typically associated with their performance preferences did not interfere with performance. An athlete exemplified this, stating:

"My Spotlight said on a bad day or under severe pressure, you can over think situations. You can disappear into your own head. I guess now even in the last 10 days (since first reading the report)*, I'm like, right, I'm aware that I'm doing that. And then I guess it's thinking, like, what can I do to obviously harness the good bits of it, but obviously mitigate anything where I go to a competition and just cocoon inwards."*

This passage provides an example of how a participant was able to utilise the novel insight into himself to adapt his behaviour in the competition environment, ensuring that his performance preferences are not overplayed to the extent that they become a hindrance.

In addition to novel insights into the self, it appeared that the Spotlight intervention also provided confirmatory self-insight for participants. For example, an athlete when asked about this replied:

> *Yeah, I'd say, it was more of a confirmation of what [I was] already quite self-aware of.*

Interestingly, when this was the case, it did not seem to be that participants saw these confirmatory insights as useless. For example, when asked whether he had an awareness of what was in his Spotlight profile, one coach required:

> *So I guess the point's like the results weren't that surprising. I think it's useful almost seeing it, and it helps you be self-reflective, but none of the stuff in there jumped out at me like, oh my god, I didn't realise I was like this or things.*

This suggests that the participants derived usefulness from confirmatory insight into themselves. Elements of participant's narratives suggest that this was because going through the process of the Spotlight intervention helped them to articulate what was already known in more detail. One coach's remark exemplifies this:

> *I think I had an acute awareness of it, and I think the Spotlight brought it out in a bit more detail. Yeah, I think, yeah, across the board that's how I felt about it is that it kind of reassured me or maybe underlined how to explain it a bit more.*

This example highlights how a participant felt able to derive usefulness from the confirmatory information in his Spotlight profile. He expressed that this usefulness came from expanding on knowledge that he held implicitly in greater detail, and by articulating it in a way in which that he could then use to describe himself effectively to others.

Overall, 'insights into the self' emerged as a clear theme in participant's experiences of the Spotlight intervention. Some of these insights were novel, and facilitated behaviour changes

in participants who were able to use newfound insights to modify their behaviour to optimise performance. Furthermore, the process of the Spotlight intervention also seemed to confirm knowledge that participants already held implicitly, but nonetheless proved useful as the language used in the Spotlight report provided them with a lexicon to better describe their preferences to others.

Insight into partner

A second theme which emerged from the participants narratives concerned insight into their athlete/coach partner. In some examples, participants were able to draw links between aspects of their partner they had observed, and the concepts of Spotlight. For example one coach observed:

> *She's a natural competitor. So, she turns up and gives it the 'I'm a little bit nervous',*
> *and then gets focused and competes really well. That's the optimistic side coming out.*

In this example, participants were able to understand their partner's behaviours through the lens of Spotlight. Furthermore, participants were able to gain novel insights into their partners through the process of the Spotlight Intervention. For example, one coach commented:

> *I'd say it made me aware of the kind of the person that [my athlete] was in terms of*
> *his personality. When we looked through it, it kind of made sense in hindsight. You*
> *can evaluate the Spotlight report and make those connections with [my athlete's]*
> *personality. Absolutely. So yeah, I think it just kind of made me more aware of [my*
> *athlete's] personality.*

Like how the Spotlight intervention enhanced participant's insight into themselves, it seems that the process provided participants with novel insights into their partners. Participants used these new insights to modify the way in which they understood their partners. For example,

one participant with a logical behavioural style commented the following after learning about her coach's empathic style:

> *I think, like, I didn't obviously quite realise he was empathetic—I'd not want him to get involved, so I would just shut him down instead when he's actually genuinely concerned about the personal stuff more than I thought. So, then we get on better with that now.*

In this example, a participant has recognised that her coach's behavioural style differs from hers and is developing an understanding of the motivation for his actions. This suggests that the Spotlight intervention develops sufficient insight into participant's partner that they can understand their actions in greater depth. Moreover, there was evidence to suggest that the insights participants gained into their partners preferences prompted them to change their behaviour to better work with their partner. For example, one coach said of her logically prudent athlete:

> *Yeah, and also it was good to know that [my athlete] wants to take her time. I didn't know that beforehand... With drills and maybe like, let's take javelin, we're coming into the season competitively, and I was probably wanting to start the full run up a little bit earlier. She wasn't ready. She was getting ready, if that makes sense?*

In this example, we can see how a participant is able to use the novel insight into their partner not only to better understand their behavioural style, but also to recognise how to adapt their own behaviour to suit their partner's performance preferences. This demonstrates how participants, from recognising their partner's performance preferences, could modify their behaviour to better suit those preferences. Participants were also able to identify novel insights from specific sections within their partners Spotlight reports. For example one coach reflected:

I've been a lot more conscious of the Wiggle Room type aspect. So we do have a lot more discussions as such, and let you go off and think about it in that respect. I suppose because of the way I am, I'm always providing the data, and I'm always backing up the stuff I say. Sometimes it sounds abrupt, but I'm just trying to cut out all the noise from other people and make sure it's right for the individual. Then I know to give you time to go away and digest after I've done that.

This narrative suggests that participants may have utilised information from specific sections of their partner's Spotlight report to deepen their insight into how their partner works most effectively. Thus, it appears that understanding their participant's performance preferences in general, and through understanding specific sections of the reports, participants were able to deepen their understanding of their partners.

Shared framework for working together

Following the emergence of themes of insight into self and other, a further theme emerged pertaining to participants establishing a shared framework for working together, having developed their understanding of self and partner. Participants expressed that these frameworks were based on a mutual understanding of how they were similar or different to their partner. For example, a coach and athlete with markedly different performance preferences expressed the following:

Coach: I don't know. I think I have a tendency sometimes to rush through things. But because of the way [my athlete] works, I need a little bit of time to readjust to certain things. And that's fine. We can do that. But I think I was always in a little bit of a rush to get to a point. But it is okay to actually take our time and work it out. Yeah.

Athlete: It's just like you said, that you like to kind of go quite quickly, and I feel like we've kind of established that, but I don't want you to stop being like that necessarily

because I can sometimes take way too long. So we've got a good balance. Now we know when one of us is trying to slow things down too much and the other one's going too fast.

Coach: It is raising the awareness of how we are different, but how it can work.

In this example, the participants express the insight into themselves and their partner they have arrived at because of the Spotlight intervention, and how they have recognised that they have differing strengths, both of which can be overplayed. However, this pair have recognised that their seemingly opposing preferences and strengths have the potential to counterbalance each other, and through this realisation have reached a synthesis. This exemplifies one instance in which a coach and athlete have used the insights gained from the Spotlight intervention process to refine their understanding of how to work together most effectively.

At other times, participant's dialogues reflected a recognition that where their performance preferences do not differ significantly, but rather are overlapping, which can potentially result in the pair collectively neglecting certain perspectives. For example, as one athlete discussed:

But I think we discussed in the session, didn't we, saying that, right, so have we got any--not blind spots, but any areas where we're not strong in. I think we went back to the meeting, didn't we, of saying risk taking. So, we're both naturally predisposed to not work in a certain way. What can we do that will benefit us that might benefit from taking another perspective? It's something I think since that that conversation and opening up on those aspects that we've not recognised or not thought about, is we've certainly have more conversations about elements of risk and taking risk and pushing the boundaries.

In this example, two logically contained participants were able to recognise that their preferences, when overplayed, can predispose them to avoid risk taking. Having recognised this preference in themselves and their partners, these participants were able to develop a framework where they regularly adopt a less risk-averse perspective and consider how this could enhance their training. This example is further developed:

Coach: Yeah, I think when I'm also planning or have been planning, especially the more recent blocks, and especially competitions coming up, I know the last block is putting in sessions where you're probably going to look and think, no, I don't want to do that, and looking at pushing those boundaries a little bit. So I'm making you take that risk, sort of like the last session we did last week. The last week or the week before--

Athlete: 450 drop?

Coach: Yeah, looking at putting you outside your comfort zone and putting that element, if you like, of risk in there to get those adaptations so when it comes to racing, racing actually becomes really easy. So yeah, I think that's one--when I am looking at the planning, there's an element of, okay, this is what I want to get done, but there's an element of that mental fortitude and taking risk in certain sessions, which I think has gone well I think in the last block.

Athlete: Because I've done so many 350s and 450s in training, whereas before, I never would do them. You always rock up on the day and still run a good 4, but a lot of lucky factors will need to come in. Whereas it's now like you're talking back to the logical approach and what would give increased confidence on the start line running a four, that you can manage it all the way around or do distances that are a bit longer but harder.

This example shows how participants with largely overlapping performance preferences were able to establish a shared framework for working together that accounted for their collective strengths and areas to take care of, in this specific instance with regards to risk aversion. In other examples, we see how participants with more distinct performance preferences can establish more effective ways of working together having developed into their own and their partner's preferences. For example, as one empathically prudent athlete and logically contained coach articulated:

> *Athlete: There was the competition where I was like in a nervous breakdown because it just went wrong. Then we sort of worked together and you went away and did all your research. And we then fed back and worked on that. Then changing the program so it wasn't the same stuff all the time. Changing it up, you were quite good at seeing if I, not that I wasn't enjoying it, but if it got too repetitive, and you were like, oh, we're going to try this instead, which was good.*
>
> *Coach: But from looking at myself, since we've got it, I feel like I'm a bit more open with [my athlete] about things than I probably was before. Because I know before we had sessions where I just wasn't in the mood with my personal stuff and would just shut off. And now I'm a bit more--I don't shut myself off and being more and more open to it.*

This instance illustrates how the participants have arrived at a shared understanding of each other's preferences; for example, the logically minded coach's preference for information gathering, and the empathically minded athlete's preference for engaging with her coach on an emotional level. Their narrative further exemplifies how they have actioned this understanding, adapting their behaviour to enhance their effectiveness as a unit.

Overall, the emergent theme is one of athlete-coach pairs arriving at a shared understanding of how to work together more effectively, given the newfound insights into themselves and

each other. As the participant extracts shows, this was true both for pairs who had quite distinct performance preferences, and for those whose preferences overlapped relatively more. For those whose preferences were more distinct, arriving at a shared framework for working together involved participants recognising their differences from their partner, and mutually adapting their behaviour to get the best out of each other. For pairs with similar preferences, establishing that framework for working together involved identifying how their largely overlapping preferences may result in blind spots developing, and subsequently adapting their behaviour to routinely take perspectives that might normally be less preferred to ensure that otherwise overlooked areas are not ignored. In sum, the consistent theme was that the knowledge provided through the Spotlight intervention provided participants with valuable insights into themselves and their partners, allowing them to develop shared frameworks for understanding each other and working together.

Perceptions of where Spotlight is best deployed

A final theme which emerged from the participants narratives concerned their perception of where and when it would be most beneficial to deploy the Spotlight intervention. One should note that participants were asked this question explicitly.

Consistent with previously mentioned themes around developing insight into an individual's self and partner, participant's narratives suggested that they perceived that Spotlight might be useful in circumstances where individuals may want to develop their insight into themselves. For example, one athlete stated:

> *I do recommend it. Because I didn't really know what it was about when we first*
>
> *started. And then it gives you loads of clues and what you are, what are your drives,*

how to take care of yourself, your strengths and weaknesses. It helps you think about

yourself differently, the way that you wouldn't normally think about.

This suggests that the athlete's perceptions of the functions of the Spotlight intervention are

consistent with the themes drawn from participant's narratives regarding insight into the self.

Moreover, participant's reflections on the usefulness of this insight linked with the theme of

developing mutual understanding. For example:

> *Athlete: Yeah, I would. I think if they're at a stage where they're kind of struggling*
>
> *with things, or they need a better understanding of what they're like as a person, it's*
>
> *really good for that kind of self-awareness thing.*
>
> *Coach: Yeah, it's raising their awareness of how the other person and how yourself*
>
> *because you do look at yourself [audio distorted]. So, yeah, awareness for sure, but I*
>
> *also know a lot of coaches that will always go down the same, same, same, same*
>
> *garden path.*

These extracts suggest that participant's perceptions were that the Spotlight intervention as

useful for developing mutual understanding in athlete-coach partnerships. Participants

stressed that this might be most useful in the early stages of an athlete and coaches'

relationship to facilitate more rapid development of a shared framework for working together.

For example:

> *Coach: I enjoyed the whole thing. It was quite good to do. I can't say there was any*
>
> *real added benefit to having me do it, but then we'd known each other fairly well. I*
>
> *think maybe for other athletes, yeah, it could work well.*
>
> *Athlete: Yeah, if you're newer. If it's like a newer partnership, you'd probably do it at*
>
> *the start. And then find out something and then see how it works.*

This suggests that participants see the value of the intervention as a mechanism to accelerate

the establishment of a working relationship, which this pair believed that they had already

established. This would suggest that the Spotlight intervention would be of greatest use to athlete-coach pairs who are in the early stages of their relationship.

Overall, a theme emerged around participants perceptions of where and when the Spotlight intervention might be most usefully deployed. Participant's narratives mirrored earlier themes in that they perceived that the intervention would be useful as a tool for coaches and athletes to enhance their insight into themselves and develop their mutual understanding. Participants also reflected that the intervention might be best deployed in the early stages of an athlete-coach relationship. Indeed, some pairs who had been together for greater lengths of time suggested that the intervention offered them less insight, as they had been together for so long that they had been through the process of developing their understanding of each other and developing a framework for working together. This might suggest that the intervention might be best thought of as a tool for accelerating the process of developing mutual understanding and a shared framework for working together.

Discussion

To summarise the results of the quantitative element of the study, a Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between participant's median pre- and post-intervention CART-Q scores. By contrast, in the qualitative element of the study, themes concerning increased in insight into self and partner, and accelerated the development of a shared framework for working together emerged from a TCA of the participants narratives of the Spotlight intervention.

Superficially at least, the qualitative and quantitative elements of the present study appear to present contradictory results. The quantitative findings indicated no significant difference in

median CART-Q scores pre- and post-intervention. A possible explanation of this could be that extraneous effects distorted the results of the test. One might suggest that participants insight into their coach-athlete relationship was underdeveloped pre-intervention, meaning they "didn't know what they didn't know," (Dunning, 2011) leading to an artificially inflated pre-intervention score, accompanied by a similar, but perhaps more realistic, post-intervention score. This might be exacerbated by the fact that the CART-Q has a maximum possible score of 77, and the median pre-intervention score was 71. This left little room for improvement in the post-intervention evaluation, which may have limited the extent to which scores could increase post-intervention. This might provide a further explanation for the discrepancy in qualitative and quantitative results.

Furthermore, due to the small size of the sample it was necessary to use a non-parametric test to measure differences in CART-Q scores pre- and post-intervention. Given that fact, it may be the case that the test used in this study was not sensitive enough to detect any changes that might be present. A further consideration might be that it may not be possible for the evidence from the CART-Q analysis to corroborate with the outcomes of the TCA, due to discrepancy in what was being measured. The variables measured by the CART-Q are coaches' and athletes' Closeness (emotions), Commitment (cognitions), and Complementarity (behaviours); doubtless crucial underpinnings of effective coach athlete relationships (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). Nonetheless, measurement of these variables may not necessarily have captured changes indicated by the TCA; improved insight into self, improved insight into partner, and development of a shared understanding of how to work together. This may further explain why there was no statistically significant change in CART-Q scores post-intervention; it may be that the CART-Q does not capture the aspects of the coach-athlete relationship which the Spotlight intervention enhanced.

The qualitative findings of this study indicated that the Spotlight intervention may have a positive impact on coach-athlete relationships in certain contexts and through certain processes. More specifically, themes that emerged from participants narratives suggest that the Spotlight intervention enhanced participants understanding of themselves and their partner. Goleman (2005) suggests that when individuals can put themselves "in the shoes" of others in this way, this can develop the quality of communication in their relationships, ultimately enhancing the efficacy of the relationship. A further theme emerged concerning how this information was used by participants to develop a shared framework for working together, which accounted for the strengths of their different preferences and safeguarded against collective blind spots or strengths being overplayed. Such shaping of communication to helps them to understand and appreciate it is a hallmark of adaptability (Hirsh, Kang, & Bodenhausen, 2012). More adaptable communication has been linked with more effective coach-athlete relationships (Duran, 1983; Williams, 2005), and indeed this study corresponds with recent literature suggesting that Spotlight interventions can enhance adaptability (Burnell et al., 2023). Concerning where and when the Spotlight intervention could be most usefully deployed, the general theme of participant's accounts was that its best use would be early in the formation of a coach-athlete relationship, as a means of accelerating the development of mutual understanding and the framework for working together. Such understanding is necessary for the formation of healthy coach-athlete relationships in the long term (Jowett, 2005), which suggests that the Spotlight intervention may have a useful role in expediting this process.

However, the extent to which participants made sense of *how* the Spotlight intervention impacted their athlete-coach partnership was limited. This represents a fundamental critique

of the research methodology; the purpose of a TCA is to present a description of the whole

data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) rather than attempting to interpret the sense that individual

participants might make of their experience with Spotlight (Saldaña, 2021). Therefore, there

is a risk that the results of the qualitative element of this study could be characterised as a

"black box", describing participants who reported improvements in their mutual

understanding and working relationship, but failing to give an interpretation of why this was

the case. Nonetheless, while the absence of deeper interpretation could be viewed as a

weakness of this study, it is worth noting that by minimising interpretation, the

generalisability of the findings is maximised. This is because the TCA attempts to find

themes that are common across multiple accounts, and therefore more likely to generalise to

larger populations than would an in-depth interpretation of individual experiences, opinions

and accounts of the meaning attached to the Spotlight process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It

appears that there is a potentially fruitful avenue for future research in exploring meaning

units in relationship to context and structure for individual Spotlight users, and then for

groups of participants, using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Discourse Analysis,

Ethnography, Grounded Theory, or other more interpretive methodologies.

As previously noted, two coach-athlete pairs who were initially recruited into the sample later

withdrew their consent to participate. This is unfortunate from the perspective of maximising

the data available for analysis. Indeed, the present research could be criticised for not

recruiting suitable alternative participants to replace those who withdrew, although

unfortunately this was no longer viable at the stage that the participants withdrew.

Furthermore, it is particularly lamentable that one of the pairs who withdrew did so because

the coach-athlete relationship had broken down. From a research perspective, the opportunity

to discuss the individual's relationship in the context of the Spotlight intervention could have

provided invaluable insight into how the Spotlight tool might be utilised in situations where the coach-athlete has become fractured.

Directions for future research which might build on the present study could be informed by the various shortcomings of this piece of research. For example, as previously mentioned the quantitative element of this study was limited by the small sample size, and a requirement to use a statistical test which may have lacked the power to resolve the extent to which the Spotlight intervention might have impacted on the participant's CART-Q scores pre- and post-intervention. Consequently, one future direction for interested researchers to explore might be to replicate the Spotlight intervention with a much larger sample, to quantify the effect, if one exists, on participant's CART-Q scores pre- and post-intervention. Similarly, the use of TCA in the present study can be criticised for failing to yield the depth of interpretation that other methodologies might offer. Therefore, interested researchers might consider replicating the qualitative elements of the present study, while deploying a method of analysis which "digs deeper" into the individual experience and understanding of meaning of participants, such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Discourse Analysis or Ethnography. Finally, interested researchers may be interested in comparing the effects of using Spotlight with coach-athlete pairs in different contexts. For example, two specific contexts which have been mentioned in this paper are the; (a) early stages of the coach athlete-relationship, and (b) moments when the coach-athlete relationship is fractured. Investigating the meaning and usefulness that participants might ascribe to experiencing the Spotlight process in these different situations may prove a rich vein of research in the future. Nonetheless the present study, as an individual piece of research, provides a valuable insight into the effect of using the Spotlight profile as an intervention to improve relationships in athlete-coach pairs, indicating that the intervention fosters a greater mutual understanding in

participants, which serves as a foundation upon which to develop a shared framework for working together more effectively.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of using the Spotlight profile as an intervention to improve relationships in athlete-coach pairs. Quantitative analysis using a Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated no statistically significant differences in median CART-Q scores pre- and post-intervention. However, themes concerning increased in insight into self and partner, and accelerated the development of a shared framework for working together emerged from a TCA of the participants narratives of the Spotlight intervention. These results indicate that the Spotlight intervention may have some beneficial impact on the relationship between coaches and athletes in certain contexts. Further research exploring the size of any effects on relationships, and research exploring the individual experience of participants participating in the Spotlight in greater depth may further enhance understanding of the effect of using the Spotlight profile as an intervention to improve coach-athlete relationships.

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Empirical Paper 2

Exploring sport psychology practitioner's attitudes towards and use of psychometric

questionnaires.

Abstract

This qualitative research project explores sport psychology practitioners' attitudes towards and use of psychometric measures. The study employs a thematic content analysis approach to analyse interviews with eight practitioners at various stages of their professional development, who had either completed or were in the process of completing a professional doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at a British university. Three thematic clusters emerge from the analysis, shedding light on the multifaceted landscape of practitioners' perspectives. This study explores diverse attitudes towards psychometric tools, revealing positive perceptions alongside reservations rooted in personal beliefs and scepticism. Institutional influences further contribute to this array of viewpoints, highlighting the varied nature of the sport psychology community. The investigation also uncovers the multifaceted purposes and benefits practitioners derive from psychometric measures, ranging from client-centred advantages like self-awareness enhancement to efficiency gains and evidence-based decision-making. However, the study acknowledges the context-specific nature of these benefits and the associated considerations. Additionally, the research reveals the limitations and challenges practitioners face, including psychometrics' inability to fully capture complexity, practical design issues, and ethical dilemmas. These concerns intersect with ethical considerations, client-practitioner relationships, and the potential misuse of psychometric data. This paper contributes to a holistic understanding of the attitudes towards and utilisation of psychometric measures in sport psychology. The findings suggest the importance of recognising the multifaceted landscape of practitioners' viewpoints, contextualising the benefits of psychometrics, and addressing the limitations and ethical challenges they present. These insights could inform training, practice guidelines, and discussions within the sport psychology community, facilitating informed decision-making around the incorporation of psychometric tools into practitioner arsenals.

Introduction

Sport psychology commonly focuses on the application of psychological principles and techniques to enhance the performance and overall well-being of athletes. The role of sport psychologists is to help athletes overcome address and overcome the various challenges that are involved in high-performance sport (Watson II & Shannon, 2010). To achieve these goals, sport psychologists utilise a variety of methods, including psychological assessments and interventions (Ostrow, 2002). Psychometric measures, also known as psychological tests, are tools used by sport psychologists to assess various aspects of an athlete's personality, mental abilities, and behaviour (Beckmann & Kellmann, 2003). These measures can provide valuable information about an athlete's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. As a result, sport psychologists have become increasingly interested in the use of psychometric measures in their work with athletes (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017).

However, the use of psychometric measures in sport psychology is not without controversy. There is a debate among sport psychologists regarding the usefulness, reliability, and validity of these measures (Andersen, McCullagh, & Wilson, 2007). Some sport psychologists believe that psychometric measures are useful in providing objective information about an athlete's mental state and can help to guide the development of tailored interventions (Anshel & Brinthaupt, 2014). On the other hand, others argue that these measures are limited in their ability to provide an accurate picture of an athlete's mental state and may even be harmful if used inappropriately (Vealey, Cooley, Nilsson, Block, & Galli, 2019). The use, or non-use, of psychometric measures in sport psychology is influenced by several factors, including the sport psychologist's personal beliefs, level of training, and academic institution in which they were trained (Vealey et al., 2019). These factors can shape a sport psychologist's views on the

utility and validity of psychometric measures, and thus influence their decision to use or not use these measures in their practice.

One of the main philosophical perspectives that influence a sport psychologist's views on psychometric measures is constructionism and realism (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004). Constructionists argue that psychological tests and measures are socially constructed and thus are subjective and culturally bound (Eberle, 2023). In contrast, realists believe that psychological tests and measures can provide an objective and valid picture of an individual's mental state (Eberle, 2023). Those who hold a constructionist perspective may be more sceptical of the validity and reliability of psychometric measures and may be less likely to use these measures in their practice (Eberle, 2023). On the other hand, sport psychologists who hold a realist perspective may place a greater emphasis on the use of psychometric measures as a means of obtaining objective information about an athlete's mental state (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017). In addition, the academic institution in which a sport psychologist was trained can also influence their views on psychometric measures. For example, sport psychologists who received their training in institutions that emphasise the use of evidence-based practice may be more likely to use psychometric measures in their work with athletes (Vealey et al., 2019). On the other hand, sport psychologists trained in institutions that focus on a holistic approach to athlete care may be less likely to use psychometric measures and may place more emphasis on other interventions, such as individualised counselling and coaching (Vealey et al., 2019).

Despite these differences and debates, the use of psychometric measures in sport psychology continues to grow (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017), and there is a growing body of research exploring sport psychologists' attitudes towards and use of these measures. This research has

revealed that sport psychologists have diverse opinions about the usefulness of psychometric measures and that their use of these measures varies widely depending on several factors, including their level of training, experience, and personal beliefs (Vealey et al., 2019). The purpose of this research paper is to deepen insight into the attitudes towards, and use of, psychometric measures amongst a cohort of trainee and qualified Sport and Exercise Psychologists, from a specific institution. This paper will utilise a thematic content analysis of transcripts from interviews with sport psychologists about their use of psychometrics (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The data collected from these interviews will be analysed using a thematic content analysis, which is a qualitative research method that involves identifying, coding, and summarising patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings from this analysis will be used to gain a deeper understanding of sport psychologists' attitudes towards and use of psychometric measures.

Thematic content analysis (TCA) is a method used to identify patterns or themes within qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, which can then be used to gain an understanding of a particular phenomenon or experience. TCA has been used in a variety of research contexts and is recognised as a useful tool for exploring complex and nuanced experiences, such as attitudes towards psychometric measures in the field of sport psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One of the strengths of TCA is its flexibility. TCA can be adapted to the specific research question and data, making it a suitable method for exploring a range of topics and phenomena (Saldaña, 2021). In the case of a study exploring sport psychologists' attitudes towards psychometric measures, TCA can be used to identify the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants. This can provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the attitudes and experiences of sport psychologists in using psychometric measures, which might not be captured through other methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TCA

was selected as a suitable method for exploring sport psychologists' attitudes towards psychometric measures, for several reasons. Firstly, TCA allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of the attitudes and experiences of sport psychologists, which can provide insight into the factors that influence their use of psychometric measures. Secondly, TCA can provide a rich and detailed understanding of the challenges and issues faced by sport psychologists in using psychometric measures, which can inform future research and practice in this area (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Methods

Participants

Eight sport psychologists participated in this study, four of whom were trainee sport psychologists and four of whom were qualified sport psychologists. All participants were recruited through a convenience sampling method and had at least one year of experience working with athletes. Each of the participants was either engaged with, or had completed, the Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University.

Ethics

This study was approved by the university ethics board and all participants provided written informed consent prior to participating. All audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely, and the participants' confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms in the data analysis and reporting of findings. In accordance with ethical standards for research with human participants, measures were taken to minimise any potential harm to the participants and to protect their rights.

The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and they were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were informed of their right to remain anonymous and that their responses would be used for research purposes only. All data collected were kept confidential and secure in accordance with data protection regulations.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant via Zoom and lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were designed to gather information about the participants' attitudes towards and use of psychometric measures in their work with athletes. The interviews were conducted by the first author and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from the interview discussions underwent thematic content analysis (TCA) to elucidate patterns and themes within qualitative data (Anderson, 2007). TCA, a method recognised for its descriptive presentation of qualitative data, identifies common themes in interview transcripts, offering a voice to the collective experience of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involves grouping and distilling common themes from the texts in a way that directly reflects the entirety of the text. While some interpretation is involved in sorting and naming themes, efforts are made to keep interpretation to a minimum (Saldaña, 2021). TCA, favoured in this study over more interpretive approaches, can provide a rich, detailed, yet complex account of data, making it valuable for examining the perspectives of diverse research participants, highlighting both similarities and differences, and generating unexpected insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic Cluster 1: Attitudes towards Psychometrics

Positive Attitudes

Initially, some participants expressed positive attitudes towards psychometrics, particularly when first introduced to the concept. For example, one participant recounted:

> *"I was in favour of psychometrics even before the doctorate, I think, before starting my first master's. So back in 2013, I am talking about here, and back then I was in favour of psychometrics, because I felt like yes, that's the way to go because they will help you understand the individual."*

This initial favourability suggests an openness to exploring the potential benefits and applications of psychometrics in their practice. It may stem from curiosity, the desire for evidence-based approaches, or an awareness of the growing use of psychometric tools in the field.

Several participants acknowledged a shift in their attitudes towards psychometrics from scepticism or caution to a more positive stance over time:

> *"I would definitely say I have tried to increase my knowledge around psychometrics and having more of a practical approach in implementing them, I would say is definitely increased."*

> *"I think before the doctorate; I was sort of just sat on qualitative using qualitative. That was sort of my only route, but I think I can see benefits of using both, whether that is just like psychometrics in isolation, or following it up with a qualitative interview, for example. I would definitely say that my use of psychometrics has increased and probably will continue to increase that I can see that the benefits of them."*

This change in attitude indicates a willingness to explore and engage with psychometric tools in a gradual manner. It suggests that as participants gained more exposure and experience with psychometrics, they recognised the potential value and relevance of these measures in enhancing their practice and improving client outcomes.

Participants expressed that to some extent their increasing willingness to use psychometrics was due to their own individuation as practitioners:

> *"Yeah, I think what influenced like my resistance towards psychometrics came from initially the people that I suppose like, inspired me…*
>
> *I kind of adopted their beliefs as my own. But I feel like is, I have, again, as you go out there, and you do your own thing, and you figure out what you actually like, and what you don't like, and you find yourself disagreeing with practice and agreeing with practice, I feel like it's that process of individuation."*

Participants reflected that their initial views of psychometrics may have been shaped by their role models in the field, who is some cases held negative attitudes towards psychometrics. Participants noted that as they became more individuated as practitioners, they were able to form their own evaluations of psychometrics rather than fusing with the views of their role models, which sometimes prompted a shift in participant's attitudes.

Noticeably, participants expressed positive attitudes towards using psychometrics selectively and when appropriate for specific cases or contexts. For example:

> *"In the sense of a client that's maybe struggling with anxiety with competitions, initially do a qualitative interview with that player, but in order to find out a little bit more of the anxiety that they are experiencing, and might give them sort of spot anxiety scale, so the SS scale to fill that out the day of a competitive game that occurs*

every Sunday morning, so before the game get them to fill that out, they will fill the

same questionnaire out after the game. So, there has been cases where I have used

psychometrics in that sense, to be quite specific."

"Where we had one or two sessions, and we had these conversations around when

they experienced anxiety, and then we are going through the case formulation, it

might be that I look at these, like the SES questionnaire."

The acknowledgment of the importance of using psychometrics "when indicated" suggests a

thoughtful and discerning approach to their application. Participants recognised that

psychometrics should not be used as a one-size-fits-all solution but rather as a valuable tool

to be employed judiciously when the assessment is aligned with the client's needs, goals, and

the specific demands of the situation.

Negative Attitudes

Some participants exhibited a negative attitude towards psychometrics characterised by a

stable decision not to use these measures in their practice. For example:

"Yeah, no, the closest I have probably ever come to it was towards the end of my

training, but I was kind of almost forced and led down a path by my supervisors to go,

"You seem very clear on what your practice philosophy is, you might want to consider

exploring other ways of delivering this work because there was a diversity piece there

and there was a go out there and try something else." And I did that and I did some

psych skills stuff. And there were potential opportunities to use psychometric

measures. Even then I didn't."

This stable decision not to use psychometrics suggests a strong resistance or scepticism

towards the value and utility of these measures. It may stem from various factors such as a

lack of belief in the effectiveness of psychometrics, personal preferences for alternative

assessment methods, or concerns about the limitations or potential drawbacks associated with psychometric tools.

A subset of participants expressed a negative attitude towards psychometrics by stating that they have never used these measures and have no intention of doing so in the future:

> *"But I have not even gotten to that point yet. Because once I know they are not congruent, I am not going to use them."*

This firm stance against using psychometrics indicates a complete rejection of these tools as part of their professional practice. It suggests a deeply ingrained belief or conviction that the use of psychometric assessments in the context of their work with athletes was not congruent with their core beliefs and values. These participants may rely on other assessment approaches that they perceive as more effective or aligned with their theoretical orientation or personal philosophy.

Some participants expressed a negative attitude towards psychometrics by indicating that they were moving further away from utilising these measures in their practice:

> *"If you think of a continuum, I am so far on the other side of that continuum that would require me to look at the psychometrics. If anything, I am moving further and further away, the more my career goes on."*
>
> *"So, I was trying to use these tools to convert it into, how well they score on psychology, if you like, for that coach? Yeah, I probably wouldn't do that now. In fact, I definitely wouldn't do that."*

This statement reflects a shift away from using psychometrics as participants actively distance themselves from these assessment tools. It suggests a growing disillusionment, disinterest, or dissatisfaction with the application and outcomes associated with

psychometrics. This negative attitude was influenced by a range of factors such as negative experiences, perceived ineffectiveness, or a desire to explore alternative assessment approaches that better align with their professional goals and values.

Resistance due to personal and institutional factors

Participants expressed resistance towards psychometrics due to philosophical differences between their beliefs and the underlying principles of psychometric assessment:

> *"Well, I suppose at the deepest level, it just doesn't align with my practice philosophy. It doesn't align with my view of reality in the world. The reality from my perspective is co-create, it is interpretivist, is subjective."*

This resistance stems from misalignment between the participants' theoretical orientations, values, or epistemological perspectives and the fundamental principles and assumptions of psychometric measures. It suggests that participants may question the theoretical underpinnings or the reductionist nature of psychometrics, leading to a reluctance to incorporate these tools into their practice.

Participants expressed resistance towards psychometrics because of prevailing institutional norms that discourage or downplay the use of psychometric measures. One participant reflected on this, stating:

> *"I was thinking about this. And, I don't think I have ever actually considered using them. I don't know if it's me, or if it's sort of being like a product of LJMU and the prof doc. I just don't think like, we are not necessarily pushed down that route, but even like, presented with the idea that this is something we could use."*

This highlights how institutional factors, such as the emphasis on theoretical orientation and the limited exposure to psychometrics within the professional training program, contribute to

the resistance. The participant suggests that the focus on selecting a theoretical orientation and adhering to it firmly restricts the consideration of psychometric measures, creating a divide where certain theoretical orientations may exclude the use of psychometrics, as another participant pointed out:

> *"I think in very simple terms, when all the philosophy was taught, it was basically about 'you have got to pick a theoretical orientation and, nail your colours to the mast' effectively, and if you go in existential and you can't do psychometrics or if you go in CBT, you can't talk about death."*

This underscores the influence of institutional norms that discourage the integration of psychometrics within specific theoretical frameworks, limiting their use in certain orientations and potentially hindering broader acceptance and adoption. The institutional context shapes participants' perspectives and practices, leading to resistance and a reluctance to consider or utilise psychometric measures.

Resistance towards psychometrics was observed among participants influenced by groupthink or the professional networks they are part of. As one participant explained:

> *"I think, more in terms of applied practice, because, I think, because a cohort, we are quite close, and we like share a lot of like the applied, what would you do in this situation? Has anyone got any resources on there?"*

This quote highlights the influence of the participants' close-knit cohort and the tendency to rely on shared applied practices and resources within their professional network. The emphasis on practical applications and exchange of experiences among peers creates a collective mindset that may discourage the consideration or adoption of psychometrics. The participant's statement suggests that psychometric assessments are not actively discussed or sought after within their professional network, indicating a prevailing groupthink mentality

where alternative assessment methods are favoured, and psychometrics may be overlooked or dismissed. This resistance arises from the dynamics of the participants' professional community, where the shared opinions and practices shape their attitudes towards the use of psychometrics.

Resistance towards psychometrics was evident among participants who cited inadequate training or limited exposure to psychometric assessment during their professional development. One participant acknowledged the importance of proper training, stating:

> *"I think if I was trained in the right way in how to use the instrument, and was confident in that, and I felt it would benefit the other person to maybe see something in front of them and have something to reflect on in that way, I think that could maybe be quite useful."*

This quote reflects the participants' recognition that their resistance towards psychometrics stems from a lack of knowledge and confidence in utilising these measures effectively. The participant suggests that comprehensive training in psychometrics could bridge this gap and enable them to see the potential benefits of incorporating psychometric assessments into their practice.

Another participant expressed their observation that psychometrics received limited attention during their professional training, stating:

> *"I don't think, on the training pathway, we have read about psychometrics."*

This quote highlights the lack of exposure to psychometrics within the participants' training curriculum. Insufficient coverage of psychometric assessment methods during their professional development contributes to a knowledge gap and a sense of unfamiliarity with

these measures. The absence of formal training in psychometrics hinders participants' ability to fully understand and appreciate their potential value in supporting their clients' well-being. Participants recognised the need for proper training and certification in psychometrics to address the existing training gap. One participant suggested:

> *"I mean, so I think that, maybe there's a training gap, potentially, where people could be trained about them, practice them, become certified, and then they can decide again, in an informed way, whether they like them or not."*

This quote emphasises the importance of training programs that equip participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to administer and interpret psychometric assessments. By filling the training gap and enabling practitioners to become certified, participants can make informed decisions about the utility and relevance of psychometrics in their practice. Such comprehensive training would empower participants to engage with psychometric measures confidently and make informed judgments about their suitability for their clients' needs.

Lack of interest or knowledge

Participants displayed a lack of interest or knowledge towards psychometrics, with some indicating that they had never considered using these measures in their practice. This lack of consideration is evident in one participant's reflection, stating:

> *"I was thinking about this. And, I don't think I have ever actually considered using*
them."

This quote demonstrates a lack of active exploration or consideration of psychometrics, indicating limited awareness of their potential benefits and applications. This lack of interest may arise from various factors such as limited exposure to psychometrics, a focus on other assessment methods, or a lack of understanding regarding the potential advantages psychometrics can offer in their work with athletes.

The unclear purpose of psychometrics was another factor contributing to the participants' lack of interest or knowledge. This lack of clarity is evident in one participant's comment:

> *"But I have never had any exposure to role-playing a psychometric, I have never had any exposure to psychometric training."*

This quote suggests a lack of understanding regarding the intended purpose and practical application of psychometric measures, contributing to participants' hesitation or disinterest in engaging with them. The participants may feel uncertain about when and how to utilise psychometrics effectively, which hinders their motivation to explore or incorporate these measures into their practice.

The absence of outside critique or feedback regarding the use of psychometrics was also identified as a contributing factor to the participants' lack of interest or knowledge. One participant noted:

> *"If you like, and not having those external influences and going to the place and other people, being that, 'Well, have you thought about this? What about this?' Because yeah, chances are, we haven't thought about that."*

This quote highlights the limited exposure to critical discussions or external perspectives that could provide valuable insights on the use of psychometrics. The participants may rely heavily on their professional network, which may lack diversity or differing viewpoints, resulting in a limited understanding of psychometric measures and their potential benefits.

Some participants expressed a lack of interest in quantifying psychological variables and favoured subjective understanding. As one participant stated:

> *"So, not interested in quantifying psychological variables, not interested in measuring them. I am more interested in understanding the person that's in front of me."*

This quote reflects a preference for subjective measures and a focus on holistic understanding rather than numerical data. The participants may prioritise a qualitative approach to assessment, emphasising the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the individual's experiences, emotions, and perspectives. The reliance on subjective measures may stem from a belief that subjective understanding provides deeper insights into athletes' psychological well-being and fosters a more empathetic therapeutic relationship. Another participant affirmed this sentiment, saying:

> *"So, it would always be through subjective measures, there would never be any attempt to try and do this objectively or quantifying or measuring anything as I have just said."*

This quote further emphasises the participants' reluctance to engage with psychometric measures that involve quantification. They may prioritise the richness and depth of subjective understanding, perceiving it as more meaningful and relevant to their therapeutic work with athletes. The participants' lack of interest in quantification may arise from a concern that numerical data alone may not capture the complexity and nuances of human experiences.

Thematic Cluster 2: Purpose and Benefits

Client-centred benefits

Participants acknowledged the value of psychometrics for mental health (MH) screening. One participant described the use of specific measures, stating:

> *"Yeah, so the three that we were using at the time that I was in the role, were one for depression, one for anxiety, and one for eating disorders. I can't remember the eating disorder one's name, but we use the PHQ nine for depressive symptoms, and we use the GAD seven, I think, for anxiety symptoms. And we would screen it three time points, close the season, three season, Christmas, and offseason, we would also use*

them in response to a significant life event. But that's obviously like psychometrics for

mental health and wellbeing."

Another participant mentioned:

"Some of the measures that, that I utilise now are, and this is kind of specific, maybe a

little bit to the environment, but helpful in other environments is, is the CCAFs 34,

which is broad and answers questions around risk and answers questions around

well-being."

These assessments enable practitioners to systematically screen for mental health concerns and gather valuable insights to support athletes' overall well-being.

Participants recognised the role of psychometrics in creating a shared language within their professional or team environment. One participant shared their observation, saying:

"I think the idea that in a company, for example, or within your team, if you are like

an individual athlete, everyone's done it, you have kind of got like a shared language

and a shared mental model of how people interact. That's what I have seen it with the

person that I am supervising that they have used is as a way of creating a shared

language if in the environment that they work."

Psychometrics contribute to developing a common understanding of communication and interactions among team members, enhancing collaboration, and facilitating more effective support and intervention strategies.

Participants also expressed that psychometrics provide clients with a platform to voice their concerns and experiences. Participants acknowledged that clients may struggle to express certain emotions or experiences, but psychometric assessments offer a way to communicate effectively. One participant emphasised the benefits for anxiety management, stating:

"So, I do feel like they have had a big advantage, in that sense, and sometimes as well, with the academy players that initially as well, they don't feel comfortable in maybe opening up or speaking about this and with their anxiety."

Another participant noted:

"I think maybe things that, maybe the clients aren't aware of, or they are aware of, but they don't know how to kind of label it. They know what it is, but they can't identify it, like maybe I explain it."

Psychometrics serve as a tool to help clients articulate their feelings and experiences, promoting a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of their mental well-being.

Participants highlighted psychometric assessments as effective conversation starters in their therapeutic practice. This theme emerged as one of the most prominent benefits. One participant emphasised the value of initiating dialogue rather than considering the data in isolation, stating:

"Yeah, and it's a start rather than an end. So, it's a start of the conversation not like 'we have got the data it's done'."

Another participant added:

"Yeah, I think they are good for stimulating conversation. I think that would be a really healthy way to use them is to do them and then speak about them. So, the dialogue around the number which was still subjective was the purpose for me."

Participants thus indicated that psychometrics serve as a catalyst for meaningful discussions between practitioners and clients, providing valuable insights that lead to deeper exploration and understanding of clients' psychological well-being.

Participants noted that psychometrics can contribute to clients' self-awareness by revealing patterns and correlations in their experiences. Participants recognised the potential for increased awareness through these assessments. One participant noted the benefit of identifying correlations between different aspects of their lives, stating:

"I guess, it could be useful for that to be like labelled for me and like that, 'Oh yeah, I knew that. But I didn't know that it kind of correlated to that or whatever.' And then I guess, I improvement on that, if they wanted to. So, I guess that will be a positive also, like, are just aware that you have been, whatever the outcome is, like, 'Oh, I didn't know that.'"

Another participant mentioned:

"Yeah. So, I think I can term of, if people may be not as self-aware. And so for an example, I have had a client say, like, 'Well, I think I am like, quite mature for my age.' And the coach are like, 'They are really immature.' Things like that. I think it could be useful."

Thus, psychometrics can facilitate greater self-awareness, allowing practitioners and clients to jointly explore areas for personal growth and development.

Efficiency benefits

Participants highlighted the time-saving benefits of using psychometrics in their consultancy work. Psychometric assessments offer a structured and standardised approach to gathering data, allowing practitioners to efficiently collect valuable information about their clients' psychological well-being. As one participant pointed out:

"They were useful in terms of getting quick data. So, I would maybe get them to fill out all of these questionnaires before consultancy and we might go through a few of their responses within the session. So, instead of me sitting down, asking them

questions surrounding anxiety, they have already presented me with the data, and I

can pick up on that."

By employing psychometric measures, practitioners can expedite the data collection process, saving valuable time that would otherwise be spent on prolonged interviews or subjective assessments. This streamlined approach not only benefits practitioners but also allows clients to express their experiences and emotions through standardised measures, ensuring a comprehensive and time-efficient evaluation of their mental health.

Additionally, participants recognised that using psychometric assessments to obtain data from multiple individuals is significantly more efficient than conducting lengthy one-on-one interviews. As one participant highlighted:

"Probably, like I have said already getting data from a number of individuals, in terms of ease and convenience, it's 100% a lot easier to get the data rather than talking to every person for 40, 50 minutes."

Psychometrics enable practitioners to administer questionnaires to multiple clients simultaneously, thereby reducing the time and effort required for data collection. This efficiency allows practitioners to focus on interpreting the results and developing tailored intervention strategies that align with their clients' specific needs. In essence, the time-saving benefits of psychometrics empower practitioners to allocate more time to meaningful interactions and interventions with their clients, enhancing the overall therapeutic process.

Participants recognised the value of psychometrics in tracking the progress of their clients throughout the therapeutic journey. Psychometric assessments offer standardised and objective data, enabling practitioners to monitor changes in clients' psychological well-being over time. As one participant mentioned:

> *"And they have improved, the scores haven't improved or they have declined or increased, it gives you that valid data, that the work that you are doing is maybe effective."*

By consistently administering psychometric measures at different stages of the therapeutic process, practitioners can capture valuable insights into clients' progress and identify any positive changes or challenges they may be experiencing. This data-informed approach empowers practitioners to make evidence-based decisions about the effectiveness of their interventions, ensuring that clients receive the most appropriate and personalised support.

Data-driven decision-making benefits

Participants recognised the importance of using multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of their clients, as one participant stated:

> *"Yeah, I wouldn't do it, only on its own. But yeah, triangulate or use different methods to sort of accommodate that and yeah, develop my understanding of the person a little bit more rather than just doing that on its own."*

Triangulation involves combining information from various assessment methods, such as interviews, observation, and psychometric assessments, to gain a more nuanced and holistic perspective of the client's psychological well-being. By integrating psychometric data with other qualitative and quantitative data, practitioners can form a more comprehensive understanding of clients' strengths, challenges, and needs. This approach enhances the quality and accuracy of decision making, as practitioners can draw on multiple data points to inform their interventions and support clients effectively.

Moreover, psychometrics provided an essential means of gathering objective data in the consultancy process. Participants recognised the value of utilising psychometric assessments to obtain objective scores and information, as one participant explained:

> *"Yeah, a coach wanted a specific project, he wanted me to look at motivation and mental skills, and they were looking at different areas of sport. And they were trying to put together a profile for each athlete and get an objective score."*

Psychometric measures offer standardised and reliable data, allowing practitioners to assess specific psychological constructs, such as motivation or anxiety, in an objective manner. This objectivity is particularly valuable when conducting research or assessments that require unbiased and valid information. By using psychometrics to gather objective data, practitioners can enhance the credibility of their findings and ensure that decision making is rooted in empirical evidence. The integration of objective psychometric data into the consultancy process enables practitioners to make well-informed and evidence-based decisions that ultimately lead to more effective and impactful support for their clients.

Participants acknowledged the importance of using psychometrics to measure the effectiveness of their consultancy work. By tracking clients' progress over time, practitioners can obtain valid data on the impact of their interventions. One participant emphasised the significance of improved scores as an indicator of effective work, stating:

> *"And that maybe that is informed a little bit of the evaluation, if we were to sort of reflect on a person in their clinical engagement. But I think that's kind of one touching point is, is the measure and then also like, in conversation just asking, in an individual therapy session, like "What has gone well?" Asking for feedback and evaluating."*

As seen above, many participants held the view that psychometrics offer opportunities to evaluate the success of interventions. As seen in the above quote, this could be viewed purely through the lens of the numerical data provided by the psychometric or using the psychometric as a springboard to launch an evaluative conversation. This could then enable evidence-based decision-making and continuous enhancement of the quality of services.

Thematic Cluster 3: Limitations and Challenges

Limitations in capturing individual and contextual complexity

According to the participants, psychometrics, while valuable in some respects, face limitations in their ability to capture the rich and nuanced individual and contextual complexities. One of the challenges highlighted by participants is the lack of real-world meaning associated with psychometric scores. Participants used remarkably similar language to question this:

> *"And okay, so I am 13 out of 20. What does that mean?"*
>
> *"So, what does this score on this psychometric mean? How does that might connect to the fitness testing that the sport scientists have done?"*
>
> *"If you give someone a questionnaire and they score eight out of 10, or say, 'What do they mean?' And that stuck with me."*

The disconnect between psychometric scores and practical implications hinders the participants' understanding and utilisation of the results in a meaningful manner. Without clear interpretations and connections to real-life scenarios, practitioners may struggle to draw actionable insights from psychometric assessments.

Another limitation expressed by participants is the failure of psychometrics to account for demographic differences among individuals. The complexity of human diversity,

encompassing variables such as cultural background, upbringing, and life experiences, is not adequately addressed in standardised psychometric measures. As one participant emphasised:

> *"They need to understand that individuals are all different. So, in the same team that you are administering personality test, one may be Asian, one person may be European, completely different story, one person may be coming from a poor family, one person may be coming from a rich family, different upbringing, different life, story, genders, ages, so, these need to be inserted in the psychometric, these need to be sort of adjusted to, and it's very difficult, how can one sentence hit every single individual."*

The failure to accommodate such diversity in psychometric assessments can result in limited relevance and applicability to specific populations, making it challenging for practitioners to fully grasp the intricacies of individual experiences and contexts.

Moreover, psychometrics may not capture relevant information aligned with practitioners' specific goals and intervention objectives. As one participant expressed:

> *"So potentially I could measure irrational beliefs beforehand, may do a piece of work around irrational beliefs and measure irrational beliefs afterward, we can see there's been benefit there. Is the child happier? Is the child performing better? It doesn't capture the essence of what I am trying to do."*

The lack of customisation and flexibility in psychometric assessments may hinder the practitioners' ability to delve deeply into specific psychological constructs or therapeutic outcomes, limiting their capacity to measure the desired changes accurately. Furthermore, psychometrics may not fully capture the depth of complex psychological issues, particularly in sensitive areas. As one participant shared:

"So, if it is sensitive areas, for example, you don't really have that scope, unless you obviously follow up with a conversation, you don't have that scope from a questionnaire, where to follow up around that sensitive area. So, it might be that they might not want to do scores on a psychometric or it might be that you have to engage in an in-depth conversation to get the understanding around it."

This limitation necessitates supplementary methods, such as in-depth interviews, to gain a comprehensive understanding of clients' experiences and emotions, reinforcing the need for a holistic approach to psychological assessment and intervention.

Practical Limitations

Assessment length posed a notable challenge, as participants expressed concerns about the impact of lengthy assessments on engagement and data accuracy. Two participants articulated this concern, stating,

"[...] answer A and then I feel I am B, then I answer C, and keep going, off here for a while, then zone out."

"Yeah, I think some can be quite interpreted is quite tedious. I know some could be quite long"

Participants reflected that the length of assessments can potentially lead to diminished attention and, subsequently, reduced data quality. Striking a balance between comprehensive data collection and maintaining athletes' sustained engagement is crucial.

Utilising psychometrics with questions that resonate universally with athletes posed another challenge. Participants acknowledged the difficulty of questions that maintain relevance across a diverse population. One participant noted:

> *"Also, as well, some of them are quite broad in terms of the questions. So, it can be hard for the client to maybe relate to the statement."*

However, participants were also aware of the necessity for a degree of generality, for example:

> *"And I understand that that might be difficult if you were to hand that questionnaire out to several people, because it could be hard to make the questions relevant to everyone."*

This challenge underscores the need for meticulous question construction to ensure that the items capture individual nuances while encompassing a broad range of athlete experiences. In general, the participants overall reflection was that the psychometrics which they were aware of fell too far towards generality and were perhaps too broad.

Moreover, issues related to participant comprehension further underscore the practical limitations of utilising psychometric assessments. Participants shared instances where athletes struggled to understand certain items, necessitating additional clarification efforts. A participant described this challenge, noting:

> *"It's required me to give that clarification and that explanation around it before they can complete the questionnaire."*

Evidently, participants experienced difficulties with the degree to which their clients were able to understand the psychometrics that they were given, a practical limitation which creates a barrier to effective use.

The potential for omissions within assessments emerged as a practical limitation with implications for data accuracy. Instances were recounted where clients inadvertently skipped items, leading to incomplete responses. As highlighted by a participant:

"Without intentionally doing this, they used to leave one out [...] and they never reply."

Gaps such as this can critically undermine the integrity and comprehensiveness of collected data. Nonetheless, such omissions were noted frequently by participants, who reflected that they were faced with a challenge of how to resolve the omission, introducing further inconvenience because of this limitation.

Ethical and philosophical challenges

The integration of psychometric assessments in sport psychology practice has unearthed multiple ethical and philosophical considerations, magnifying the complexities practitioners grapple within their application. A striking concern that emerged was the perceived compromise in the authenticity of therapeutic interactions. Participants shared reservations about reducing the complexity of human experiences to numerical scores, as it seemed to dilute the authenticity and honesty of the therapeutic process. One participant poignantly conveyed:

"If I was to round off and base the success of the intervention on a score on a piece of paper, I just think that is almost fake."

This introspection accentuates the pivotal role of authentic, verbal exchanges in the therapeutic relationship and prompts contemplation about the potential superficiality introduced by an overreliance on quantitative metrics.

Intrusive observation was flagged as another ethical dilemma, particularly in terms of psychometric data potentially exacerbating participants' feelings of hyper-observation. The intrusion on athletes' personal realms due to the comprehensive nature of psychometric assessments was considered. A participant articulated:

"Is this making the individuals hyper-observed? Yes, in a way, because then there's no privacy. We all know how they are feeling, how sore their body is, what they ate, what chitter chatter, and yes, of course, and some of them will do unsure in order to be liked."

This observation underscores the necessity of maintaining a sensitive balance between data collection and preserving the athletes' private sphere.

A power dynamic concern emerged, suggesting that psychometrics could inadvertently reinforce hierarchical relationships. Participants pointed out that quantifiable data, especially when interpreted by practitioners, can perpetuate power imbalances in the therapeutic relationship. A participant articulated:

"there's a power dynamic between you and the client. And they want to show that you have done good work, they don't want to make you upset."

This highlights the potential distortion of data as clients may feel inclined to present more favourable outcomes to appease practitioners or validate their expertise, potentially undermining the genuine rapport-building process.

Confidentiality dilemmas were another ethical quandary participants highlighted. The sharing and handling of psychometric data raised concerns about ensuring participants' privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive information. Participants raised the crucial aspect of setting expectations regarding data sharing at the outset, emphasising the importance of transparent communication. As a participant articulated;

"Recognition of the limitations of them, one of the things is ethical practice, where is this information shared? I think that needs to be discussed and navigated better."

This speaks to the multifaceted ethical dimensions intertwined with the utilisation of psychometric tools in sensitive sport contexts.

Such confidentiality requirements, often intertwined with ethical standards, were identified as a source of dilemma, particularly in terms of how psychometric data connects with other disciplines. Participants articulated concerns about the effective sharing and integration of psychometric data across interdisciplinary contexts. A participant pondered:

> *"But how well do we actually share that data? What does this psychometric that we have collected data on a sports science, how does that connect to the fitness testing? How does that connect to the physio? How does that connect to the coaches?"*

This question uncovers the complex dilemma between confidentiality, and data actionability, whereby if data is collected and not shared it risks redundancy, whereas if it is shared with a wider team there is a risk of ethical standards around confidentiality being compromised. Participants voiced a fundamental concern regarding the potential barrier created by psychometrics in the client-practitioner relationship. They highlighted the risk of reduced human connection when quantitative assessments dominate the therapeutic process. One participant critically remarked,

> *"If you rely on psychometrics, I feel it becomes a barrier between you and the person that you are trying to work with."*

This sentiment underscores the integral role of rapport and interpersonal connection in effective therapeutic outcomes, cautioning against methodologies that might inadvertently diminish the personal, human dimension of the therapeutic journey.

The perception of external pressure to employ psychometrics for various reasons emerged as an ethical dilemma faced by practitioners. Participants revealed instances where external

forces, such as teams or organisations, influenced the decision to incorporate psychometric assessments. These decisions often engendered feelings of unease or ethical concern. One participant shared:

> *"We were in a multidisciplinary team, and they felt that including a personality test would be important to assess. But I remember as soon as I saw that it was not just one personality test but a list of tests, I had this feeling of I don't want to be part of this team anymore."*

This highlights the nuanced challenges practitioners face when striving to adhere to ethical principles while navigating the demands of stakeholders who may prioritise quantifiable outcomes over the qualitative aspects of psychological well-being.

Philosophical incongruence surfaced as a significant contemplation among participants. The alignment of psychometric methods with practitioners' personal philosophical orientations and approaches was deliberated. One participant reflected:

> *"Using psychometrics is something I would have to consider if I was flirting with the idea that there may be some congruence. But I have not even gotten to that point yet. Because once I know they are not congruent, I am not going to use them "*

This underscores the importance of congruence between practitioners' beliefs and the tools they employ, prompting introspection on the potential philosophical discrepancies that might arise when using psychometrics within therapeutic contexts.

Lastly, concerns emerged about the inappropriate use of psychometrics for selection decisions. Participants expressed reservations about utilising psychometric data as a sole determinant in critical decisions such as player selection. This application was criticised for

oversimplifying complex human attributes, potentially leading to ill-informed decisions. A participant pointed out,

> *"The medical staff were using that to screen whether or not players were in the right headspace or had enough sleep. And they had a kind of default line on the on the graph where if a player fell below that, they would prevent them from playing "*

This raises questions about the ethical implications of using psychometric data in contexts where it might not adequately capture the multifaceted nature of human performance or well-being.

Issues with administration and interpretation

Overuse and overreliance on psychometric assessments emerged as a noteworthy apprehension among practitioners. The risk of saturating therapeutic interactions with excessive reliance on these metrics was articulated by participants. One participant cautioned:

> *"I think like the first thing that springs to mind would just be overuse of them, in like either a one-to-one situation or in workshops, I guess."*

This concern underlines the need for judicious integration of psychometrics within a broader therapeutic context to avoid the overshadowing of nuanced individual experiences by quantitative measures.

Participants also raised concerns about the propensity to interpret psychometric outcomes as definitive diagnoses. This apprehension highlights the importance of prudently interpreting assessment results within their appropriate context. One participant remarked:

> *"I think there might be an over-reliance on the outcome of the metric. And I feel like people need to be careful not to assume a 'diagnosis' off the bat."*

This draws attention to the nuanced nature of mental health screening and underscores the need for practitioners to exercise caution when extrapolating clinical implications solely from psychometric scores.

The potential for misguided applications of psychometrics was another theme that emerged from participants' responses. Instances of employing these tools solely for expediency without a clear therapeutic purpose were highlighted. A participant articulated:

> *"Because if you are just using it, because it saves you time and you don't have that understanding around why it's important, then I don't feel like that's the most effective approach."*

This suggests the importance of aligning the use of psychometrics with a comprehensive understanding of their purpose and implications, guarding against superficial applications that might undermine their potential benefits.

Misinterpretation of psychometric data was also a significant concern voiced by participants. The potential harm that could arise from using these assessments inappropriately or with a lack of sensitivity to language nuances was highlighted. A participant pointed out:

> *"Yeah, I mean, yeah, potentially do more harm than good if your language is inappropriate around it or if it's used in the wrong way."*

This concern underscores the ethical responsibility of practitioners to translate assessment outcomes accurately and to engage in sensitive, nuanced dialogues with clients to avoid potential misrepresentations or harmful interpretations.

A recurring theme in the discussion was the necessity of follow-up and contextualisation. Participants highlighted the importance of not treating psychometric scores as isolated entities but rather as entry points into deeper conversations. One participant emphasised:

> *"So, it's not always straightforward in terms of just seeing a score around a player's anxiety without following it up."*

This acknowledgment underscores the role of psychometric assessments as catalysts for meaningful dialogues that delve into the underlying factors influencing the scores and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the individual's psychological landscape.

Discussion

This study explores into the intricate landscape of psychometric assessments within the delivery of sport psychology consultancy. Through the voices of practitioners, the research examines the multifaceted attitudes, challenges, and potential benefits surrounding the integration of psychometrics into the practice of psychological coaching. The investigation culminates in distinct thematic clusters, each shedding light on a critical aspect of this integration.

One of the thematic clusters that emerges from the narratives of practitioners is the presence of positive attitudes towards psychometrics. This cluster explores how practitioners view psychometric assessments as valuable tools that can provide standardised insights into clients' psychological dimensions. These positive perceptions align with the broader trends in psychological and coaching practices, where psychometrics have increasingly been recognised as contributing to a more holistic understanding of clients' needs and experiences (Beckmann & Kellmann, 2003). This suggests that, to some extent, participants in the sample

concur with the portion of the extant literature which suggests that psychometric measures are useful in providing objective information about an athlete's mental state and can help to guide the development of tailored interventions (Anshel & Brinthaupt, 2014).

In tandem with positive attitudes, the thematic cluster highlighting negative attitudes towards psychometrics underscores the complex nuances at play. These negative perspectives reveal apprehensions around the reductionistic nature of psychometric data and the potential to dilute or damage the deeply human and nuanced interactions inherent in coaching relationships. This, again is consistent with evidence which suggests that at least a proportion of Sport Psychology practitioners are sceptical about the usefulness of such measures (Vealey et al., 2019). While participants acknowledge the quantitative insights that psychometrics offer, they emphasise the necessity of a balanced approach that integrates these insights with qualitative understanding.

A distinct thematic cluster in this study unveils the dynamics of resistance, both on personal and institutional levels, to the incorporation of psychometrics in coaching practices. This resistance stems from a combination of traditional counselling philosophies, practitioners' personal inclinations, and institutional pressures. This cluster provides insights into how these influences can shape the adoption of psychometrics and contribute to the broader discourse on the evolution of psychological coaching. This theme corroborates with the extant evidence suggesting that practitioners attitudes towards psychometry can be influenced by the institution in which they studied, whereby practitioners trained in institutions that emphasise the use of psychometric measures are more likely to use them in their work with athletes, while those trained in institutions that focus on a holistic approach to athlete care may be less likely to use psychometric measures (Vealey et al., 2019). However, given the variety of

perspectives expressed by the participants in this study, all of whom studied at the same institution, it must be that institutional pressures do not explain all the variance in practitioners use of psychometrics.

For example, one other factor could be practitioners' interest or knowledge of psychometrics. The thematic cluster revolving around the lack of interest or knowledge uncovers the interplay between practitioners' familiarity with psychometrics and their willingness to integrate them into practice. It is likely that practitioner's willingness to engage in independent continuous professional development relating to psychometric measurement informs their later use of psychometrics, given that institutions will likely have a prevailing philosophical and practical perspective on the use of psychometric measures. Thus, this aspect sheds light on the importance of ongoing professional development, acknowledging that a deeper understanding of psychometrics could influence practitioners' perspectives and practices, fostering more informed decision-making.

Amidst the complexities, the study identifies a thematic cluster that outlines the perceived purpose and benefits of utilising psychometrics in psychological coaching. This cluster reflects practitioners' recognition of how psychometrics can enhance client-centred interactions, streamline processes, and inform data-driven decision-making. These positive viewpoints align with the contemporary drive towards evidence-based practices, where psychometric insights can augment the qualitative understanding of clients' experiences (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017). Furthermore, the exploration of client-centred benefits reveals that psychometrics can function as a valuable conduit for clients to gain deeper insights into their own psychological states. Practitioners suggested that these assessments can empower clients by offering a shared language to articulate complex emotions and

thoughts. This shared language enables clients to better communicate their experiences and concerns, bridging the gap between their internal worlds and the coaching dialogue, which the extant literature suggests is vital in relational coaching (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Additionally, participants expressed that psychometrics foster an environment where clients feel their voices are heard, enhancing their agency and engagement in the coaching process.

Efficiency emerges as a pivotal theme in this cluster, emphasising the time-saving attributes of psychometric assessments. The integration of standardised tools streamlines the data collection process, freeing up practitioners to delve into more focused and meaningful discussions during sessions. By pre-emptively gathering information on clients' psychological dimensions, practitioners are equipped with a contextual backdrop that enables them to delve directly into the core of clients' concerns. This time-efficient approach enhances the efficacy of coaching relationships and facilitates a more targeted approach to addressing clients' needs. This perspective is consistent with the research conducted by Vealey et al. (2019), wherein practitioners, from the period of 2003 to 2017 expressed that efficiency was one of the key advantages offered by psychometric measures. Furthermore, the theme of data-driven decision making emphasises the potential of psychometrics to inform evidence-based coaching interventions. Practitioners highlight how psychometric insights provide quantifiable data points that can guide coaching strategies. This data-driven approach assists practitioners in tracking clients' progress over time, allowing for objective assessments of the effectiveness of interventions. By quantifying the impact of coaching efforts, practitioners can tailor their approaches more effectively and refine strategies to ensure clients' growth and well-being.

However, many practitioners questioned the quality of the data yielded by the psychometric measures specifically citing the intricate nature of human experiences that psychometric assessments might struggle to encapsulate fully. Practitioners point out that these standardised tools can sometimes fall short in capturing the depth of personal histories, cultural nuances, and unique life trajectories that shape individuals. The inherent diversity among clients necessitates a nuanced understanding that transcends the confines of predefined categories and cutoffs. These concerns echo those of Anderson et al. (2009), who question the validity of making the jump from scores on paper-and-pencil tests to meaningful inferences about real-world behaviour. Detractors of psychometric measures in this study were therefore consistent with a proportion of the existing literature which levels the criticism that psychometric assessments may overlook the dynamic interactions between clients and their environments, neglecting the broader contextual factors that influence psychological performance and well-being.

Practical limitations were also highlighted as potential challenges in the administration and interpretation of psychometric assessments. The multifaceted nature of these tools can result in questionnaires that are excessively long or overly broad, potentially leading to respondent fatigue or ambiguity. Furthermore, the need for follow-up discussions to address sensitive or ambiguous responses can create a workload that practitioners may find overwhelming and may counterpoise the advantages to efficiency that practitioners in this study and others (Vealey et al. 2017) have cited. Practitioners grapple with the juxtaposition of efficiency and depth with psychometrics; a measure which is brief enough to be accessible to clients may not capture sufficient depth or nuance, whereas one which captures more depth becomes arduous for clients to complete, and practitioners to interpret. Research to address this problem is ongoing; for example, Horvath and Röthlin (2018), to change athletes' perception

of low return on time investment in completing extensive psychometrics, shortened the Thought Occurrence Questionnaire Sport from 17 to three items. If it is indeed possible to create psychometrics which are shorter than their original forms but maintain validity and reliability is possible, this may go some distance towards resolving the dilemma expressed by practitioners in this study.

The subthemes of issues with administration and interpretation, and ethical and philosophical challenges unveils intricacies involved in administering and deriving meaningful insights from psychometric assessments which echo those noted by Collins and Cruickshank (2017). The authors note in their commentary on "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" of psychometrics in sport that amongst "The Bad" lurks the risk of overuse and overreliance on these tools, which can lead to superficial understanding, overlooking the broader context of clients' narratives. This sentiment was echoed by participants in the present study with similar concerns, as was the disquietude over misinterpretation of scores and language barriers further hindering the accuracy of assessments.

Both Collins and Cruickshank (2017) and the participants in the present study highlight the question of confidentiality and the appropriate sharing of data add an ethical layer to the administration process. Ethical and philosophical challenges were cited in several domains and underscored complex moral and philosophical considerations when using psychometrics in coaching. Practitioners voiced concerns about authenticity and the potential for these assessments to mechanise the coaching process, diluting the human connection that underpins effective coaching relationships. The reinforcement of power dynamics between practitioners and clients and the potential intrusion into clients' privacy and autonomy raise significant ethical questions. Furthermore, the pressure to use psychometrics due to external expectations

can compromise the practitioner's autonomy and the client's genuine growth. Such ethical concerns were also among "The Ugly" of psychometrics in sport as labelled by Collins and Cruickshank (2017), a concurrence which suggests the challenges of effectively and ethically implementing psychometric assessments underline the need for careful consideration and practitioner training.

Using a Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) to explore the research question concerning sport psychology practitioners' attitudes towards and use of psychometric measures offers distinct advantages and potential disadvantages. TCA is a robust qualitative methodology that enables a systematic examination of textual data to identify recurring themes, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Anderson, 2007). In the context of this study, TCA facilitated the in-depth exploration of practitioners' attitudes and practices, revealing underlying patterns and uncovering diverse perspectives. Through rigorous coding and analysis, TCA provided a structured framework to organise and synthesise the diverse range of responses, allowing for the identification of thematic clusters that encapsulated the multifaceted nature of practitioners' viewpoints. By adopting a TCA approach, the study could capture the richness of data, uncovering subtle nuances and providing insights into the complexities of integrating psychometric measures in sport psychology.

However, there are certain limitations associated with employing a TCA methodology. One potential drawback is the risk of subjectivity during the coding and interpretation process. While TCA protocols emphasise that interpretation should be kept to a minimum (Saldaña, 2021), the reality is that different analysts may interpret the data differently, leading to variability in the identification and categorisation of themes. This subjectivity highlights the importance of ensuring intercoder reliability as a method to enhance the validity of the

findings, however with only a single individual coding data in this study it was not possible to leverage this method of enhancing validity. Additionally, TCA involves the reduction of textual data into summarised themes, which arguably may oversimplify the richness and complexity of individual responses. This reductionist approach can potentially omit nuances and variations within the data, leading to a loss of depth in the analysis. Despite these limitations, the systematic and structured nature of TCA enables researchers to mitigate subjectivity and extract meaningful insights from large volumes of qualitative data.

Drawing all participants from a single university programme in the context of this study presents both advantages and potential drawbacks. One significant advantage is the potential for homogeneity in terms of training and background. Participants from the same program are likely to share a similar academic foundation and theoretical framework, which could facilitate a deeper understanding of their attitudes and practices regarding psychometric measures. This common background could lead to more coherent and focused discussions during data collection, potentially allowing for the identification of distinct patterns that are specific to that program. Additionally, the participants' shared experiences within the same programme could enhance the credibility of their insights, as they might collectively provide an in-depth understanding of how psychometric measures are integrated into a particular educational context. However, there are notable drawbacks associated with exclusively focusing on participants from a single university programme. One primary concern is the potential lack of generalisability of the findings to a broader population of sport psychology practitioners. The perspectives and experiences of individuals within a single program may not necessarily reflect the diversity of attitudes and practices that exist among practitioners from different educational backgrounds or professional settings. This limitation could impact the external validity of the study's findings, as they might not be applicable to practitioners

with different training or experiences. Furthermore, by homogenising the sample, the study could inadvertently overlook important variations and nuances in attitudes and practices that may exist across different contexts or programs. This limitation could compromise the study's ability to offer a comprehensive understanding of the broader landscape of sport psychology practitioners' perspectives on the use of psychometric measures.

Conclusion

This study presents an exploration of sport psychology practitioners' attitudes towards and utilisation of psychometric measures, a multifaceted understanding of the topic emerges. The thematic content analysis revealed a rich tapestry of perspectives that contribute to the evolving landscape of psychometric applications in the field. The findings underscore the complex interplay of attitudes, benefits, limitations, and ethical considerations that shape practitioners' engagement with these measures.

The study's thematic clusters revealed diverse practitioner attitudes towards psychometrics, influenced by personal, institutional, and contextual factors. While some practitioners embraced these tools for their client-centred benefits, efficiency gains, and data-driven decision-making potential, others harboured reservations stemming from limitations in capturing complexity and ethical concerns. This underscores the need for a nuanced approach when considering the integration of psychometric measures within sport psychology practice. While the study contributes rich insights into sport psychology practitioners' perspectives, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations. Drawing participants from a single university programme could limit the generalisability of findings. Nonetheless, this study provides a foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of psychometric utilisation and attitudes among sport psychology practitioners.

The integration of psychometric measures into sport psychology practice is a multifaceted journey marked by diverse attitudes, intricate benefits, practical challenges, and ethical considerations. As the field continues to evolve, embracing these insights can aid practitioners, researchers, and educators in making informed decisions about the role and implications of psychometrics, ultimately enhancing the quality and impact of sport psychology interventions.

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Research Commentary

Exploring the Research Process in Sport and Exercise Psychology: A Reflective Commentary

"If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be called research, would it?" This poignant quote by Albert Einstein aptly encapsulates the initial feelings of trepidation and uncertainty that I experienced at the outset of my professional doctorate. The prospect of embarking on a research journey comprised of three substantial projects felt overwhelming. However, despite my initial apprehensions, I embraced this challenge. This discipline, still relatively young and rapidly evolving, demands the continuous generation of new knowledge through research. In the intervening years I have completed a trio of doctoral research components. These components encompassed a systematic 'umbrella' review evaluating the efficacy of psychological skills training in enhancing sports performance, a study into the application of the SpotlightPROFILE personality profiling tool to enhance coach-athlete relationships, and an investigation of sports psychology practitioners' attitudes towards psychometric measures.

The impact of advancing these areas of research extends far beyond academia; it resonates with athletes, coaches, practitioners, and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, and illustrates the significance of my own research journey. In the pages that follow, I invite the reader to join me in a reflective exploration of my research process. Throughout this commentary, I will reflect on my research process, discuss key findings, explore how my philosophy as a researcher has evolved over time, and discuss how my personal beliefs have shaped the research questions to which I have sought answers. In sharing my reflections, challenges, and evolving perspectives, through this commentary I aim to contribute not only to the understanding of sport and exercise psychology but also to the broader discourse on the dynamic interplay between personal growth and the advancement of knowledge within the realm of the discipline.

Section 1: The Research Journey

Research Design and Framework:

In the early stages of my research journey, my philosophy as a researcher was rooted in a realist ontology (Bhaskar, 1975). This perspective is characterised by an emphasis on empirical reality that is observable and measurable. I was drawn to the idea that there are common, empirically observable features of research that can be objectively analysed. As a result, I favoured systematic reviewing methodology over narrative reviewing for the umbrella review, which was the first of the research components that I began. Systematic reviewing, with its structured and methodical approach, aligns with a more realist ontology (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). It assumes the existence of these empirically observable features, which can be objectively evaluated. This choice was also reflected in my selection of a quantitative research question for this component and my use of the AMSTAR-II quality assessment tool, primarily designed for the analysis of meta-analyses rather than qualitative reviewing methodologies (Shea, et al., 2007).

However, as my journey as a researcher continued, my perspective evolved. Through practical experiences as a practitioner, personal life events, and a growing exposure to literature emphasising the pivotal role of the client-practitioner relationship in intervention outcomes (Tod & Andersen, 2012), my core belief that meaningful change occurs within the context of relationships began to take shape. This shift led me to move from a realist ontology toward a critically realist perspective. Critical realism acknowledges the existence of an objective layer of reality but also recognises that our understanding of this reality is influenced by our perspectives and experiences (Bhaskar, 2009). This shift in perspective influenced my research interests, directing my focus toward relationships in the realm of sport psychology, particularly the coach-athlete relationship. I aimed to investigate methods

of enhancing this relationship to improve performance outcomes. Consequently, I selected the project centred on the SpotlightPROFILE personality profiling tool. By this point, I had transitioned sufficiently from realism to critical realism to adopt a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) elements into my research design for this project. This approach allowed me to explore the complexity of the coach-athlete relationship from multiple angles, blending the objective and subjective aspects inherent in such a dynamic.

My trajectory continued to evolve as my research journey unfolded. My interest in objective measurement remained a constant and began to merge with a growing interest in psychometrics. Balancing the epistemic fallacy, which asserts that reality is not entirely subjective, with the concept of critical reflexivity, which recognises the need for continuous examination and revision of one's beliefs (Bhaskar, 2009), I found myself intrigued by the dialectical tension between relativist and realist perspectives. A core belief in finding a golden middle ground between these perspectives began to solidify. This philosophical shift guided my choice of research question for the study on sports psychology practitioners' attitudes towards psychometric measurement. I leaned towards a qualitative methodology, embracing what can be described as "the most quantitative of the qualitative methodologies;" thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, Using thematic analysis in psychology, 2006). This choice was grounded in my belief that while an objective reality exists, individual perceptions of it vary. Thus, I found it intriguing to explore how this variation plays out in the realm of practitioners' attitudes towards psychometric measurement, a research question which leans towards a qualitative methodology to allow information capture around attitude and belief, rather than measurement.

Data Collection and Analysis:

My approach and evolving choices to data collection and analysis across the three distinct research projects closely mirrors the evolution of my research philosophy. Initially, my alignment with a realist ontology led to a quantitative emphasis in data collection and analysis. As my philosophy evolved towards critical realism, my research projects incorporated mixed-methods approaches, blending quantitative and qualitative elements. This transition reflects a developing understanding of the interplay between objective reality and subjective perspectives, aligning with the principles of critical realism.

In the initial stages of my research journey, where my orientation leaned toward a more realist ontology, I naturally gravitated towards quantification as the predominant mode of data handling in my systematic review. This entailed practices such as tallying the frequency of various psychological skills training (PST) interventions in the included papers, applying numerically based quality assessment criteria, and quantifying the types of control groups involved. The emphasis was placed squarely on the empirically observable, with minimal room for subjective interpretation.

The first empirical paper marked a pivotal juncture in my philosophical evolution, characterised by a shift towards critical realism and the development of a core belief in the influence of relationships in effecting meaningful change. This transition was notably exemplified in data collection that assumed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative elements. Quantitative data was gathered using the CART-Q (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), a tool designed to assess coach-athlete relationships. Analysis of self-rated CART-Q scores pre-post Spotlight intervention provided quantitative insights. Additionally, the project incorporated a thematic content analysis (TCA) component

involving joint coach-athlete interviews. This endeavour aimed to synthesise and make sense of the diverse array of data collected, bridging the gap between quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

The second empirical paper exhibited a marked shift towards a predominantly qualitative nature. Although thematic content analysis (TCA) was still employed, allowing for minimal interpretation, the data collection methods took on a qualitative character. Transcriptions of semi-structured interviews with sports psychology practitioners formed the basis of this research component, with subsequent analysis involving subjecting these transcripts to TCA. This approach signifies a departure from the quantification-oriented beginnings of my research journey. It aligns with a more relativist ontology, acknowledging the uniqueness of individual perspectives. However, by adopting TCA, which is recognised as one of the more systematic and replicable methods of qualitative analysis, this research piece strikes a balance, echoing the critical realist perspective that acknowledges the existence of an objective reality while recognising the diversity of individual interpretations.

Seeking Publication

One of the notable experiences in my research journey revolved around the pursuit of publication, a journey characterised by unexpected challenges and enduring perseverance. The research component that I sought to publish was the systematic review —a project that demanded six months of meticulous work to meet the standards set by my supervisor to facilitate publication. What followed was an arduous two-year struggle to see the systematic review published in the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology. This journey offered a first-hand education in the rigorous world of academic publication. It was a humbling experience characterised by multiple manuscript rewrites, submissions to various

journals, and spirited dialogues with numerous peer reviewers. The process tested my patience and resolve, and there were moments when I contemplated redirecting my focus toward other professional doctorate projects, private practice, or leisure pursuits. What kept me going through this challenging endeavour was a mixture of sheer spite and stubbornness. This compelled me to persevere, even when the path to publication seemed uncertain. This experience has granted me an appreciation for the complexities and tribulations that researchers face in the pursuit of publication, particularly when research is not one's primary occupation. It underscores the importance of resilience and persistence in navigating the stringent demands of the academic publishing world.

Section 2: Research Findings and Implications

Systematic Review: Psychological Skills Training (PST)

In the systematic review, the efficacy of Psychological Skills Training (PST) in enhancing athletic performance was the focal point. Given the abundance of reviews in this domain, a comprehensive "review of reviews" or overview was undertaken to consolidate the evidence. This process included electronic searches across six databases, manual searches in thirteen journals, and exhaustive forward- and backward-searching. The overview incorporated 30 reviews, spanning systematic, meta-analytic, and narrative formats. These reviews met specific criteria, assessing PST's application to athletes, and summarising its impact on sport performance or surrogate measures. Data extraction encompassed review characteristics, PST interventions, and outcomes. Crucially, the reviews themselves underwent assessment, revealing that while 90% endorsed PST's performance-enhancing potential, a striking 97% were critically low in quality. This revelation cautions against hasty reliance on low-quality reviews. Practitioners should exercise caution when interpreting review-level evidence for PST interventions. The call to action is directed at prospective reviewers, urging adherence to

rigorous methodology to ensure future research's clarity and reliability regarding PST interventions' efficacy.

SpotlightPROFILE: Coach-Athlete Relationships

Effective partnerships between coaches and athletes have gained increasing significance in elite sport. This project delved into tools and interventions aimed at enhancing coach-athlete relationships, with a specific focus on the 'SpotlightPROFILE' psychometric tool developed by Mindflick®. The study's objective was to investigate the impact of the SpotlightPROFILE as an intervention for improving coach-athlete relationships. Coach-athlete pairs formed the study's sample and underwent a structured process involving the completion of the Spotlight psychometric tool. Subsequently, they received individual debriefing sessions, followed by a joint session as a pair. Quantitative analysis using the Wilcoxon Sign Test, comparing Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) scores before and after the intervention, revealed no statistically significant differences. However, qualitative insights emerged from post-intervention interviews, subjected to thematic content analysis. Themes such as 'increased insight into self and partner' and 'accelerated development of a shared working framework' emerged from the analysis. These findings suggest that the Spotlight intervention may yield beneficial effects on coach-athlete relationships, particularly in terms of enhancing self-awareness and establishing a shared framework for collaboration. While the quantitative analysis did not reveal significant differences, the qualitative aspects hint at valuable impacts. To comprehensively understand the potential of the Spotlight tool, further research utilising alternative methodologies is recommended, mindful of the current study's limitations.

Practitioners' Attitudes Towards Psychometrics

This qualitative study explores sport psychology practitioners' attitudes and use of psychometric measures. Eight practitioners at various career stages, pursuing or completing professional doctorates in Sport and Exercise Psychology at a British university, participated in interviews analysed using thematic content analysis. Three thematic clusters emerged, revealing diverse attitudes toward psychometric tools. Practitioners expressed positive perceptions, reservations grounded in personal beliefs, and scepticism. Institutional influences added complexity, highlighting diversity within the sport psychology community. The investigation unveiled multifaceted purposes and benefits derived from psychometric measures, from enhancing self-awareness to evidence-based decision-making. These advantages, however, were context specific. The research also highlighted limitations and challenges faced by practitioners, including psychometrics' inability to capture complexity, practical design issues, and ethical dilemmas. These concerns intersected with client-practitioner relationships and potential misuse of psychometric data. This study contributes to understanding attitudes and use of psychometrics in sport psychology. It emphasises the need to recognise practitioners' diverse viewpoints, contextualise benefits, and address limitations and ethical challenges. These insights inform training, practice guidelines, and discussions within the sport psychology community, aiding informed decision-making regarding psychometric tools.

Cross-Component Insights and Their Alignment with Research Philosophy

Across these three research components, a clear parallel emerges with the evolution of my research philosophy. Beginning with a realist foundation, my focus was on empirical reality and objective analysis. However, this journey has seen a shift towards critical realism. The systematic review of PST revealed critically low-quality evidence, underscoring the

importance of discerning evidence reliability, aligning with the critical realist perspective of multifaceted interpretation. The SpotlightPROFILE study introduced mixed methods to capture the complexities of coach-athlete relationships, acknowledging the interplay of objective and subjective elements. Exploring practitioners' attitudes toward psychometrics further solidified this shift. It unveiled diverse perspectives shaped by individual beliefs and ethical considerations. The interplay of my evolving research philosophy and findings enriched the interpretation of results. As my philosophy transitioned to critical realism, it provided deeper insights into coach-athlete relationships, psychological skills training, and attitudes toward psychometrics. This integration emphasises the symbiotic relationship between philosophy and empirical research, enhancing the depth of conclusions. It underscores that philosophy is not static but actively enriches the dialogue between empirical evidence and theoretical foundations.

Section 3: Reflection and Learning

Early Philosophy vs. Evolved Philosophy

My research journey initiated with a realist ontology, emphasising empirical reality, quantifiable outcomes, and the belief in an unequivocal truth. This early philosophy guided my preference for research methodologies rooted in objective, quantifiable data. However, my philosophical perspective underwent a profound evolution during my journey. This transformation was instigated by a growing recognition of the paramount role relationships play as mechanisms of change in sport and exercise psychology. Unlike empirically observed entities, relationships are not directly observable but can be inferred as powerful causal mechanisms, aligning with critical realism. Acknowledging relationships' centrality prompted a shift toward critical realism—a philosophy that recognises both objective reality and individual perspectives. This shift was further complemented by my adoption of dialectics,

seeking a middle ground between opposing philosophical viewpoints. It became apparent that while empirical evidence is invaluable, it must coexist with an appreciation of the intricate interplay between objective reality and subjective interpretations.

In summary, my research journey has seen a significant transition from a realist ontology to a critical realist perspective. This evolution has been characterised by a deeper understanding of the significance of relationships, the recognition of their role as causal mechanisms, and the practice of balancing opposing philosophical stances. This transformation has profoundly influenced my research approach and enriched my ability to explore the nuanced dynamics within the field of sport and exercise psychology.

Personal Growth and Future Research:

Throughout my research journey, I have witnessed a profound evolution not only in my research philosophy but also in my personal growth as a researcher. When I embarked on this path, I resonated with Albert Einstein's sentiment that "if we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be called research." This sentiment was rooted in my relative inexperience with research and my initial adherence to a realist ontology. However, as my journey unfolded, I gained invaluable experience and insights that transformed my perspective. I learned to embrace my core beliefs and adopted an ontology that resonated with my evolving understanding of research practice. This shift allowed me to move beyond the confines of what I had been taught and explore new methods of research. Importantly, it led me to develop a more profound appreciation for the complexity and intricacies of research. The consequence of this transformation is that while I now know more, I also recognise the vastness of the unknown.

As I look to the immediate future, I am driven by the goal of disseminating my Spotlight paper and seeking publication for the psychometrics paper. These endeavours reflect my commitment to contributing to the field and sharing the knowledge I have gained. In terms of future research generation, I maintain a sense of humility and limited ambition. However, my confidence as a researcher lies in my ability to interpret newly published literature as the field evolves. This skill will enable me to continually update my practice, staying at the forefront of research in sport and exercise psychology.

Conclusion

In the pursuit of understanding the research process, my journey as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist has been marked by profound transformations in my research philosophy. At the outset, I grappled with the daunting task of conducting research while adhering to a realist ontology, emphasising empirical reality and objective analysis. This early philosophy shaped my initial research choices, favouring quantification and systematic reviews.

However, my research journey led to an evolution of my philosophical outlook. Through experiences, reflections, and the recognition of relationships as potent mechanisms of change, I transitioned towards a critical realist ontology. This perspective allowed me to acknowledge both objective reality and individual perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities within sport and exercise psychology.

These philosophical shifts have left an indelible mark on my research journey. They influenced my choice of methodologies, guided data collection and analysis, and enriched the

interpretation of research findings. The dialectical tension between realism and relativism became a central theme, emphasising the importance of seeking a golden middle ground.

As I reflect on this journey, I recognise the profound personal growth that has accompanied my evolving philosophy. My confidence as a researcher has grown, enabling me to explore new research methods and interpret evolving literature. While my immediate future involves disseminating my research and contributing to the field, my enduring commitment lies in the dynamic interplay between research philosophy and the ever-evolving landscape of sport and exercise psychology.

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Practice Log of Training

Client Details	Professional Standards (incl. CPD) Location	Date	Nature of activity	Contact hours	Placement host details
LJMU	LJMU	16/01/2020	Training day	6	NA
JSF	JSF	20/01/2020	Online Course	4	JSF
JSF	JSF	20/01/2020	Planning training	4	NA
Jersey Sport	Public	21/01/2020	Partnership meeting	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	21/01/2020	First Aid	4	St John's Ambulance
JSF	JSF	22/01/2020	Safeguarding	3	Jersey Sport
JSF	JSF	23/01/2020	Online Course	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	22/01/2020	Lifestyle colleague meeting	1	JSF
LJMU	JSF	24/01/2020	Case study write-up	5	JSF
LJMU	JSF	27/01/2020	Case study write-up	3	JSF

LJMU	JSF	27/01/2020	Ethics checklist	1	JSF
LJMU	LJMU	28/01/2020	Training day	7	NA
JSF	JSF	03/02/2020	Reflection	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	04/02/2020	Case study write-up	2.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	05/02/2020	Case study write-up	3.5	JSF
NA	JSF	11/02/2020	Reflections	3	NA
LJMU	LJMU	14/02/2020	Training day	7	NA
NA	JSF	11/03/2020	Reflections	1	NA
LJMU	LJMU	03/03/2020	Joe Causer supervision	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	05/03/2020	Jersey Sport partnership	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	09/03/2020	Reading	2	JSF
LJMU	LJMU	12/03/2020	Training day	7	NA
JSF	JSF	18/03/2020	Performance review meeting	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	19/03/2020	Partner organisation meeting	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	23/03/2020	Team meetings	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	24/03/2020	Online CPD	1	JSF

JSF	JSF	25/03/2020	Online CPD	3.5	JSF
LJMU	Home	25/03/2020	Online profdoc class	2	NA
JSF	Home	26/03/2020	Online CPD	1.5	NA
JSF	Home	31/03/2020	Online CPD	3	NA
JSF	Home	01/04/2020	Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Home	02/04/2020	Online uni class	2	NA
NA	Home	16/04/2020	Online uni class	1	NA
NA	Home	16/04/2020	AASP virtual conference	3	NA
NA	Home	17/04/2020	Grounding reading	2	NA
NA	Home	23/04/2020	Virtual class	3	NA
NA	Home	23/04/2020	Research participation	1	NA
NA	Home	24/04/2020	Mentorshio meeting (Andy Hill)	1	NA
NA	Home	28/04/2020	Case study write-up	3	NA
NA	Home	30/04/2020	Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Home	13/05/2020	Tutor meeting	2	NA

NA	Home	14/05/2020	Uni Class	2	NA
NA	Home	01/06/2020	Uni Class	2	NA
JSF	Home	02/06/2020	AHP meeting	1	JSF
NA	Home	11/06/2020	Uni Class	2	NA
JSF	Home	11/06/2020	Online CPD	6	NA
JSF	Home	16/06/2020	Online CPD	2	NA
NA	Home	01/07/2020	Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Home	06/07/2020	Tutor meeting	1	NA
JSF	Home	09/07/2020	AHP meeting	1	JSF
NA	Home	20/07/2020	Uni Class	3	NA
NA	Home	03/08/2020	Tutor meeting	1	Na
JSF	JSF	14/08/2020	In-house CPD	3	
JSF	Home	18/08/2020	AHP meeting	1	
JSF	Home	18/08/2020	AHP meeting	1	
JSF	Home	24/08/2020	AHP meeting	1	
JSF	Home	10/09/2020	AHP meeting	1	

JSF	Home	14/09/2020	SpotLight training	7.5	SpotLight
JSF	Home	15/09/2020	SpotLight training	6.5	SpotLight
JSF	Home	17/09/2020	SpotLight training	3	SpotLight
JSF	Home	23/10/2020	APT CBT course	18	
NA	Home	29/10/2020	Uni Class	2	NA
NA	Home	03/11/2020	First4Sport reading	1	NA
NA	Home	05/11/2020	Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Home	06/11/2020	First4Sport reading	1	NA
NA	Home	09/11/2020	First4Sport work	5	NA
NA	Home	17/11/2020	Tutor meeting	1	Na
NA	Home	30/11/2020	First4Sport work	2	NA
NA	Home	10/12/2020	Uni Class	2	NA
NA	Home	03/03/2021	CBT CPD	18	NA
NA	Home	21/07/2021	DBT CPD	18	NA
NA	Home	08/10/2021	MI CPD	18	NA
NA	Home	16/12/2021	Psychiatric drugs webinar	4	NA

NA	Home	07/01/2022	Suicide prevention training	8	NA
NA	Zoom	03/11/2021	DT Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Zoom	20/10/2021	DT Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Zoom	01/09/2021	DT Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Zoom	15/06/2021	DT Tutor meeting	1	NA
NA	Zoom	25/02/2022	DT Tutor meeting	1	NA
GoJ	Online	03/03/2022	DBT Essentials Training	16	
LJMU	Online	01/06/2022	Tutor Meeting	1	
LJMU	Online	12/09/2022	Tutor Meeting	1	
GoJ	Home	Mar-23	Low intensity CBT training	48	
GoJ	Exter University	Mar-23	Low intensity CBT training	16	
GoJ	Home	Apr-23	Low intensity CBT training	48	
GoJ	Exter University	Apr-23	Low intensity CBT training	16	
GoJ	Home	May-23	Low intensity CBT training	48	
GoJ	Exter University	May-23	Low intensity CBT training	16	
GoJ	Home	Jun-23	Low intensity CBT training	48	

GoJ	Exter University	Jun-23	Low intensity CBT training	16	
GoJ	Home	Jul-23	Low intensity CBT training	48	
GoJ	Exter University	Jul-23	Low intensity CBT training	16	
GoJ	Home	Sep-23	Low intensity CBT training	48	
GoJ	Exeter University	Sep-23	Low intensity CBT training	16	
GoJ	Home	Oct-23	Low intensity CBT training	64	

	Consultancy				
Client Details	**Location**	**Date**	**Nature of activity**	**Contact hours**	**Placement host details**
JSF	JSF	20/01/2020	Consultancy Prep	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	21/01/2020	Consultancy Prep	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	21/01/2020	Athlete rehab planning	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	22/01/2020	Consultancy prep	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	23/01/2020	Consultancy Prep	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	23/01/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2.5	JSF

JSF	JSF	24/01/2020	1-2-1 notes and feedback	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	27/01/2020	Profile Design	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	27/01/2020	Project Gold intake	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	27/01/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	28/01/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	28/01/2020	Profile development/review	4	JSF
JSF	JSF	03/02/2020	Profile development/review	4	JSF
JSF	JSF	06/02/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	07/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	06/02/2020	1-2-1 prep/profiling/management team meetings	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	14/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	19/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	20/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	20/02/2020	Coach 1-2-1	0.5	JSF

JSF	JSF	24/02/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	25/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	28/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-2	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	28/02/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	29/02/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	01/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	02/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	02/03/2020	Profile development/review	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	04/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2	JSF
La Moye	La Moye	09/03/2020	Coaching	3	JSF
JSF	JSF	09/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	09/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	06/03/2020	AM meeting	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	10/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	18/03/2020	Team strategy meeting	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	23/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF

JSF	JSF	23/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	24/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	JSF	24/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	25/03/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	25/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	30/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	30/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	31/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	31/03/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	02/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1s	2.5	JSF
JSF	Home	03/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	03/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	07/04/2020	Case formulations	3	JSF

JSF	Home	08/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	08/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	09/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	14/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	14/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	14/04/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	15/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	15/04/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	15/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	17/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	22/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	22/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	23/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	23/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	24/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	28/04/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF

JSF	Home	28/04/2020	Profiling	1	JSF
JSF	Home	29/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	29/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	30/04/2020	1-2-1 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	30/04/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	2.5	JSF
JSF	Home	01/05/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/05/2020	Athlete 1-2-1	1	JSF
JSF	Home	11/05/2020	Coach meeting	2	JSF
JSF	Home	12/05/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	13/05/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	14/05/2020	Athlete 121s	3	JSF
JSF	Home	14/05/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	15/05/2020	122 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	15/05/2020	Athlete 121s	1	JSF
JSF	Home	15/05/2020	Coach meetings	3	JSF
JSF	Home	22/05/2020	Athlete 121s	2.5	JSF

JSF	Home	22/05/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	26/05/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	26/05/2020	Athlete 121	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	29/05/2020	Athlete 1212	2	JSF
JSF	Home	29/05/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	01/06/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/06/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	03/06/2020	Coach meeting	2	JSF
JSF	Home	04/06/2020	Athlete 121s	3	JSF
JSF	Home	05/06/2020	Coach meeting	2	JSF
JSF	Home	05/06/2020	Athlete 121s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	08/06/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	08/06/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	08/06/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	10/06/2020	Coach meetings	4	JSF
JSF	Home	10/06/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF

JSF	Home	10/06/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	11/06/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	11/06/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	12/06/2020	Athlete 121s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	13/06/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	14/06/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	14/06/2020	Athlete 121s	3	JSF
JSF	Home	22/06/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	01/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	01/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	03/07/2020	121 prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	03/07/2020	Athlete 121s	3	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	07/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	07/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF

JSF	Home	08/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	08/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	09/07/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	09/07/2020	Athlete 121	3	JSF
JSF	Home	10/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	13/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	13/07/2020	Coach meetings	2	JSF
JSF	Home	14/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	15/07/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	15/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	17/07/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	17/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	FB Fields	21/07/2020	Observation and 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	28/07/2020	121 prep	2	JSF

JSF	Home	28/07/2020	Athlete 121s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	30/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	30/07/2020	Athlete 121s	2	JSF
JSF	Home	04/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	04/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	Competition Obs	2	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	06/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	08/07/2020	Competition Obs	2	JSF
JSF	Home	10/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	10/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	12/07/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	12/07/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	13/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF

JSF	Home	13/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	17/07/2020	Coach/athlete meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	19/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	19/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	21/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	21/07/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	24/07/2020	Case formulations	3	JSF
JSF	Home	25/07/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	25/07/2020	Athlete 121	3	JSF
JSF	Home	28/08/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	28/08/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	09/09/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	09/09/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/09/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/09/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	17/09/2020	121 prep	1	JSF

JSF	Home	17/09/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	21/09/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	21/09/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	23/09/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	23/09/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	28/09/2020	Spotlight debrief	1	JSF
JSF	Home	28/09/2020	debrief prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	28/09/2020	Coach meeting	1	JSF
JSF	Home	29/09/2020	Spotlight debrief	1	JSF
JSF	Home	29/09/2020	debrief prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	30/09/2020	Spotlight debrief	1	JSF
JSF	Home	30/09/2020	121 prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	30/09/2020	Athlete 121	3	JSF
JSF	Home	02/10/2020	debrief prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/10/2020	Spotlight debrief	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF

JSF	Home	02/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	03/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	03/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	04/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	04/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	05/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	05/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	14/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	14/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	19/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	19/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	21/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	21/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	22/10/2020	121 prep	2	JSF

JSF	Home	22/10/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	27/10/2020	121 prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	27/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	29/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	29/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/11/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/11/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	03/11/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	04/11/2020	121 prep	2	JSF
JSF	Home	04/11/2020	Athlete 121	2	JSF
JSF	Home	06/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	16/10/2020	Competition sims	2	JSF
JSF	Home	17/10/2020	121 prep	1	JSF

JSF	Home	17/10/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	26/10/2020	121 prep	8	JSF
JSF	Home	26/10/2020	Athlete 121	8	JSF
JSF	Home	01/12/2020	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	01/12/2020	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	04/12/2020	121 prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	04/12/2020	Athlete 121	3	JSF
JSF	Home	10/12/2020	121 prep	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	10/12/2020	Athlete 121	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	16/12/2020	121 prep	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	16/12/2020	Athlete 121	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	17/12/2020	121 prep	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	17/12/2020	Athlete 121	1.5	JSF
JSF	Home	06/01/2021	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	06/01/2021	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	25/01/2021	121 prep	1	JSF

JSF	Home	25/01/2021	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/02/2021	121 prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	02/02/2021	Athlete 121	1	JSF
JSF	Home	17/02/2021	121 prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	17/02/2021	Athlete 121	3	JSF
JSF	Community	Apr-21	Athlete 121s	3	Private
JSF	Community	Apr-21	121 prep	3	Private
JSF	Community	May-21	Athlete 121s	5	Private
JSF	Community	May-21	121 prep	5	Private
JSF	Community	Jun-21	Athlete 121s	6	Private
JSF	Community	Jun-21	121 prep	6	Private
JSF	Community	Jul-21	Athlete 121s	5	Private
JSF	Community	Jul-21	121 prep	5	Private
JSF	Community	Aug-21	Athlete & coach 121s	8	Private
JSF	Community	Aug-21	121 prep	6	Private
Private	Community	Aug-21	Athlete 121s	4	Private

Private	Community	Aug-21	121 prep	4	Private
JSF	Community	Sep-21	Athlete 121s	6	Private
JSF	Community	Sep-21	121 prep	6	Private
Private	Community	Sep-21	Athlete 121s	6	Private
Private	Community	Sep-21	121 prep	6	Private
JSF	Community	Oct-21	Athlete 121s	5	Private
JSF	Community	Oct-21	121 prep	5	Private
Private	Community	Oct-21	Athlete 121s	5	Private
Private	Community	Oct-21	121 prep	5	Private
JSF	Community	Nov-21	Athlete 121s	6	Private
JSF	Community	Nov-21	121 prep	6	Private
Private	Community	Nov-21	Athlete 121s	6	Private
Private	Community	Nov-21	121 prep	6	Private
JSF	Community	Dec-21	Athlete 121s	5	Private
JSF	Community	Dec-21	121 prep	5	Private
Private	Community	Dec-21	Athlete 121s	4	Private

Private	Community	Dec-21	121 prep	4	Private
JSF	Community	Jan-22	Athlete 121s	3	Private
JSF	Community	Jan-22	121 prep	3	Private
Private	Community	Jan-22	Athlete 121s	3	Private
Private	Community	Jan-22	121 prep	2	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Feb-22	Athlete 121s	3	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Mar-22	Athlete 121s	7	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Apr-22	Athlete 121s	4	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	May-22	Athlete 121s	5	Private
CGAJ, Private	Community (SWC)	Jun-22	Athlete 121s	18	Private
CGAJ, Private	Community (SWC)	Jul-22	Athlete 121s	16	Private
CGAJ	Birmingham	Aug-22	Athlete 121s	50	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Sep-22	Athlete 121s	4	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Oct-22	Athlete 121s	3	Private

Private	Community (SWC)	Nov-22	Athlete 121s	4	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Dec-22	Athlete 121s	4	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Jan-23	Athlete 121s	7	Private
Private	Community (SWC)	Feb-23	Athlete 121s	11	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Mar-23	Athlete 121s	11	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Apr-23	Athlete 121s	12	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	May-23	Athlete 121s	7	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Jun-23	Athlete 121s	8	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Jul-23	Athlete 121s	10	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Aug-23	Athlete 121s	12	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Sep-23	Athlete 121s	7	Private
Private	Community (Regus)	Oct-23	Athlete 121s	8	Private

Research			
Location	**Date**	**Nature of activity**	**Contact hours**

JSF	22/01/2020	Literature search	2
JSF	28/01/2020	Literature search	1.5
JSF	07/02/2020	Literature search	1
JSF	20/02/2020	Literature search	1
LJMU	12/03/2020	Tutor meeting	1
JSF	18/03/2020	Protocol research	2
Home	23/03/2020	Tutor meeting	1
Home	11/06/2020	Protocol writeup	4
Home	29/05/2020	Tutor meeting	1
Home	13/06/2020	Protocol writeup	2
LJMU	22/06/2020	Tutor meeting	1
Home	22/06/2020	Protocol writeup	2
Home	23/06/2020	Protocol writeup	4
Home	30/06/2020	Lit search	7
Home	01/07/2020	Lit search	7
Home	06/07/2020	Tutor meeting	1

Home	07/07/2020	Lit search	3.5
Home	08/07/2020	Lit search	3.5
Home	14/07/2020	Lit search	3.5
Home	15/07/2020	Lit search	4.5
Home	16/07/2020	Lit search	1.5
Home	21/07/2020	Lit search	5
Home	22/07/2020	Lit search	2
Home	23/07/2020	Lit search	2
Home	24/07/2020	Lit search	2
Home	25/07/2020	Lit search	2
Home	28/07/2020	Lit search	2
Home	29/07/2020	Lit search	2
Home	03/08/2020	Lit search	2
Home	04/08/2020	Lit search	2
Home	05/08/2020	Lit search	5
Home	06/08/2020	Lit search	2.5

Home	07/08/2020	Lit search	1.5
Home	11/08/2020	Extraction	6.5
Home	13/08/2020	Extraction	4.5
Home	19/08/2020	SLR	6
Home	20/08/2020	SLR	6
Home	25/08/2020	SLR	1.5
Home	26/08/2020	SLR	4
Home	27/08/2020	SLR	5
Home	28/08/2020	SLR	1
Home	08/09/2020	SLR	3
Home	09/09/2020	SLR	2
Home	10/09/2020	SLR	3
Home	11/09/2020	SLR	4
Home	16/09/2020	SLR	2
Home	17/09/2020	SLR	3
Home	18/09/2020	SLR	3

Home	24/09/2020	SLR	4
Home	28/09/2020	SLR	2
Home	05/10/2020	SLR	7
Home	14/10/2020	SLR	8
Home	16/10/2020	SLR	2
Home	20/10/2020	SLR	6
Home	21/10/2020	SLR	3
Home	05/11/2020	SLR	6
Home	27/11/2020	SLR	4
Home	Dec-20	SLR	12
Home	Jan-21	SLR	20
Home	Feb-21	SLR	20
Home	Mar-21	SLR	10
Home	Apr-21	SLR	8
Home	May-21	SLR	8
Home	Jun-21	SLR	8

Home	Jul-21	SLR	8
Home	Aug-21	SLR	12
Home	Sep-21	Paper 1	15
Home	Oct-21	Paper 1	10
Home	Nov-21	Paper 1	10
Home	Dec-21	Paper 1	20
Home	Jan-22	Paper 1	0
Home	Feb-22	Paper 1	0
Home	Mar-22	Paper 1	0
Home	Apr-22	Paper 1	0
Home	May-22	SLR	12
Home	Jun-22	SLR	12
Home	Jul-22	SLR	12
Home	Aug-22	SLR	0
Home	Sep-22	SLR	12
Home	Oct-22	SLR	20

Home	Nov-22	SLR	20
Home	Dec-22	SLR	20
Home	Jan-23		0
Home	Feb-23		0
Home	Mar-23		0
Home	Apr-23	Paper 2	10
Home	May-23	Paper 2	10
Home	Jun-23	Paper 2	12
Home	Jul-23	Paper 2	4
Home	Aug-23	Paper 2	22
Home	Sep-23	Research commentary	18
Home	Oct-23	Meta-reflection	16
Home	Nov-23	N/A	0

	Education/Dissemination				
Client Details	**Location**	**Date**	**Nature of activity**	**Contact hours**	**Placement host details**
JSF	JSF	22/01/2020	Workshop topic brainstorm	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	23/01/2020	Workshop topic brainstorm and survey	3	JSF
JSF	JSF	04/02/2020	Workshop planning	2.5	JSF
Highlands College	JSF	04/02/2020	Lesson planning	2.5	JSF
Highlands College	JSF	05/02/2020	Lesson planning	2.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	05/02/2020	Workshop planning	2.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	06/02/2020	Workshop planning	6	JSF
Highlands College	FB Fields	11/02/2020	Lesson delivery	3	JSF
JSF	JSF	17/02/2002	Workshop prep/pilot	3.5	JSF
Highlands	JSF	20/02/2020	Lesson planning	1	JSF

College					
Highlands College	JSF	24/02/2020	Lesson planning	4	JSF
Highlands College	FB Fields	25/02/2020	Lesson delivery	3	JSF
JSF	JSF	26/02/2020	Workshop delivery	1.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	27/02/2020	Workshop delivery	2.5	JSF
JSF	JSF	02/03/2020	Workshop review and planning	1	JSF
Highlands College	JSF	04/03/2020	Lesson Planning	1	JSF
Highlands College	Highlands College	05/03/2020	Lesson delivery	4	JSF
Highlands College	Highlands College	17/03/2020	Lesson delivery	4	JSF
Highlands College	JSF	16/03/2020	Lesson Planning	1	JSF

JSF	JSF	18/03/2020	Workshop planning	2	JSF
JSF	JSF	23/03/2020	Workshop prep	3	JSF
JSF	JSF	24/03/2020	Workshop prep	3	JSF
JSF	JSF	25/03/2020	Workshop prep	4	JSF
JSF	JSF	26/03/2020	Workshop prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	01/04/2020	Workshop prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	07/04/2020	Workshop prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	08/04/2020	Workshop prep	1	JSF
JSF	Home	27/04/2020	Workshop prep	6	JSF
JSF	Home	15/05/2020	Dominion education prep	5	JSF
JSF	Home	19/05/2020	Dominion education prep	5	JSF
JSF	Home	21/05/2020	Delivery	2	JSF
JSF	Home	26/05/2020	Workshop prep	3	JSF
JSF	Home	29/05/2020	Delivery	3	JSF
JSF	Home	10/07/2020	Staff CPD session	1	JSF
JSF	Home	27/08/2020	Staff CPD session	1	JSF

CGAJ	CGAJ	Jun-22	Spotlight workshop preparation	5	Private
CGAJ	CGAJ	Jul-22	Spotlight workshop delviery	1	Private
PFKBBA	Online	Jan-22	Spotlight workshop preparation	5	Private
PFKBBA	Online	Feb-22	Spotlight workshop delviery	1	Private

Reflective Practice Diary

22/1/20 - Working with an Injured Athlete

Description

I was involved in a planning and goal setting meeting with an injured athlete. He is a heptathlete, who is recovering from a chronic hip flexor injury, which has prevented him from engaging in any speed-power training which engages his lower body. This has led to a decrease in his motivation and general mood. However, he described how being injured has allowed him to word hard on his bench press, which he believes is responsible for a recent PB in shot-putt. He described how this resulted in a lift in his mood, and it was decided that he should work in this area further, even though it is already an area of strength. I was able to use limited self-disclosure to demonstrate empathy and attentiveness to what he was saying.

Thoughts and Emotions

These events prompted me to reflect on my thoughts about strengths-based approaches. I have previously been sceptical of such approaches, as the law of diminishing returns would suggest that identifying and developing athletes' areas of weaknesses more effectively facilitates performance gains. However, in this instance it seemed best to focus on the athlete's area of strength (upper body speed/power development) rather than his area of weakness (Capacity work, which he expressed he was finding boring and was further decreasing his motivation). This made me think that while it is often appropriate to target areas of weakness to get the fastest returns, in some contexts working on strengths may be more appropriate. These thoughts didn't provoke a strong emotional response – if anything I was a little surprised by the realisation.

Evaluation

Positive:

- I was able to identify that a particular approach did not match with my typical model of practice but was able to critically analyse it in context and decide that it was probably the best option.

Negative:

- I had probably prematurely written of strengths-based approaches in my own mind based on a general principle, where they may have some utility in specific contexts.

Analysis

This was a positive learning experience, an event provided disconfirming evidence related to a preconception I was holding. As a result, I am now more open to incorporating strengths-based approaches in my own practice where appropriate. Having said that I would still maintain that in most cases targeting areas of weakness is the appropriate default. This was also a useful opportunity for me to utilise self-disclosure as a counselling skill to enhance the quality of the client-practitioner relationship, which is indicated in the practitioner development literature to be a commonly used strategy by other neophyte sport psychologists (Longstaff & Gervis, 2016).

Action

- Be open, in principle, to utilising strengths-based approaches in future.
- Watch out for situations where strengths-based approaches could be appropriate for applied sport psychology deliver, as opposed to physical preparation.
- I am planning to read more into strengths-based approaches. I have some awareness of Kate Ludlam's "Super Strengths" approach, but my memory is vague. It would be

worth increasing my awareness of this approach, either so that I can use it where appropriate, or so that I can provide a robust critique of it should I ever be asked to defend why I do not utilise it.

03/02/20 -Values checklist exercise

Description

Out of interest, I completed a values checklist exercise supplied by a colleague who I had approached to learn more about ACT. Prompted by remembering that values and core beliefs were the foundational layer of Poczwardowski, Ravizza and Sherman's (2004) hierarchy, I decided to re-read their paper and reflect on my own core beliefs and values. According to the values checklist exercise, my core values are courage, humility, persistence, self-development, self-control, and trust. Upon re-reading the paper, three points to consider that the authors suggest stood out: "convictions regarding free will versus determinism in human actions, people being rational versus irrational, and fundamental goodness (vs. badness) of human nature." I reflected that I did not believe that humans are either totally self- or externally determined (although I am certain that we are less self-determined than we believe we are), that people are neither totally irrational nor rational (although I lean more towards rationality) and, regarding the fundamental goodness of humans, that we are neither fundamentally good nor bad, but we are fundamentally self-interested. This could manifest itself in goodness or badness, depending on the exact circumstances. In addition, whether we are "good" or "bad" is largely not innate- in my opinion this is determined environmentally, based on context and learning.

Thoughts and Emotions

I felt a sense of pride from completing the exercise and reading the list of six values. I thought that they did genuinely reflect what I value in life, particularly self-development. This was the most important of the values, the others listed function to facilitate self-development. In addition, other values that I rated highly were subsumed by self-development (such as challenge, excitement). Reflecting on the questions proposed by Poczwardowski et al. (2004) made me feel a little disappointed, as the answers that I found were not what would typically be considered the most optimistic. I also felt pretentious, not giving either/or answers as the dichotomous nature of the questions suggests one should – however I do not think extreme positions on these issues would be correct.

Evaluation

Positive:

On reflection, I am pleased that I did not try to give binary answers to the proposed questions, even though the way that they are phrased lends itself to binary answers. In a way, I see this as demonstrating courage – doing what I believe is right, regardless of whether it is easy.

Negative:

I wonder how much my responses to the values checklist were informed by my present state, rather than my traits. It is possible that my answers were influenced by several environmental factors – my physical environment (I completed the checklist at work), what I am reading at present and my current mode of practice (I may have unconsciously tried to select values that would point towards the model of practice I am currently using, rather than the other way around).

Analysis

This was a beneficial exercise in developing my professional practice and my reflective practice. Going forward, I can review the theoretical underpinnings of my practice and examine whether they match the values and core beliefs which I have written about here.

Action

- I aim to revisit this checklist in six months' time, to examine whether my values and core beliefs have remained stable (as they should have done).

- I've written my values in a visible place (on the front of my notebook) so that I am regularly reminded of them and can measure my behaviour and decisions against them.

06/02/20 - Practitioner Approach

Description

As part of the write up for my first consultancy case study, I am required to write about my theoretical orientation and approach to service delivery. As an exercise to get myself thinking about this issue, I re-read Keegan's (2015) chapter on practice philosophy and completed the self-awareness exercise detailed at the end of the chapter. The conclusion of this exercise was the following:

o My style can be characterised as cognitive-behaviourally based, and practitioner led.

o My aims are performance enhancement, education and self-regulation

o I believe human psychology is most compatible with fallibilism.

o I pursue my aims through education/coaching.

o My guiding principle is that I am the expert, and I will direct the sessions

o My role is to assess, then analyses and educate.

o Needs analyses and case formulations should have a theoretical grounding.

o Psychometrics are useful tools for assessment and monitoring.

o Close relationships with clients are nice, but non-essential.

Thoughts and Emotions

Like the values exercise, I felt a sense of pride at having detailed my approach and the philosophy that underpinned it. This was a learning experience; it enhanced my awareness of myself and my practice. I felt more confident that I would be able to describe my approach to others having completed this exercise. I also feel better able to justify this approach and am more familiar with the critique of this approach and others, should I ever need to offer it.

Evaluation

I'll take this as a chance to evaluate my own practice and model of delivery.

Positive:

- It's novice-friendly – There are lots of resources available to teach oneself MST, and allied methods such as CBT, REBT and ACT are relatively easy to add to a repertoire through preliminary reading followed by in-person courses.

- The scientific grounding of this approach is more likely to resonate and be viewed as credible by my colleagues.

- Use of psychometrics efficiently provides lots of measurable data.

- There is a wealth of extant resources to draw from to use in sessions.

- Approaches to service delivery are highly structured, which is useful for an inexperienced practitioner.

- Delivery is fast.

Negative:

- Approach under-emphasises the importance of the quality of the client-practitioner relationship, which has been demonstrated to be a crucial factor in intervention success (Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999).

- Practitioner led intervention may come across as overly paternalistic to some athletes.

- Some wider athlete lifestyle issues fall outside the scope of PST (but may be addressed by REBT, for example)

Analysis

At this time, my approach and the underpinning philosophy are congruent with my core beliefs, as detailed in my previous reflection. The focus on learned behaviour and the environment advocated by the cognitive-behavioural approach sits well with my view that behaviour is largely determined by environment and learning. In addition, my belief that humans are mostly rational corresponds well with use of REBT. In addition, viewing my role as that of an educator or instructor sits well with self-development, my core value, because as an educator the aim is to facilitate the self-development of others. The extant practitioner development literature suggests that it is normal for neophyte practitioners to adopt a relatively client led, CB approach (Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2009). This gives me some reassurance, as many of my peers have gravitated more towards existential/humanistic, counselling-based, approaches. I am reassured by the practitioner development literature that what I am doing is not particularly wrong, or out of the ordinary.

Action

- When I repeat the values exercise in six months' time, I will also repeat the practitioner approach exercise, once again to monitor and evaluate how my practice philosophy and approach has changed.

11/02/20 - First Highlands lesson

Description

Today was the first time that I taught a class of students. I was teaching on the Lifestyle and Physical Activity module of a Sport and Exercise Science course, provided by a local higher education college. I was teaching a class on methods of assessment, which included components on questionnaires, interviews, and data protection. I taught alongside one of my colleagues form the JSF, who had delivered the course up until this point. I taught a class of 12 young adults, who were at the equivalent level as a first-year undergraduate. The session lasted for three hours and would have lasted longer but the students needed time to work on one of their formative assessments.

Thoughts and Emotions

One of my concerns before the session was how to create the content needed for the session. Partly, I didn't really know where to start, and partly because I was very time pressured when I was needing to prepare. In the end, I drew from the lecture materials that I had saved from two of my postgraduate master's degree, and "dumbed it down" a suitable amount. I was aware that the education level of the students was not as high as would be the case on a normal undergraduate course, and my colleague had informed me that some of the students had difficulty focusing their attention for long periods of time. For this reason, I attempted to make the session as engaging as possible, to retain their attention. However, this was further

complicated by the fact that one of the students apparently has extreme difficulty with speaking aloud in the group, which limited the potential for individual discussion / presentation style activities. I was quite nervous before this lesson, however once again my nerves were mitigated by the environment that I was in. I was seated whilst I was delivering, and we were all sat around a table, so it felt less like a presentation and more like a led discussion.

Evaluation

The experience was an overall positive. It was my first attempt at teaching, and it went well – therefore it was a mastery experience and my confidence going forward is increased. This is particularly pertinent given that I am going to be launching my own workshop series soon, which I will be delivering individually to athletes on the high-performance programme – so the stakes are higher.

A negative aspect of this experience is that, on reflection, I had pre-judged the students that I was going to be teaching. I went into the lesson assuming that they would be inattentive, and it would be difficult to keep their attention. Whilst this in part turned out to be true, this may have been to some extent a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is also somewhat hypocritical for me to teach about the virtues of empathic neutrality and a non-judgemental approach, having prejudged my own students so. In addition, my actions here contradict my own values of self-development and trust, I should go into the lesson with good faith, trusting that the students are there for the right reason (their own self-development).

Analysis

This was a positive experience in that it went well, and was a mastery experience, increasing my self-efficacy with relation to teaching. However, my approach and prejudgements were not congruent with my values, and I was not modelling the behaviour that I was teaching as best practice.

Action

- Next time that I am teaching, I will first take time to examine my assumptions going into the session and analyse whether they are consistent with my values.

27/02/20 - Ethics Checklist

Description

Continuing to work through "Being a Sport Psychologist" (Keegan, 2015), I completed the ethical practice checklist, which had been extracted (with permission) from Moore (2003). Most of my answers were in line with what the author described as ethical practice. The ones that were not were:

- Am I providing informed consent that is detailed, honest and appropriately describes: empirical support (or lack thereof) for services/other intervention options/the extent to which these interventions are likely to be effective?

- When I attend organisational events, do I remain superficial in my contact with client-athletes and avoid excessive socialising to limit the potential for loss of objectivity or the development of unnecessary dual-role relationships?

Thoughts and Emotions

Overall, I am satisfied that my practice is ethical, despite indication that there are some areas for improvement. I am confident that I could defend my practice in front of an ethics board or a court of law if necessary.

With regards to the first point, I was grateful that this exercise had raised this issue, as it is relatively easy to correct. All athletes agree sign an informed consent document upon enrolment on the program, and annually thereafter, so it was easy for me to update this document to reflect the suggestions for what should be included under the umbrella of informed consent for sport psychology service delivery.

With regards to the second point that the checklist raised, I feel more conflicted. As a result of my enrolment on the high-performance programme for a number of years before beginning employment with the JSF, ad being involved in a relatively small community of high-performance athletes in Jersey, I have previously established personal relationships with many athletes for whom I am now their sport psychologist. Thus, the demand to "remain superficial" and "avoid excessive socialising" makes me feel uncomfortable.

Evaluation

It is good that the issue around informed consent has been highlighted and changed. It is less than ideal that I have established relationships with athletes prior to the commencement of service delivery. However, this was unavoidable and cannot be changed now. Thus, given the reality that dual-role relationships exist whether I like it or not, I will proceed by ensuring that the athletes welfare is always my priority, and that confidentiality is protected appropriately.

Analysis

This exercise illustrated to me that professional ethics are rarely black-and-white. In our messy and contextualised world, following strict guidelines is often impossible due to circumstances. In these situations, we revert to the guiding principle of ethics – do my actions protect my client, my profession and myself? I am confident that the decisions I have made can be justified on these grounds. It struck me that the phraseology of some of the questions is biased towards a "left-sided" practitioner according to Keegan's conceptualisation. For example, use of the word "objectivity" suggests that such is possible, and "close personal relationships" are apparently to be avoided. A practitioner who is minded towards a client-led, existential/humanistic counselling perspective might disagree.

Action

- As mentioned, I have updated the athlete handbook to reflect the above points regarding informed consent.
- I will continuously monitor the dual relationships I have with athletes where they exist and seek mentorship from my supervisor on this issue.

04/03/2020 - Jersey Sport, Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity Workshop

Description

Jersey Sport hosted a three-hour workshop on Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity. The workshop did not come across as what was marketed. It appeared from the marketing to be a MHFA course for sport and PA, but in reality it seemed to be some education around mental health and mental illness (which was confusing and contradictory at

times) and recommendations for how volunteer coaches can recruit participants who have mental health difficulties, and remove barriers to entry (which was not what I, and the coaches attended had signed up for, and was not particularly relevant). Afterwards, I was encouraged to send detailed and honest critical feedback to Jersey Sport by John. I did so and received a response that was creditably honest and humble, reporting that they had received generally negative feedback, and thanking me for my honesty.

Thoughts and Emotions

In the workshop I felt frustrated and incredulous. Some of the information presented was confusing, some of it was plain wrong. I also felt bored, aside from two or three discussion tasks, the workshop was a very long lecture (so I also felt bored). Before sending my feedback, I was nervous – I didn't want to compromise any relationships with Jersey Sport. After receiving the response to my feedback, I felt relieved that it seemed no offence had been caused.

Evaluation

Positive:

- I'm glad that I sent the feedback, on reflection I was congruent with my values of courage, trust and development by being open and honest with critical feedback.
- It's good that Jersey Sport are taking on board constructive criticism.
- It's good that there is an increasing awareness of mental health in sport (I've been surprised in recent weeks at the levels of sub-clinical psychopathologies in the athletes I speak to).

Negative:

The misinformation in the initial workshop that was sent out to coaches is dangerous – it confuses what mental health and mental illness are, and therefore how they should be dealt with

The practical impact of the course was, and still is, limited – the main reasons participants had for going is not being addressed to my knowledge.

Analysis

This workshop reassured me – mine weren't that bad! In terms of the presentation at very least, in a perverse way it was nice to see that a paid professional with years of experience could be so much worse at delivering a presentation than me. Looking at the big picture, this workshop highlighted the sorry state of sport and mental health education in Jersey. It is not at all encouraging that there appeared to be a lack of evidence base, and no quality assurance, applied to a workshop being delivered by the government body for sport. That said, they have since recognised that the workshop was nowhere near what it needs to be, and they appear to be working hard on improving it.

Action

In future – be courageous! In this instance honesty was appreciated, even if the honest feedback was very critical. This reinforces the utility of behaving in a way that is congruent with my values.

10/03/2020 - La Moye Prison

Description

Today I worked at La Moye prison for the first time. The JSF delivers some S&C and education services there, and I was asked to cover a staff member who no longer felt comfortable working at the prison for personal reasons. While not explicitly sport psychology service delivery, I saw this as an opportunity to work on my people skills with a challenging population, and to use my knowledge of basic psychological needs to try to improve motivation in relation to barbell strength training.

Thoughts and Emotions

I felt nervous before the session, which is to be expected given that this is a frequent emotion among neophyte practitioners in new situations (Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2009). However, I felt much less nervous than in other novel situations, for example delivery of my first psychology workshop, or my first taught college lesson. Interestingly, I feel I was less nervous than one of my colleagues, or whom it was also his first time delivering at the prison. My nerves quickly dissipated when the session started though, the individuals I was working with were friendly, cooperative, and very engaged.

As a result, I was a little confused afterwards, as I had anticipated that working with convicted criminals would be difficult. I was conflicted, because I got on well with, and liked some of the individuals in the group. This was even though they were J Wing prisoners, so were mostly sex offenders.

Evaluation

Positive:

The key positive from this experience was that the session which my colleague and I delivered went well, the participants were engaged and receptive, and took away some useful information and skills. In fact, I found this group to be much more engaged and receptive than the class that I teach at highlands.

I'm also pleased that I was well able to answer one question from one of the group members. He is physically well developed and is familiar with strength training. He is also quite well versed in S&C theory (apparently this is common for prisoners, as they have lots of time to read). At one stage he asked me about post-activation potentiation, which I was able to answer reasonably competently. I sensed that he already knew the answer and was testing me. I'm glad that I had the knowledge to pass this little "test"!

Negative:

As previously mentioned, I had some mixed feelings about this event afterwards, and am still not sure that I have totally resolved why.

Analysis

I think that I felt less nervous than my colleague because the self-efficacy that I derived from the mastery experiences of delivering my first workshops and lessons is beginning to generalise to other situations (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1997). This event has forced me to think more about my views on the nature vs nurture debate. It's easy to think that criminals, particularly sex offenders, are in some way inherently different to me, my friends, my family etc. This is a comforting story, as it allows me to believe that me and mine could

never do the things that the J wing prisoners have done because, by nature, we are qualitatively different. However, the fact that in the short time I was with the prisoners, they behaved and interacted exactly as I would expect from a group of non-criminals in a gym environment (indeed I could imagine myself being friends with some of them), calls the validity of this story into question. Of course, these individuals have committed crimes, but this experience nonetheless forces me to consider that these individuals are not by nature any different to me or mine, they are human still after all. Rather, the environments in which they learned and were nurtured is what differentiates us.

Action

I honestly don't know what action to take off the back of this. My thoughts about it are still not clear, so I will continue to reflect. Perhaps I should read more into the nature vs nurture debate, and the free-will and determinism debate as the logical next step.

14/03/2020 - Covid-19 - Education under lockdown

Description

It seems that a total societal lockdown is inevitable, given the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the JSF team has been holding strategic meetings to determine how we can continue to deliver services and add value to our athletes under the circumstances. The outcome of these meetings has been positive, while S&C and physio will run at reduced capacity, this gives psychology, nutrition, lifestyle, and management room to operate at a greater capacity than usual. For myself, this means that I will have the chance to get the psychology profiles out and analyse the data as it trickles back. I'll also be able to chat (virtually) with each of the athletes, and their coaches, about the results of the profile, in keeping with our triangulation approach. Furthermore, I will be delivering psychology

webinars weekly to the athletes, to bring them up to their necessary LTAD mental fitness stage.

Thoughts and Emotions

The announcement of a total societal lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a wave of uncertainty and concern. Initially, I felt a sense of anxiety and worry about how this would impact our athletes and their progress. However, as the JSF team began holding strategic meetings, my outlook started to shift. The collaborative atmosphere and the proactive steps we are taking have instilled a sense of purpose and determination in me. I am eager to contribute in new ways and make a meaningful impact during this challenging time.

Evaluation

Positive:

- The lockdown provides an opportunity to focus on areas that often receive less attention, such as psychology, nutrition, lifestyle, and management.
- I will have the chance to work more closely with athletes on their psychological profiles, allowing for deeper analysis and personalised feedback.
- Virtual meetings and webinars offer a new platform for engagement, which can be more flexible and inclusive.
- The shift in focus can enhance the overall mental fitness of our athletes, aligning with their Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) goals.

Negative:

- Virtual interactions lack the personal touch and immediacy of face-to-face meetings, which could affect the depth of communication and connection.

- There is a risk that athletes may feel isolated or demotivated without their usual training routines and physical social interactions.

Analysis

The situation presents both challenges and opportunities. While the lockdown disrupts traditional training and support structures, it also opens up new avenues for focusing on the psychological and holistic aspects of athlete development. The strategic shift to emphasise psychology, nutrition, and lifestyle management can significantly benefit our athletes, helping them build resilience and adaptability. This period can serve as a valuable time for reflection, self-assessment, and mental growth, which are crucial components of athletic success. However, it is essential to be mindful of the potential negative impacts on motivation and physical progress and to address these proactively through regular communication and support.

Action

To maximise the benefits and mitigate the downsides, I will take the following actions:

1. Enhanced Communication: Schedule regular virtual check-ins with athletes and their coaches to discuss psychological profile results and provide tailored feedback. Ensure that these meetings are interactive and supportive, fostering a sense of connection and engagement.

2. Webinars and Workshops: Develop and deliver weekly psychology webinars that are not only informative but also interactive, encouraging participation and discussion. Topics will be aligned with the LTAD mental fitness stages and current challenges faced by athletes.

3. Mental Well-being Focus: Incorporate strategies for maintaining mental well-being, such as mindfulness practices, goal-setting exercises, and coping strategies for dealing with uncertainty and isolation.

26/03/2020 - Think aloud online tutorial

Description

It's week one of working from home. Everything is totally different to normal, but I shall leave talking about how my daily practice looks to another reflection. Right now, I will reflect on our first Prof Doc online lecture, with Dr Amy Whitehead on Think Aloud. Amy gave a lecture to a group of about 15 of us on Zoom. It was a re-run of the lecture that she gave us at MSc level, but I found this one to be much more impactful in terms of "take away and use it" knowledge. Amy talked about the levels of think aloud, the purposes of it and its application in research and applied work.

Evaluation

Positive:

It's good that we can continue learning even though the university has been shut down. A further positive is that this teaching is going to significantly impact on my applied practice once the Covid-19 lockdown has ended.

Negative:

The fact that this kind of teaching was as, if not more, helpful than traditional "go to university and be taught" learning makes me question why we learn that way on the Prof Doc. Going to university is a massive hassle for me and is not particularly friendly towards

the environment (or my bank balance). Why bother if the same quality of learning can be achieved from the comfort of my home? Or can it?

If a group of 15 can receive teaching this way, why not 100? Or 1000? Admittedly though, it would be harder to facilitate discussion and field questions in a group that large, but nonetheless the efficacy of this teaching method (admittedly based on this one-off anecdotal experience) calls into question the macrostructure of university learning.

Analysis

I'm going to use this section to talk about how I've made sense of Think Aloud, and how I can use it in my applied practice.

Recording self-talk – I could use TA to record the verbalisations (either external only or internal and external) of athletes, and use that as an assessment/needs analysis tool for optimising self-talk

Tracking thoughts in long-chain events – Use TA in longer events e.g., cycling, to track the frequency of different types of thoughts. Use MST strategies to change if necessary.

Improving communication – Using TA with athletes in training could be useful for helping them to verbalise things that they are not sure about, allowing them to then take this to their coaches/teammates to seek clarification.

TA for coaches – Could also be used to improve coaches' communication. Could run a TA workshop/webinar for coaches?

Action

Once lockdown is over, I will be integrating points one and two into my day-to-day practice. I'd like to review the second two points in more detail and think a bit about how it would be best to do that/what I'm hoping to achieve/what level of service that fits under.

02/04/20 - Work for first case study complete

Description

Today was my seventh session with the athlete that I am writing my first case study on – and was the review session. In the week I had given the athlete the TOPS questionnaire to fill out for the second time, which she returned to me before the session. I re-analysed the data and set the summary alongside the summary from January. In our meeting, we firstly went through our thoughts on how the consultancy had been, in an informal, dialogical manner. The athlete reflected those elements of the consultancy that had been useful; she now has a structured pre-shot routine, is getting familiar with applied relaxation and has more positive self-talk. However, she also reflected that some sessions had been less useful as she struggled to remember the content if they were more dialogical and less hands-on. She recommended to me that I should make the plan for the consultancy clearer to the athlete, so they know what's coming each week – and give a summary after sessions so that athletes could refer to previous weeks if the session consisted of talk alone. On seeing the feedback from the TOPS (which showed improvement in some of the skills we had worked on, no improvement in

others and no improvement in those we had not worked on) the athlete agreed and remarked that she felt the tool was accurate.

Thoughts and Emotions

Hearing criticism from clients is hard, and even though most of the feedback is good and I believe I've had an impact, hearing the "you could do better" parts still stung my pride. Overall, I'm happy that I seem to have made an impact, the athlete is happy with the service and wishes to continue too.

The athlete also recently shot a PB – I'm a little unsure as to how much this is due to the work we've been doing together, but I'm pleased for her.

The athlete's point about plans and providing summaries is good – doing that will professionalise my practice and make me more credible.

Evaluation

Positive:

- It's good that I've been able to get this block of work done, as I can now write it up for my first case study.
- It's good that sport psychology has benefitted this athlete.

Negative:

- I need to provide more clarity and structure when planning an intervention for an athlete – they will buy in more if they are involved in the process (autonomy) and feel competent as they know what's going on (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Analysis

This is probably the best outcome that I could have hoped for from a first real consultation. I made mistakes true – but they weren't massive, and in doing so I have found ways that I can do better in the future. In addition, despite those mistakes I have made a positive impact on the athletes training and performance. The practitioner development literature indicates that my experience is consistent with that of other trainees; that the need I feel to have tangible outcomes or positive feedback from clients to manage my anxieties and reassure myself of my professional worth is not unique to me (Tod, 2007). Indeed, Tod's paper indicates that experiencing and learning to overcome anxieties such as this is a crucial component of practitioner development.

Action

- In future I will provide athletes with plans for the consultancy that we will be doing so they are aware of the process.
- I will try to make skill learning as hands-on as possible.
- I will provide summaries to athletes after each session.
- I will be mindful of the fact that the anxiety and urge to demonstrate value which I experience is normal, while trying to mitigate any negative effects it could impose on my practice by staying true to my practice philosophy.

01/06/20 - "War is the only proper school of the surgeon"

Description

Today we were given a lecture by Lorraine O'Malley from the CFG. She relayed to us that in the previous week the director of a premier league football club had remarked to her that "Sport psychology is vitally important; the problem is there aren't very many good sport

psychologists", whatever than means (paraphrased). This raised the broader conversation of whether the training that trainee sport psychologists receive is adequate. Everyone who participated in this meeting agreed that they had found themselves unprepared at the time of their first job, captured by 'not knowing what they don't know'. This was a useful moment to collectively engage in reflective practice around this concept, and to consider what we might have liked to have happened differently if we'd had the time again.

Thoughts and Emotions

The thought that sprang into my mind after this conversation was the quote seen above, from Hippocrates in the third century BC – "War is the only proper school of the surgeon." I was struck that this appears to be the essence of the training that sport psychology practitioners receive. For example, at post-MSc level, the focus on how to do of sport psychology in training could be more extensive to compliment the perhaps natural assumption that trainees such as myself will use our knowledge and 'know how' to then, based on our own practice philosophy, develop our ability to do our craft in the arena of applied practice. More 'show how' in training would help. This is reflected in the professional development literature, as McCarthy and Jones (2013) note, many of their contributors commented on "Flying by the seat of their pants" as they first established themselves in the discipline. In essence, they only truly began learning their applied craft (surgery) in the field of applied practice (war).

My concern is that we do not view this approach with the same level of incredulity with which a modern surgeon would view the idea of teaching trainee surgeons nothing beyond general theory and subsequently tossing them battlefield casualties to see which would sink and which would swim. Nonetheless, this is the approach that we seem to take. While our

predecessors learned through trial and error, much as the early surgeons did, this does not necessitate that trainees must learn in the same way. Far better, surely, that we adopt the strategies for teaching medicine that have evolved in the millennia since Hippocrates, and rigorously train the craft skills of sport psychology through observation of qualified practitioners, simulation tests and role play.

Evaluation

This conversation was a useful experience. It forced me to consider explicitly, and to write this reflection on, an issue which I've given little thought to since reading the letter to the 15000 (Ingham, 2019). It is clear to me now that I need to take more responsibility of training myself with the "how to do it" of sport psychology.

Analysis

While it is hurtful to hear, it is somewhat clearer to me now why this director valued psychology deeply yet was sceptical of sport psychologists. It seems to me that at least part of this is due to some of the inadequacies of training. However, a useful component of this experience was the demonstration of the value of shared reflective practice. The practitioner development literature is clear that reflective practice, of which peer supervision is a component, is a useful a mechanism to assist practitioners develop their effectiveness (Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010). This is therefore a mechanism that I must ensure I am engaging with to develop my own knowledge, understanding and skills as a practitioner.

Action

Recognising that I must take more responsibility for technical training myself, in practice I need to continue with my training in ACT, and further my knowledge of MST (There's a new book on the way to me that should be helpful with this!). I'm also interested to explore the pedagogy of other, older, applied sciences to see how they teach their trainees. I hope to establish a network of people with whom I can engage with in peer supervision as a means of reflective practice, as this is something I found particularly beneficial from the session today.

01/07/2020 - Meaning in the context of Covid-19: being a sport psychologist

Description

This is reflection was written more in retrospect than usual. These events were approximately three months ago. The covid-19 pandemic has given me cause to reflect on the meaning and value of practicing as a sport psychologist. The pandemic brought into sharp focus the work of essential personnel from numerous sectors, including the medical sector, retail, agriculture, refuse disposal and several more. Sport psychology, sport science and sport in general are absent from this list. This caused me to question the value of my profession, which also led me to question my own value. This was emphasised further as several people close to me are involved in the medical, biomedical, and nursing professions, whose services were more of a priority than ever before.

Thoughts and Emotions

I felt guilty that my work carried on, while so many people were losing their jobs or being furloughed. I was also frustrated and disillusioned, considering that I might have chosen a profession which was of less value to society than I perhaps could have done. This was exacerbated after a conversation with a loved one who (I think partly in jest) also questioned

the value of sport psychology. This led to persistent low mood for what I remember to be a period of a couple of weeks.

Evaluation

This was a strangely difficult couple of weeks for me, which on the face of it is negative. On the flip side, having had this negative experience and come out the other side will have increased my psychological resilience. However, the most significant positive is that this episode forced me to consider the place of sport psychology within society, and the value that it can provide.

Analysis

There were a few interesting things going on here. The first is that I was associating my own value as a person with the utility of my job within society. In my opinion, there is some overlap between things, but it is slight. The second is that it became clear to me that while I knew "why **I** had become a sport psychologist" (in the sense that I had a personal interest in the area) I had not considered "why I had become a **sport psychologist**" (in the sense of, why am I doing this job no just because it suited me, but because it allows me to manifest myself in a way that benefits others). The relationship between practitioner identity and professional status is something that other practitioners have also grappled with; Winter & Collins (2016) write that although the field of applied sport psychology has developed, it faces further challenges on its way toward gaining greater professional status. Thus, it's likely that there are both professional and personal elements at play here.

Action

The points which are proposed by Winter and Collins as the test for a professions status (a) provides an important public service, b) has a knowledge-base underpinning, c) has organisational regulation, d) has a distinct ethical dimension, and e) has professional autonomy) form a basis for actions I can take. By ensuring that my services as a practitioner are ethical, evidence based, and useful to my clients, I can satisfy three of those criteria on an individual level. Therefore, I will endeavour to ensure that my practice is consistent with these principles. The remaining points regarding professional regulation and autonomy are more complex and focused on institutions such as the BPS, but by continuing to work on my Prof Doc I work towards being a fully regulated and chartered member, which would then allow me to participate more fully in my regulatory organisation to work towards consistency with the aforementioned principles.

27/07/20 - Reflection on the journey so far

Description

Having found and read Andersen, Aldridge, Williams, and Taylor's paper (1997) and found it interesting, I decided to write a reflective piece on it comparing their results with my experience. Their results showed that that most doctoral graduates found positions in academia/research, and most of the master graduates were in some sport or sport psychology-related job. Many of the master and doctoral graduates, however, reported that finding paying sport psychology work was difficult, and many expressed at least moderate levels of frustration with the progress of their sport psychology careers.

Thoughts and Emotions

Comparing myself with these results, I found that some points resonated, whereas others did not. For instance, once I have completed my Prof Doc, I will be a doctoral graduate, however

I have no intention of going into academia immediately. Rather, I aim to secure full-time paid employment with the JSF. This would put me at odds with most doctoral graduates from this study, although one should consider that these were PhD students, and therefore may have been more academically minded. Instead, I am much more interested in applied practice. I enjoy being immersed in sport and have no desire to research or teach in a formal academic setting. I find more in common with the latter findings of this paper. I think that I have been incredibly lucky to have obtained the placement that I have, unpaid as it is, as I don't really know of any equivalents elsewhere. In addition, it is rare to see advertisements for paid psychology work elsewhere, at east online. It is rare even to see advertisements for psychologists from the EIS, who frequently advertise for positions in other disciplines. Nonetheless, it has been suggested that there is salaried work waiting for me with the JSF once my Prof Doc is complete, so I will try to take comfort in that, even if it is not yet in writing. I will write about the study's findings on frustration with career progress in a later reflection.

Evaluation

Positive:

It's good that I have a good placement, in the sector of the industry where I want to work in the future.

Negative:

It may be problematic in future finding paid work in sport psychology in jersey, given the relative paucity of work and difficulties with finding that work (particularly in Jersey).

Analysis

I think the reason that the majority of SP doctoral gradates went into research was because they were PhD doctorates, as previously mentioned. Therefore, it makes some sense that this doesn't resonate with me. It's a little bit surprising to me that my experience around struggling to find paid work is similar, given the changes in web-based advertising since the paper was published. Perhaps the reason for this is that the culture of recruitment within sport has not changed a great deal, such that most recruitment is either done internally, through professional networks or word-of-mouth. It is nonetheless reassuring in some ways to know that the challenges I face are not unique to me and have indeed been present since the writing of Andersen et al.'s (1997) paper. That the challenges have existed since then, and yet many sport psychologists continue to operate successfully indicates to me that it is possible to forge a successful career in this field.

Action

It seems that the best thing for me to do now is to keep my head down and prove my worth with the JSF to try to make sure that there is employment for me here at the end of the Prof Doc. However, I should keep contingency plans if that plan falls through; I know that there is clinical work to be done in Jersey, so I should consider this as an alternative plan if necessary.

25/08/20 - Systematic review progress

Description

Having begun the process of completing my systematic review in earnest back in June, I am now at the stage where all that remains is to finish writing the manuscript. The title of the project is "The Efficacy of PST for Enhancing Sport Performance: An Overview." Most of June was spent writing the protocol and piloting the searches. July was mostly given over to the searches themselves. The manual search took by far the longest, taking nearly three

weeks. By comparison, the electronic and backwards search took no more than a few days each. Beginning in August, I screened for duplicates, assessed the full texts for eligibility, extracted data and no have started writing.

Thoughts and Emotions

- The process of searching, particularly the manual search, were quite boring and frustrating.

- I'm a little frustrated that a systematic review is part of the Prof Doc, see evaluation below.

- Since starting writing, I have found that I've quite enjoyed it, and it's quite rewarding to see "words on pages", which shows some tangible progress.

Evaluation

Positive:

- The major positive from this project is that it so far it has been successful as of the first attempt. This is a massive plus, give that I know many others have struggled with the systematic review.

- A further positive of conducting the systematic review is that it's a wonderful way to familiarise oneself with the literature on a topic. This is even more true when conducting an overview, as a greater body of evidence is already summarised for you. It's been valuable to conduct the review on PST, given that this is my preferred methodology.

Negative:

- The frustration of completing this project is largely driven by thoughts like "this is pointless, I'm not doing this qualification to be an academic." Whilst it's useful to

critically reflect on these thoughts, it's still unpleasant experiencing them and their subsequent emotional consequences.

Analysis

I can understand why the systematic review is included as part of the Prof Doc; it seems that there is a move towards producing researcher-practitioner sport psychologists, and a need to grow the sport psychology literature base, given the relative youth of the discipline. The extant literature also engages with the concept of developing sport psychologists as scientist-practitioners, for example Harwood's (2016) reflections champion the importance of the scientist-practitioner model, stressing that sport psychologists face a number of conceptual, professional, methodological, and institutional challenges, and that the dual-role of scientist-practitioners promotes critical thinking and scrutiny within the community of stakeholders in the field such that greater collaboration might sustain long-term well-being and growth in the profession.

Action

Press on with the review! I'm aiming to complete a first draft of the manuscript by the end of September. Then, while David takes some time to mark it, I'll have an opportunity to work on consultancy case studies. When the new cohort starts, I think I may offer up my experiences if any of the new starters wish to hear them. I will continue to be mindful that I am "seeing the wood despite the trees;" while the project itself may be frustrating, and my ultimate aim for engaging with the professional doctorate was not to undertake further academic work, by moving towards operating as a scientist-practitioner, ultimately my effectiveness as a consultant will be enhanced.

09/09/20 - Hear Rate Variability

Description

Under guidance from our head of services, I've been looking at ways in which I can use HRV to enhance the psychology service within the JSF. In the last few weeks, I have met with staff from two companies that supply products for measuring HRV – Omega-wave and Morpheus. These meetings have been useful as Mikhael and Dan respectively have been very informative on how HRV can be used as a measure of recovery and training readiness. Moreover, Dan has kindly sent us two units free of charge, which are currently en-route.

Thoughts and Emotions

- I'm happy to be learning more about a subject I know little about, and this is encouraging to me as it makes me think that there are more areas that I don't yet know about in which I can expand the service and add more value.

- I'm really pleased to have secured the units from Morpheus free of charge, I feel like that's demonstrated positivity and productivity to my colleagues.

- I've been thinking that looking at psychophysiology is something that seems to have been largely overlooked by mainstream sport psychologists, and by trainee sport psychologists particularly. Given that we should have some background knowledge of the nervous system, it seems that we should be "claiming this territory" – however it seems that this is mostly being looked at by physiology/S&C people.

- Initially, I was looking for ways in which whatever device we acquired for measuring HRV to assess training readiness could also be used for HRV biofeedback. However, it seems that this will not be possible, as there doesn't seem to be any hardware that will allow both functions to be performed with any validity.

Evaluation

Positive:

It's good to be expanding the psych service and it's great that we've got some free units coming – this could be a stepping-stone to increasing our provision of monitors (perhaps to tier 1 athletes? Top 10 athletes?). This could be awesome as it has the potential to revolutionise our approach to physical prep, as if you have a good measure of the athlete's recovery then that limits the need for a high/low training sequencing.

Negative:

It's a shame that it's not possible to centralise HRV training readiness measurement and biofeedback.

Analysis

I must be careful that this HRV project remains about adding value to the athletes as the top priority. There is a danger that this project (and one other that is going on at present which I'll write about later) become more about showing my own value and feeling good about my own contribution and usefulness. This leads into a wider discussion on whether it is truly possible to do something totally for someone else – I'm not convinced this is possible). What I must bear in mind is that the greatest proportion of benefits must go to the athletes rather than myself, and that fundamentally it'll reflect better on me if I do things that genuinely add value rather than appearing a busy fool.

Action

I have been having some conversations with people from the university around HRV biofeedback and how to start doing it. However, I think what I really should be doing is sticking with HRV for training readiness for now, finding out how best it works and integrating it as a service before starting the new project. I've noticed I tend to race ahead with new projects before considering properly if I have capacity for them – which I need to look out for going forward!

16/09/20 - JSF Closure

Description

Last week on Thursday, our management team scheduled 1-2-1 chats with all our staff members. Mine was the first one in the schedule. In the meeting I was told that, as of April 25th next year, the JSF will be ceasing to operate. The reason for this is that there is a new facility being built on the island, which will be hosting a performance programme very similar to ours. I understand that the reason for this is that there have been significant covenants placed on the land that the facility is being built on, which demand that a certain proportion of it be given over to community use. While this appears a good thing, the effect of this has been that our corporate sponsor has decided that it doesn't make sense for the JSF to exist as a competing organisation and has decided to dissolve the organisation when the new facility opens.

Thoughts and Emotions

The news was a total shock, we had no idea that this was coming. It's left a sour taste because we were given assurances by our sponsor that our organisation would continue to exist regardless of the development at Strive. I'm disappointed that the organisation will cease to be, as it's been an important part of my life for the last seven years now. I'm slightly nervous for the future, things are uncertain now as to where I'll end up working, and what I'll end up doing.

Evaluation

Positive:

- There is a potential opportunity to work at Strive. This will be something new, and will offer a possibility of payment, which is a huge plus.

- Working at Strive, which will be a health club as well as a performance facility, will offer me an opportunity to expand into exercise/health psych as well as carrying on with sport performance psychology.

Negative:

- There's massive uncertainty about whether I will be able to get work at Strive. It's unclear whether there is a sport psych coming in already to work there. It's also unclear whether Sport Psych is a service which is wanted at the organisation. Finally, it's not certain whether ex-JSF staff are welcome at Strive given certain history between the MD of strive and the JSF.

- 'X' and 'Y' have been categorical saying they will not work for Strive. This is a negative because they've been fantastic mentors and friends to me, and it'll be a huge shame to lose them. As an aside, it seems ludicrous to me to lose the pair of them from the sporting community in Jersey, their expertise and experience would be invaluable in developing sport on the island.

Analysis

There is both opportunity and threat here. I need to make sure that I stay patient and don't rush too much to either make decisions or commitments. This will be tricky for me, as I naturally struggle to be patient. I need to remain mindful that the road of a developing sport psychologist is "long and winding," (Tod, 2007). Whilst this paper engages with practitioner development primarily in terms of approach to practice and practitioner philosophy, evolutions of these are often driven by changes in circumstance such as this. It may well be that the change in my employment is something that leads me to new and more effective ways of working or allows me further opportunities to develop my philosophy as a practitioner.

Action

We have a meeting with our sponsor on Monday 28th – I've decided not to contact Strive until after that is done. After that, I'll ask the MD of strive for an informal conversation about working there. They're currently advertising for "Performance Coaches", which I loosely meet the person spec for – but it would be worth having a conversation about whether there is a possibility of developing a more specialised role. I will remain mindful that while this change is unsettling, it may be that as the situation develops it may lead me to new opportunities to develop myself as a practitioner.

13/10/20 - SpotlightPROFILE training

Description

I've recently completed the training for the SpotlightPROFILE produced by Mindflick. The Spotlight is a personality profile that combines the E and A components of the 5-factor personality model with elements of RST. The tool was developed to use with sports people

and teams and has since been taken to be used in the world of business. I will be completing a research piece on the use of Spotlight as an intervention to develop the relationship in athlete-coach pairs. Since then, an opportunity has come up to run team days for Jersey Sport and for Dominion using Spotlight as the basis. This could work very well, as there is a suggested format for how to run a team day with spotlight, so it would not require a huge amount of work from me but should be quite polished.

Thoughts and Emotions

I'm glad to have done the training, and very pleased that it was free because it came out of my CPD budget! In the wake of the news of the JSF closing, it also seems to me that spotlight for teams is a ready-made business that can be taken into any environment where there is a team that needs to work well together. I know that there are huge budgets for CPD, which could be accessed if I am able to develop this. However, I'm cautious and somewhat nervous about pursuing this, as I know presenting to groups is not one of my greatest strengths. However, speaking about this with John, he seemed interested in co-delivering this for a time, with the view of gradually phasing out. This would be an ideal scenario for me, as it would allow me to learn from someone who is a fantastic public speaker, while retaining ownership and the income of the business.

Evaluation

Positive:

- Having spotlight is a useful string to my bow – it's a leading profile in terms of its evidence base and represents a good way to make some money from individual clients, as well as from groups in a corporate CPD context.

- Working in partnership with John bringing Spotlight to businesses in Jersey would be ideal in the short/medium term. It would allow me to get my foot in the door while learning from someone more experienced, and who has more credibility.

- Spotlight has also nicely tied together some CPD for me; a research project and a way to add value to what the JSF is doing.

Negative:

A potential problem could be finishing the research project in time for the JSF closing, although I think it should be okay. Much will depend on my situation with work which will become clearer towards the end of the month.

Analysis

Overall, there are few negatives to having done the training, perhaps the only one being that it was quite intensive and quite tiring! It's a worthwhile investment of time and energy though and improves my position going forward.

Action

For now, I await the final confirmation from Mindflick, at which point the research project will begin. I also hope to do the team days with Jersey Sport and Dominion, to start building my experience. When my position with work and 'Strive' becomes clearer, I'll need to have a more in-depth conversation with John about going into business together.

24/11/20 - Athlete Mental Health

Description

Two weeks ago, I was made aware that one of my athletes had been referred to CAMHS for psychotic symptoms. I was later made aware that she had been diagnosed with Schizophrenia, as well as secondary diagnoses of chronic anxiety, depression, and insomnia. It has emerged that the hallucinations this athlete was experiencing were auditory instructions to end her own life, and visions of how to do so. Last Friday, the athlete got off the school bus early, near a tall cliff, which she aimed to jump from. However, she was prevented from doing so, and was sectioned. She has remained in hospital since then. We have been contacted to enquire whether she may return to training, as it has become clear that her hallucinations are much reduced while she is training. We are in discussions about whether we can allow the athlete to train every day, or perhaps to participate in some coaching, to give her a space where she can feel safe.

Thoughts and Emotions

The first point to make is that this episode has not adversely affected me to a great extent. However, it is nonetheless a tragic that this has happened to this athlete. My first thought was about how unfair this situation is. In my eyes, this athlete is kind, humble, hard-working, intelligent, and anti-materialist. It seems so unfair that such a tragic thing has happened to this individual. I do not feel much hope; the psychosis has an early onset; the athlete is female and has no history of using psychoactive substances; the prognosis is not good. I also feel some disappointment; this athlete had incredible promise and was a fantastic role model and advocate for sport in jersey. Taken with the closing of the JSF, this seems a very bad time for sport in Jersey.

Evaluation

There is very little positive about this episode. The only positive that can be taken from it is that it seems that training gives this athlete some respite from the hallucinations. This means that it is possible to have the athlete return to training, and possibly increase her training hours. However, we need to be careful that she does not overtrain. We also need to take care, as her allostatic stress load is clearly already high. For this reason, HRV cannot give us any useful information, we will have to rely on her subjective self-assessment.

Analysis

The challenge that we face is that the athlete can't be left alone at any time. We would need to escort the athlete from being picked up and dropped off. It's also problematic how the athlete must occupy the rest of her time. However, there are boundaries that must be respected here; it is not our job to fix complex psychosocial problems, we can only assist where we can.

Action

I'll continue to monitor the athlete as best I can. I will also try to open a dialogue with her lead practitioner, so that we can communicate information where necessary and enhance their care approach.

26/11/20 - Research progress review

Description

To this point, I have completed most of my systematic review and have begun laying the groundwork for empirical paper 1. At this stage, it is too early to say much about empirical paper 1, so I will focus this reflection on my systematic review.

Thoughts and Emotions

I am pleased that my systematic review has progressed as much as it has to this point, as I know that it has been a major stumbling block for previous Prof Doc students. I am getting quite fatigued with it however, as it has been in the works for several months now. I think I will have a feeling of relief when it's finished! It's been an interesting experience reviewing the quality of the reviews on PST in sport. There is a significant quantity of evidence for the effectiveness of PST, however the quality of that evidence is seriously limited. This has been interesting to research and write about, as it has prompted me to critically evaluate my own practice and use of PST.

Evaluation

Positive:

- Significant progress with review

- Plan in motion for empirical paper 1

Negative:

- Limited ideas for what to explore for empirical paper 2

Analysis

Progress has been good to this point; I anticipate that within the next four months I will be nearing completion of both the systematic review and empirical paper 1. The next challenge will be selecting an appropriate project for empirical paper 2. I have some interest in practitioner development, and where and how practitioners learned how to "do" sport psychology service delivery. I know Freddie has been doing some work in this area, so I'll have a chat with her at some stage where possible.

Action

Continue with current projects and contact Freddie to get a feel for practitioner development research landscape.

26/11/20 - First Annual progress review

Description

To this point, I have completed case studies 1&2, and am nearing completion of the systematic review & case study 3. I have begun work on the education case study and empirical paper 1. I've invested in training in CBT and ACT and have developed skills with HRV and have gained accreditation to use the SPOTLIGHTPROFILE. I began the year with a very rigid approach to reflective practice, rigidly making sure that one reflection was written each week. Over time I have become more flexible in my approach to reflective practice, engaging less frequently, but being more purposeful when I do.

Thoughts and Emotions

I had hoped at the beginning of the year that I would have completed five of the major assessments by the end of 2020. It looks like I will not quite hit this target, which I am a little disappointed with. However, I am pleased that I have made the progress that I have with the systematic review, which I see as the most arduous assignment within the Prof Doc. Assignments aside, I am pleased with how I have developed as a practitioner. I am much more confident working with individuals than I was at this point last year, and I have many more tools in my arsenal. I think that there has been some change to my approach as a practitioner. I notice in the dialogues I hold with clients that I am becoming more client led. Overall, I still feel that I identify most closely with a practitioner-led, cognitive-behavioural style, but sense that I am becoming more flexible as I individuate (McEwan et al., 2019.

Evaluation

Positive:

- I have developed my experience of working with individuals substantially.

- I have been able to develop my skills with psychological therapies through CBT and ACT CPD

- SPOTLIGHT and HRV have become useful tools that I am comfortable with

- More flexible and intentional approach to reflection

- Developed comfort and confidence with online 1-1 delivery.

Negative:

- Have had limited opportunity to develop skills delivering to groups due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

- Less opportunity for face-to-face peer support and supervision as travel to Liverpool impossible for most of the year.

Analysis

This year has been successful insofar as I have been able to develop my skills as a practitioner and have completed a significant body of work towards the completion of the Prof Doc. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, I have not been able to engage in much group work. This is a disappointment to me, as I recognise that working with groups is one of my key weaknesses. However, there may be greater opportunity to deliver to groups in the coming year, as a potential business opportunity has arisen to deliver SPOTLIGHT team days to groups and organisations. This represents a good opportunity to develop my skills in this area. Overall, my development this year has mirrored that of previous trainees; it is often the case that when first interacting with clients, trainees often adopted rigid "expert" problem-solving approaches to service delivery. However, with time and experience those trainees began to adapt wider and more flexible interventions to suit athletes' needs. I have certainly

seen this change mirrored in my own practice, which I believe to be largely a consequence of my deepening experience and skillset, which allows me the tools and confidence to work with clients in a less rigid way.

Action

In the coming year, my focus will shift away from 1-1 work and case studies, and more towards groupwork and research. However, I will continue my skill development with psychological therapies, through APT courses in MI and ACT. I see these as particularly important in laying the foundations for delivering exercise psychology interventions.

15/12/20 - Depression

Description

After a few tough weeks, experiencing persistent low mood, disturbed sleep and appetite and decreased of enjoyment in things I usually enjoy, I recognised I was experiencing several symptoms of a depressive episode. As such, I contacted my GP and arranged an appointment. After describing my symptoms, my GP diagnosed me with a depressive episode. Discussing treatment options, I was clear in my conviction that I would not take SSRIs, and it was clear that the waiting list for state-funded talking therapy is so long that it wasn't even worth a referral, as by that stage the situations precipitating my mental ill-health would have been resolved. Therefore, the avenue of treatment that we agreed I would pursue would be based on behavioural activation and lifestyle changes. In the week since, I've been putting these strategies into place, and at present am feeling well.

Thoughts and Emotions

Upset – Immediately after the diagnosis I felt very emotional and upset. It's difficult to say why on reflection, perhaps acknowledging how low I've been feeling was difficult.

Shocked – I was genuinely shocked to find that the waiting list for talking therapy was over six months. I knew that mental health services in Jersey were stretched, however I was not aware it was this bad.

Relief – A week on, it's been a bit of a relief to have had a diagnosis. This brings some clarity to my situation, helping me put a clear label on the way that I feel. It's been easier to break out of patterns of rumination on negative thoughts, as it's easier to label them as anxiety coming from the depression, which helps to unhook from them.

Evaluation

Positive:

- It's good to have had a diagnosis, and to have acknowledged that there is something wrong.

- It's also good that I've been able to share the information with my family, close friends, and girlfriend, and it's not affected those relationships at all thus far.

- This experience will give me some shared experience with individuals whom I will work with in the future who are experiencing similar psychological difficulties.

Analysis

A few things have stuck out to me from this experience. Firstly, it was not a single circumstance that has led up to this, rather it's been a combination of things (job instability,

COVID lockdowns, lack of fulfilment from work, conflict and resentment within my inner circle of friends). It's worth remembering this in the future, as there may be individuals whom I work with who may mention 'the little things' that aren't going well and may be in a similar situation. In isolation, none of these issues are crippling, but taken together I've found it can make life very difficult.

Action

I've taken my focus away from sport psychology work and study and am focusing primarily on recovering my mental health for now. This means that I'm allowing myself to sleep as much as I can each morning, rather than setting an alarm to be up for work. I'm also ensuring that I exercise first thing every morning and getting outside for sunlight exposure. I'm also engaging in daily structured mindfulness practice, and I've also began practicing the Wim Hof method, to see if that makes any difference. It'll be hard to tell what's worked and what hasn't, as I'm doing multiple things at once, but the important thing now is recovery rather than empirical measurement of which strategies are effective!

19/04/2021 - New Assistant Psychologist Role

Description

I've just begun the sixth week of my new job with the psychological assessment and therapy service. Work has been busy, indeed life in general has been very busy. My role has turned out to be quite varied. There is a significant amount of clinical audit and analysis work, which my experience of athlete profiling has helped a lot with, as has my background in research and statistics. There will also be an element of group work; I will be co-facilitating one group weekly, and two other groups bi-weekly. Furthermore, I will have a small caseload of individual clients, in fact I have just met and assessed the first of them. Finally, there will be

occasional one-off pieces of work – for example I will be going back to the prison to do a pair of stress management workshops in the next few weeks.

Thoughts and Emotions

- Pleased – I'm pleased to be here in this new job. It feels fulfilling working in this environment. Indeed, the team is very appreciative of the work that I've been doing so far, which has been very encouraging for me.

- Nervous – I'm a little nervous that I'll be leading groups, as in the past I've been quite anxious with public speaking.

- Mixed feelings – there are some individuals who are engaged with services, and I've been involved in their treatment who I know from "outside." This has raised some mixed feelings in me at this stage (and will be the subject of a future reflection once I'm further into the work).

Evaluation

Positive:

- I have an opportunity to work on an area of historical weakness by working with large groups. I feel quite reassured that even the mention of leading groups has not made me feel particularly anxious.

- I'm quite reassured that in the 1-1 I had today that I felt comfortable and not out of practice.

Negative:

- Between my new job, working for the JSF part time, training and doing prof doc work, I'm currently finding I have very little free time and it's difficult to find much time that is spare.

- I'm aware that there's an increased risk of burnout with things as busy as they are.

Analysis

Overall, it's been a positive start to this new job. The work is satisfying and I'm enjoying myself. Things are challenging at work, which is good, as I'm being gently pushed out of my comfort zone. The main challenge which I need to consider is that I currently have a lot on, and it could be a fine line between managing everything and burning out and crashing or getting sick or injured. I'm also pleased to be in a new environment, which allows me to learn new skills and is a new bend in the "long and winding," road of my practitioner development (Tod, 2007). Furthermore, it will be interesting to assess how balancing the demands of working PT in one role and full time in another will feel, given that this is not something I've done in my Sport Psychology career to this point, but is in fact something which is common for neophyte sport psychologists (Van Raalte et al. 1993).

Action

I'll continue as things are for now, managing the balance of prof doc work/training/social life outside of work. I may need to accept that it'll take longer to complete the Prof Doc, but that is something that is more acceptable now that I have a salary. I need to ensure that I stay consistent and keep a slow steady stream of work going to ensure that I maintain momentum.

23/04/21 - Confidentiality Dilemma

Description

Recently, I was working at an inpatient psychiatric unit delivering group skills training sessions. When arriving on one occasion, I was surprised to encounter an athlete who I had previously worked with in a sport psychology context. Given that my previous relationship with this client had been professional, I judged that it would not be unethical for me to work

with this client in a clinical context. However, I was aware that the client may have found it uncomfortable to work with me in this group. Therefore, I asked one of my colleagues to check with this client if they would be comfortable with me being in the group with them, and the client was agreeable. Since then, the client has been a regular attendee at the group. I am somewhat conflicted however, as I was under the impression that none of my former colleagues who have responsibility for working with the client in the context of sports performance were aware that she was in inpatient psychiatric care. As it emerged yesterday, the client had informed her parents that she'd had contact with me in the IPU, who had in turn informed my previous manager. In conversation he raised this with me, informing me he knew that he was aware the client was in IPU and was concerned for her, but fully respected that I could not disclose any information relating to the client's case.

Thoughts and Emotions

- Conflicted – I feel somewhat conflicted, as I want to share information on the client's care plan and progress with her coaching team, however this is of course impossible due to client confidentiality regulations and ethics.

- Saddened – It's truly sad to see this individual in IPU. I'm aware that she has had difficulties with psychological suffering historically, nonetheless it is quite visceral to find that she is such a risk to herself.

Evaluation

Positive:

- This has been a positive experience for me as it has given me cause to reflect on my personal philosophy regarding confidentiality in clinical and sport and exercise settings.

Negative:

- It was a distressing experience seeing the athlete in IPU.

- There was potential that one of my former colleagues could have put me in an awkward position by pressing me for information on the athlete's care, but fortunately this has not occurred.

Analysis

I believe the key reflection to have come from this incident was to reflect on my thoughts on best practice for confidentiality policy in sport and clinical psychology settings. In sport psychology settings, as part of a MDT I have felt most comfortable with an opt-in confidentiality policy such that information can be shared in the MDT when relevant and where possible, but athletes may also keep the content of session private if they wish. This allows for the best of both worlds. Often, athletes are more than happy for the content of their sessions to be shared more widely, e.g., with technical coaches of other athletes. In clinical settings, information can be shared in a clinical team or MDT if sharing that information is in the best interests of the client. In contrast to sport psychology however, that information cannot, and should not ever go further than that. Thus, I could not legally or ethically share any information about this client's case with my JSF colleagues. I believe there is a distinction here, because of the different nature of clinical psychology and sport psychology issues. Clinical issues are by nature deeper and more impactful, and therefore client confidentiality must be protected without exception, whereas in sport psychology I believe this comes down more to the preferences of the individuals involved.

Action

No particular action is required on this issue, although I must be mindful that I have worked on an opt-in confidentiality basis for the last year and a half, but do not any longer. Therefore, I must be certain not to make any mistakes around breaches of confidentiality.

05/05/2021 - First 'Clinical' Client

Description

Today I've had my first encounter with a client who has a moderate depressive episodes and experiences anxiety. He experiences his anxiety physically, often finding that he stutters, and his limbs shake. Today I introduced him to PMR and paced breathing. We practiced both together in the session, and explored ways he could implement the practice in his day-to-day life. We finished roughly 50 minutes into the hour-long session. At that point the client asked me if he could ask a few questions to get to know me better. He asked if I had ever experienced mental health difficulties, to which I responded yes. He then asked if I was happy to share my diagnosis, to which I responded that I would rather keep that private, which the client accepted.

Thoughts and Emotions

My thoughts behind making the 'yes' disclosure was that it was worth making some disclosure to facilitate building an effective trusting relationship. However, I decided to set a boundary by not disclosing the nature of the issue to set a precedent for having therapist boundaries, so that the client would not operate under the assumption that I was an open book. I did feel a little uneasy about whether I had made any mistakes but was reassured in supervision that my choices were justifiable.

Evaluation

Positive:

- This has given me a cause to reflect on my thoughts around self-disclosure.

Negative:

- Initial uncertainty

Analysis

My supervisor gave a useful perspective on this incident. He suggested that it might have been possible that the client was seeking some reassurance that it would be possible for an individual to get through mental health difficulties, study and gain useful employment. I thought that this may well be possible and offers a good explanation. My rationale was that it may have been the case that the client simply wished to get to know me a bit better to facilitate the therapeutic alliance. On reflection, it's curious that I hesitated over self-disclosure given that it's something I'm more confident with in sport psychology contexts (indeed I refer to this in one of my initial reflective diary entries). I put this down to my own uncertainty about whether such self-disclosure is appropriate in the clinical environment. Interestingly, the literature which I previously cited (Longstaff & Gervis, 2016) which indicates that participants used a range of counselling principles, including self-disclosure, to develop practitioner-athlete relationships specifically focuses on integrating counselling techniques from the clinical sphere in sporting contexts. This, along with my supervisor's advice, reassures me that the degree to which I am comfortable with self-disclosure in sporting contexts may be appropriate in clinical contexts too.

Action

In future, I'm happy to carry on allowing some self-disclosure to clients, but I need to bear in mind the question that my supervisor advised. This question was "is this self-disclosure helping the client's therapy process?" This will prevent any conversations from straying away from being a therapeutic dialogue and becoming a conversation between two parties that is less related to the client's therapy.

28/06/21 – EDI in Sport

Description

A great deal of comment has been made amongst sport and exercise professionals in my network regarding the inclusion of Laurel Hubbard in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Hubbard is a male-to-female transgender athlete, who will be competing in a women's weightlifting event. A question was asked whether SES professionals thought that her inclusion was fair, and if not, whether they would consider working with a male-to-female athlete who was competing in a women's category.

Thoughts and Emotions

My initial thought was to search for what the two sides of the dialectic in this debate might be. My thought was that on one side of the dialectic we have a prioritisation of fairness and sporting merit, and on the other a prioritisation of inclusivity. This dialectic seems clunky and unrefined, so I have found myself wondering if much of the controversy around this issue results from the two "sides" talking past each other. I have experienced feelings of relief that I have not been asked for an opinion on this topic; I am aware that any opinion I give is likely to cause upset. I've even felt some anxiety because of putting my thoughts to paper on this.

Evaluation

Positive:

- The positive that I aim to draw out of this reflection is that it is a further opportunity for me to reflect on my therapist boundaries and personal ethics.

Negative:

- The clear negative of this situation is that the controversy surrounding this issue is unlikely to have any positive impact on the athlete concerned, the reputation of weightlifting, and of the IOC and the games. Unfortunately, it is likely to distract from the display of sporting talent on show.

Analysis

At a broad level, I wonder if the middle path in the dialectic is for the inauguration of specialised categories for transgender athletes. This would allow for inclusion in the games, without controversy over unfair advantages. With regards to whether I personally would work with an athlete in Hubbard's position, the answer would be "yes" because she has not broken any rules and thus, I see no reason not to. Therefore, provided there were no other reason why I could not work with a person in this position then I would have no problem with it.

Action

There's no specific need for action in this case as this reflection has not indicated a need to change my practice. I intend to keep quiet on this topic as far as possible, given that it is so controversial I would be hesitant to poke my head above the parapet for fear of getting shot down!

31/08/21 - Private Work Begins

Description

In the previous month I have started doing private sport psychology work. There were two people who had contacted the JSF asking for sport psychology support. Neither was eligible for JSF support, so it was suggested that I work with them privately. To this end, I set up a business email address and got in contact. I offered both a free consultation, and then paid sessions thereafter. I have already been working for one of the clients for a month, the other I will begin with this week. This has given me experience of running a business email, doing my own scheduling around my normal work, and creating and issuing invoices. I've been using a work café with free bookable private meeting rooms to deliver sessions, which has meant I have no rent overheads.

Thoughts and Emotions

One of my thoughts was on how much to charge the clients. I told the first client that I normally charge £60/h but would give her a £10 discount. She accepted this without complaint. With the second client, I simply charged £60/h, which again was met without complaint. I think for the next client that I will charge £65-70/h and continue to increase this until it is met with surprise. While I don't feel this charge is unreasonable for professional services of a trainee who is also employed in psychological service provision, it does feel a little as if I'm guessing as there are no rules or guidelines as to what (trainee) Sport and Exercise Psychologists should charge their clients.

I felt proud that I have started my own business. I feel confident in that it's almost impossible for the venture to fail, as I have no overheads, so anything from here is a success. I am also pleased that the work is something I feel confident doing, having built up experience with the JSF and in my clinical services work.

Evaluation

Positive:

- It's good to gain experience of running my own private work.

- Created custom invoices for the business, created email address for the business.

- Extra income

- Taking an opportunity to develop a sense of what fees I could reasonably charge for private work.

Negative:

- More of my time is being taken up, which is already in short supply between two jobs and prof doc work.

Analysis

Overall, this is a positive move for me in my career, as it is an opportunity to learn and start growing into the private practice space. It may be that after these two clients I do not have more private work for some time. This might be a loss of income, but that's not necessarily a problem as I have my own paid job already. Instead, this would be an opportunity to work further on my doctorate. It is also an opportunity to start building up the necessary infrastructure for a more developed private practice; the necessary forms, website, and referral network for example. On that point, doing some private work and doing well will be a fantastic future investment as word gets out.

Action

I will continue work to completion with these two clients, and make sure to let other professionals I know who work with athletes on the island that I am practicing privately if there are referrals that they wish to make to me, and that I might make for them in return.

30/09/21 - Potential Clinical Referral Dilemma

Description

Recently I had a private client referred to me, whom I suspected might be a borderline case for clinical referral. In our initial meeting, my assessment included an experience where she was particularly emotionally vulnerable, and as a result had experienced a panic attack whilst training for her sport. She had then felt anxiety when approaching the same situation in subsequent training for fear of having another panic attack. She noticed that physical sensations of anxiety or nerves were experienced as early warning signs of a panic attack. This was problematic for her, as she had a competition approaching in a month's time. In the background, it seemed as though the client held core beliefs around her own inadequacy, and a need to be perfect. The client reflected that this led her to strive for perfection to her own personal detriment in multiple domains of her life. My formulation was that the presenting problem stems from underlying core beliefs around inadequacy and need to be perfect. The dilemma I faced was that I believed that I was competent to deal with what I perceived to be the presenting issue but am less equipped to address what I perceived as the underlying issue. I discussed this with the client, and we collaboratively agreed that we would work together on the immediate issue, and that the client would pursue a clinical referral to address the underlying issue.

Thoughts and Emotions

I felt some nerves around this case, as I was not sure if I should take this client on as a sport client. I was worried that I had not made the correct decision, and that the client would suffer as a result. I was concerned that I might have been biased in my decision making, as not working with the client would represent lost income in the short term. I also reflected that I

might be affected by a need to prove my own worth and competence in what might be a challenging case.

On the other hand, I also perceived that I am well able to deal with panic attacks in the context of sport, as working with individuals experiencing panic attacks is something that I do regularly. I was also confident in the approach of teaching skills that would allow the client to manage the effects of the underlying issue without addressing the issue itself, as this underlies dialectical behaviour therapy which I have training in and practice regularly.

Evaluation

Positive:

- This will be a good opportunity to test my skills with a slightly more complex client.
- This has been an interesting case to reflect on.

Negative:

- There is an increased risk that there might be negative outcomes for the client.
- I may have to cut our work short if there is risk to the client.

Analysis

I took this case to supervision, and there was consensus that the case is not clear cut! I was advised that the guideline to work by was whether I believed I would be able to justify my decisions based on my own competence and confidence that I am able to work with the client, which I believe that I am able to. Where I could be criticised is that within this piece of work, I am not attempting to address what I perceive as the underlying issue, but rather

attempting to give my client skills to manage its effects. However, I do not perceive this to be a problem, as in many cases this approach is best practice (e.g., DBT for BPD clients).

Action

I have been invited to bring this case for further supervision, which I shall do. In addition, I shall also monitor the situation closely to ensure that the risk of harm to my client is minimised.

21/10/21 - Referral Necessary

Description

Regarding the client in my previous reflection…Work on graded exposure was progressing well, and the client was feeling more confident ahead of her upcoming race. However, as the race approached, she became more and more anxious, to the point where she found she could not control her worrying and was finding it difficult to concentrate and sleep. As a result, she withdrew from the swim section of her upcoming iron man race, which resolved her emotional distress. She communicated this to me in an email. When we next met, the client and I discussed some of her early experiences, core beliefs, rules for living, and the effects of those rules in her life. We agreed to continue working together, and that I would take the case to supervision before we decided what to do next. The client expressed that she wished to attempt the same iron man fully next year.

Thoughts and Emotions

- Disappointment – I was disappointed for the client that she would not be able to complete the full race, and questioning of myself whether I could have done more to help her had I done something different.

- Anxious – I noted some anxiety in myself; the episode that the client described has indications of underlying GAD, again making me question if I'd made the right decision in deciding to work with her and not to refer.

    o I also noted anxiety around whether the client would believe that I had done a bad job of helping her. She assured me this was not the case, without prompting, which was followed by a thought that she might be saying this out of compliance rather than genuineness.

- Confusion – I noted that I was unclear on where exactly to go next in therapy, or what to do. Based on the client's disclosures it was clear that there is more to this than just sport, but my formulation at this point was not sufficient to give clarity on what to do next.

Evaluation

Positive:

- There was sufficient openness and rapport in my relationship with the client that we were able to discuss personal issues openly.

- I am glad that I was able to share my confusion with the client, rather than needing to appear "expert."

- There is an opportunity to reformulate this case in more detail going forward now.

Negative:

- This has raised the possibility that I did not make the right decision by not referring the client, as when she had the episode of anxiety there were some GAD type

characteristics on display. However, these were not chronic, and were resolved by withdrawing from the swim, indicating that the worrying is not persistent.

- I was not able to help the client to participate in the swim section of her upcoming race.

Analysis

The sense I make of this situation is that I had not collected sufficient information at intake to form a broad enough formulation to make sense of the clients presenting issue. Partly this was because there was not an in-depth exploration of her early experiences, which at the time did not appear to be relevant. This meant that while some of our efforts were useful, they did not address the problem in sufficient depth to allow the client to have completed the swim section of her race.

Action

The client is currently away completing the race, and we will regroup afterwards to discuss going forwards. I have engaged in further peer supervision – and the result was that there is limited further reformulation that we could do without a significantly increased body of information to work with.

09/01/22 - Frustrations with Reflective Writing

Description

I was having a discussion with my supervisor about reflective practice. I discussed how I find writing reflections frustrating, as I do not particularly find the process of writing in my

reflective journal very "reflective." I relayed how, rather, I find that I get the greatest quality of reflection comes through organic, unstructured conversations with colleagues. Together we explored why this might be, how my reflective practice is necessarily constrained by the requirements of the prof doc for the moment, and how it might evolve in the future.

Thoughts and feelings

Frustration – I have experienced frustration having to regularly write entries in a reflective journal while not feeling like I experience any benefit from it.

Excitement – Having discussed ways forward for reflective practice I feel excited about being able to develop better ways to reflect once I am unconstrained by the doctorate.

Relief – It was reassuring to discuss this issue in supervision and to be assured that my position is not unreasonable and that there are others who prefer to reflect in the same way that I do.

Evaluation

Positive:

The opportunity to discuss my feelings about reflective practice has been valuable, as it has allowed me to recognise that my feelings are legitimate. This is important to me, as I recognise that reflective practice is crucial to effective and ethical practice, yet I was finding the process challenging to engage in.

Analysis

The sense that we made of this (collectively, through a process of discussion) came in the form of two key factors which we identified as being important to me in my reflective

process that are excluded by writing in a reflective journal. Firstly, writing in a reflective journal seems like a discrete, cross-sectional action to me, whereas the process of reflective learning is a longitudinal process. I often find that my best quality reflections come as a series of mini epiphanies over time. Therefore, it seems strange to me to stop at a certain point and write a reflective entry, as the next point of learning may come afterwards, rendering that reflective entry invalid. Secondly, I do not find that those lightbulb moments or "mini epiphanies" come while I am writing reflective entries in my journal. Rather, I find that I learn far more having discussions with colleagues. The sense that we made of this was that dialogue offers alternative perspective, which is particularly valuable to me in reflection. This is because that alternative perspective may not be subject to the same biases and conditioning as my own, which means that it might be more able to critique my decisions and views than I am myself. Overall, I remain conscious that the practitioner development literature is clear that reflective practice is vital for improving one's effectiveness as a consultant (Cropley et al. 2010), so I remain committed to engaging in reflective practice as a concept. I believe that the key for me is to find and utilise ways of engaging in reflective practice which feel useful and authentic for me.

Action

I will continue writing in this reflective journal until the end of the doctorate, because I am required to! Past that, what we discussed was keeping a list of "lessons". This would contain the distilled essence of the reflections from the reflective conversations that I have with colleagues, either from formal supervision or simply held in passing.

02/02/2022 - Second Annual Progress Review

Description

To this point, I have completed Case study 1, Case study 2, Case study 3, Consultancy contract and report, Education case study, Education essay and Systematic review, and Empirical paper 1 is in progress. I have left my full-time role with the JSF and am working as an assistant psychologist in a CPTSD specialist team, while working privately in sport psychology alongside. This has delayed my progress with the Prof Doc but has provided me with valuable experience. My reflective practice has further developed through the blending of my reflections on sport and clinical psychology practice. I have been engaging in regular peer supervision and take supervision from a clinical psychologist with a keen interesting in sport.

Thoughts and feelings

I am disappointed that I am not closer to finishing the doctorate, however this is because I have segued into psychology practice and have set up my own private practice, which I view as a favourable trade. I do feel some anxiety to finish the doctorate in this calendar year.

Evaluation

Positive:

- I have developed my experience of working in groups in my psychology practice.

- I have been able to develop my skills with MI through my CPD.

- Continued use of SPOTLIGHT.

- Good progress with Prof Doc assignments.

- Engaged with new peer support group.

Negative:

- Will not meet initial target for prof doc completion.

Analysis

This year has been successful insofar as I have been able to develop my skills as a practitioner and have completed a significant body of work towards the completion of the Prof Doc. I am particularly pleased that I have been able to get more comfortable with delivering to groups, as this was one of my key weaknesses identified last year. I notice that as time goes by I am more able to articulate the values and beliefs which underlie my method of practice, and explain why I am choosing to invest time into learning more about particular ways to provide support (e.g. SPOTLIGHT, MI). Tod, Hutter and Eubank (2017) write that "practitioners with clear and articulated personal and professional identities will likely be able to make choices leading to optimal individuation." I feel that as I am better able to articulate, and therefore understand, my own personal and professional identity, it better allows me to focus on developing myself as a practitioner in ways which allow me to both be authentic to my values and beliefs, and to be effective as a practitioner.

Action

In the following year, I am aiming to reduce my 1-1 contact hours as much as possible to maximise the amount of time I can spend on my research projects to ensure completion of the doctorate.

30/07/2022 - Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games

Description

It's the second day of competition at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. I'm sitting in the athlete dining area with some free time for the first time since arriving two days ago, reflecting on my role as sport psychology lead for team Jersey at the games. My sense is that the role of a psychologist at the games has been unclear, both to me and to the rest of the

games staff. I drew the comparison of taking an S&C coach to the games, it's almost redundant as any serious interventions should have been executed months in advance. Indeed, a colleague of mine reflected that he would not be going to the games with his nation, as he was unclear what the point would be. Nonetheless, there are sport psychologists here. I have been lucky to meet the lead psychologist for Jamaica, and the team psychologist for NZ women's rugby. I'm also aware that there are psychologists here from each of the major home nations. It's clear that these professionals, and the governing bodies that employ them, see some use in having them here, so what is it?

Thoughts and Emotions

- I've noticed a sense of anxiety since being here, although much of the time it remains beneath awareness. I notice that my laugh sounds a bit different, and that sleep takes a while to come; my brain feels pretty 'wired.'

- Urges to "look busy." Underlying sense that I need to prove my worth or demonstrate the value of having a psychologist at the games. Who to? Particularly CGAJ staff who employ me, other medical professionals on team who I hope will be referring to me in future, and athletes.

- Frustration – A lot of this is dues to organisation at the games! Transport is a nightmare.

- Worry that I may be doing too much, which then swings to concern that I might be "trying too hard" to help.

Evaluation

Positive:

- All experience has something to learn from. The fact that I'm at the games is a massive experience, and its great fun to be here.

- It's a useful opportunity to reflect on my mode of practice, how short/long term it is.

- Learning what my role is/can be while at a major games.

Negative:

- Temporary discomfort – lack of role clarity

- Periods of boom/bust in terms of busyness? Unclear how my time will be occupied across course of the games.

Analysis

Clarity (or lack of) about what my role entails is central. I think my emotions stem from this uncertainty. Without clarity about what my role is then I/others can't see if my presence is useful or not – which leads to some of the concerns about perception by other staff. There's also an element of the expected "imposter syndrome" that is common among neophyte psychologists. I feel a strong sense to prove myself to be useful, but that may not be necessary. In an ideal world, no intervention would be needed at this stage, even if it were possible. I also lack experience with brief intervention work, my best work has been long term and founded on good relationships. Here however, I don't have that timescale, and some of the athlete's I've not even met before.

Action

Short term:

Offer what I can –

- Competition reviews

- Check in's (athletes)

- Check in's (staff)

- Making myself available to talk (find somewhere to be present and visible but private enough to work)

Long term:

- Supervision, what is the role of the psychologist at a games, and how does this interface with the role beforehand

- Training, education around brief interventions in sport psychology (if this exists?)

19/08/2022 - Post-Games

Description

Having now returned from the games and had some time to reflect on the experience, I am writing this reflection about by time in Birmingham. Following my previous reflection, I took a few hours to do some reading about brief contact interventions in sport psychology. Following this, I made sure that I was available to athletes and staff for chats within the village as often as possible. It was immensely useful to be moved into the village, as this meant brief contact interventions nested within organic 'conversations in passing' more easily. In the end I left the games two days earlier than planned due to testing positive for covid. I spent the following week off work, which gave me a chance to recuperate and reflect. Since returning, I have met with the president of the CGAJ, who fed back that he was pleased that I had gone to the games, and was keen for me to continue, and expand upon, my involvement.

Thoughts and Emotions

- Pleased to have gone – I've described the experience to people who've asked as "like nothing I've experienced before." Being at the games was great fun, and completely new.

- Motivation – Being at the games was significant personally, I think because being in a totally different environment gave an outside perspective, which helped me to look personally at what I want for myself. Identifying this more clearly has helped my motivation to complete the prof doc and continue my personal and professional development.

- Nervous – before meeting CGAJ president. Thinking "They may not want me back."

- Relief – after meeting CGAJ president, and excitement about what the future might hold.

Evaluation

Positive:

- Learning experience:
  - Learning and experience with brief contact interventions.
  - Learning around what role can be at a major games and what it MUST be beforehand.
- Fun, once in a lifetime event.
- Covid gave period to rest afterwards, which was necessary but would not have happened otherwise.

Negative:

- The games were exhausting, it's easy to work 12/13-hour days. This is not sustainable over long periods. Nonetheless, this seems to be the culture and expectation among the games management team.

- I was not as effective as I could have been as a practitioner. However, there's valuable learning there about how I could be more so.

Analysis

For next time – It's necessary for me or any other psychologist to be effective that we have stronger relationships with the athletes and staff who are attending the games. This requires being more proactive in the build-up to the games, with outreach to athletes and coaches about what sport psychology is, how it can be useful and what my role is. It will also be useful to develop my own skills with brief contact interventions further, so that they are sharper for the next games. Furthermore, it would be instructive to speak with other psychologists who have attended major games about what their roles in that context entail. I feel that this may be a "critical moment" for me in my journey as a practitioner (Wadsworth et al. 2021); a moment which significantly contributed to my development as an applied practitioner. It was through this experience, particularly the stark contrast in how effective I was able to work with those athletes with whom I had previous relationships and those I did not, that emphasised the primacy of relationships in accomplishing change. I was aware of this importance through the literature, for example Tod and Andersen (2012), however this was the point where I *felt* it most deeply and saw the truth of it so clearly in my practice.

Action

- Complete report for the CGAJ recommending that efforts are made to build relationships between psychology practitioner(s) and athletes and staff to a greater extent than was the case in this cycle.

- Outreach to athletes through coaches and team managers – educate the coaches about what sport psychology can offer then let them be the gatekeepers?

- Search for more comprehensive education around brief contact interventions in sport psychology.

01/09/22 - Frustrations with Written Work

Description:

I am feeling frustrated about the length of time it is taking me to complete all the assignments required for my portfolio. I had set myself a goal to complete them within the next few months, but it is now clear that this is not achievable, partly due to the amount of time I have dedicated to pushing for my systematic review to be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Thoughts and Feelings:

I feel a sense of frustration and disappointment about the delay in completing my portfolio, and it has caused me some anxiety about meeting my training objectives and deadlines. I also feel a sense of pride and accomplishment about my systematic review, but I recognise that this has taken up significant time and energy, which could have been used to work on my portfolio assignments.

Evaluation:

Positive:

I am pleased that I have made progress with my systematic review and that I have pushed for it to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. This has been a significant accomplishment for me and has been a valuable learning experience.

Negative:

However, I am frustrated that this process has delayed my progress on my portfolio assignments. I realise that I have not been as focused on the portfolio assignments as I could have been, and this has led to a delay in my training timeline.

Analysis:

Looking back on the situation, I realise that I need to prioritise my portfolio assignments if I am to achieve my training objectives and deadlines. I also need to recognise the amount of time and energy that will be required to complete the portfolio assignments and plan accordingly.

Action

In the next year, I plan to prioritise my portfolio assignments and dedicate more time and energy to completing them. I will break down each assignment into smaller, more manageable tasks and set specific deadlines for each one. This will help me to stay focused and on track and will allow me to complete my training objectives on time. To help me achieve my goals, I will schedule regular meetings with my supervisor to review my progress and to get feedback on my work. I will also seek out additional training and resources to support me in completing the portfolio assignments. Finally, I will establish a schedule of regular breaks and self-care activities to help me maintain my motivation and focus throughout the process.

05/02/23 - Publication at Last

Description:

I have recently had a piece of research published in a peer-reviewed journal. The research was an umbrella review on psychological skills training in sports, which I worked on for two years during my training.

Thoughts and Feelings:

I feel elated and proud that the research has been published in a prestigious journal. It's a great achievement and a significant milestone in my career as a sport psychologist. I put a lot of effort and time into this research project, and it's rewarding to see it being recognised and valued.

Evaluation:

Positive:

The process of conducting the research was a valuable learning experience. I developed my research skills, and the systematic review method was new to me, so it was interesting to learn more about it. Additionally, having the research published is a great way to build my reputation in the field, as well as to contribute to the broader understanding of psychological skills training in sports.

Negative:

It was a time-consuming process, and it took longer than expected to complete the research project. Additionally, the peer review process was challenging, and I had to revise the manuscript several times. It was frustrating at times, but I learned a lot from the feedback I received.

Analysis:

The publication of this research has shown me the importance of persevering with a project despite challenges and difficulties. The peer review process was arduous, but it helped me to refine my writing and research skills. This experience has also shown me the value of contributing to the broader research community, and how rewarding it is to have research published in a reputable journal.

Action:

Having my research published has been an exciting and rewarding experience. It has taught me a lot about research methods, the peer review process, and contributing to the research community. I feel motivated to continue working on research projects and exploring ways to build my career as a sport psychologist.

25/02/23 - Performance Psychology in the Corporate World

Description

I recently completed a workshop with a financial services organisation. An old friend who works for this organisation reached out to me and asked if I could, within my role as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist, provide some training to them that would be of use in terms of enhancing the organisational culture or enhancing individual effectiveness within the teams that they work within their teams. I delivered a workshop based on the principles of the spotlight profile, and the feedback that I had from that workshop was very positive. I delivered the workshop online via Zoom and made it as interactive as I possibly could, so I included lots of breakout rooms and lots of opportunities for reflection. The feedback from that was positive.

Thoughts and Emotions

I was quite nervous going into the workshop. I was conscious that I was working with people who were not familiar with sport and exercise psychology, so I almost had a sense that I was representing the discipline. I remember feeling a deep sense of satisfaction when the workshop was done, and I had feedback from the attendees saying that it was one of the best CPD sessions they had in this regularly occurring slot.

Evaluation

Positives:

This was a fantastic opportunity for me to expand my area of service provision and to deliver teaching and training in a context that was completely new to me. As such, it was beneficial for both my consultancy and my role as a teacher and trainer. I am now feeling more confident in delivering further teaching and training outside the realms of sport and exercise while applying the principles of sport and exercise psychology. The workshop I delivered was well-prepared, and I could deliver an identical workshop to a similar organisation if I was approached or if I marketed myself to such an organisation. If I continue doing things like this, then I could conceivably build up a bank of workshops I could deliver, which would eliminate the need for preparation time and maximise my profit in relation to the time I'm spending preparing for the workshops.

Negatives:

At this point in time, I can't really identify any negatives from this experience. It's been a positive opportunity and experience.

Analysis

This has been an enlightening experience for me. Previously, teaching and training were perhaps neglected components of my role as a sport and exercise psychologist, where the key components of my service delivery focused on one-to-one consultation with athletes. This experience has highlighted where I can further incorporate teaching and training into my role to add another arm to my business and the services that I deliver.

Action

Based on this experience, I will seek feedback from the organisation to which I delivered the teaching and training in writing. I can then use this feedback to market myself to similar organisations to deliver similar workshops, either in person or online. This will provide an opportunity to further deliver my skills as a teacher and trainer and another chance to market the application of the principles of sport and exercise psychology outside of the traditional context in which those principles are usually applied.

14/03/23 - Third Annual Progress Review

Description

To this point, I have completed Case study 1, Case study 2, Case study 3, Consultancy contract and report, Education case study, Education essay and Systematic review and Empirical paper 1. Empirical paper 2 is in progress. This leaves the meta-reflective essay and research commentary as outstanding pieces of work, which I hope to complete in the next 3-4 months. In my work I have started a role as a trainee psychological wellbeing practitioner. This is supporting my education and practice of CBT-informed formulation and intervention. Alongside this, I have been working privately in Sport Psychology. A key event has been being invited to work at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games as a staff member for team Jersey. This was a formative event in several ways, and I learned a lot from it. Finally, I have

published my systematic review. This absorbed a significant amount of time, which detracted from the amount of time that I was able to commit to my empirical paper 2 and remaining pieces of work for the Prof Doc.

Thoughts and feelings

I am not particularly frustrated that I have not yet finished the doctorate, as I recognise that there are other worthwhile things that have been absorbing my energy in the interim. This has included preparing for and attending the CWG, private work, and committing time to publishing the systematic review. However, my thoughts are now turning to completing the Prof Doc as I recognise that I am now more than three years into the programme. I have been spending time reflecting on my core values as a human and am beginning to link these to my core beliefs and how these feed into my approach to practice.

Evaluation

Positive:

- Attended Birmingham CWG and gained valuable experience.

- Spent time reflecting on values & linking to practice philosophy.

- Published systematic review.

- Continued with peer support group.

Negative:

- Slower progress than anticipated with Prof Doc assignments

Analysis

Overall, I've made progress in several areas, but there's still work to be done to complete the Prof Doc. It's encouraging to reflect on my values and beliefs, which can contribute to my professional growth and approach to practice. However, one of the challenges I've faced is that publishing the systematic review took up a significant amount of time, which hindered my progress on the Prof Doc assignments, particularly the empirical paper 2. I plan to review my time management and priorities to ensure I allocate sufficient time to complete the remaining tasks promptly.

Action

- I should prioritise completing the remaining pieces of work for my Prof Doc. I have been absorbed by other experiences and projects, which have delayed my progress on the Prof Doc assignments. Now that I'm over three years into the programme, it's essential to prioritise completing the remaining pieces of work to meet my academic goals. I will review my schedule and identify any time slots I can dedicate to completing the assignments.

- It might be useful to review my time management and prioritisation strategies to ensure that I allocate my time effectively, balance my different commitments, and meet my academic goals.

- I will seek support and feedback from my peer support group and academic mentors / supervisors in this period. It's always helpful to have support and feedback from people who understand the challenges and expectations of completing a doctorate and to help me manage my workload, review my progress, and provide constructive feedback.

- I will continue reflecting on my values and beliefs. As I mentioned, reflecting on my values and beliefs is crucial to my professional growth and approach to practice. I will

keep exploring my values and how they link to my core beliefs, professional goals, and practice philosophy. This reflection can help me stay motivated and focused on my academic and professional goals.

12/09/23 - Evaluating Teaching and Training Methods

Description

In my role as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist, I have recognised the importance of evaluating my teaching and training methods. Historically, I have heavily relied on informal verbal feedback from participants in the groups I lead as the primary source of information for assessing the effectiveness of my teaching and training sessions. This approach has offered certain advantages, such as its organic nature, immediate accessibility after sessions, and minimal data analysis requirements. However, it also comes with inherent limitations, including the potential for response bias and the lack of time for participants to deeply reflect on the content they've just experienced.

Feelings

My reliance on informal verbal feedback has given me valuable insights into the immediate perceptions of participants. It has also contributed to a sense of comfort and ease in collecting feedback. However, I've started to experience some apprehension about the limitations of this approach. I am increasingly aware of the need for more structured and comprehensive feedback methods to enhance the quality of my teaching and training.

Evaluation

Positives:

- Organic and Immediate Feedback: Relying on informal verbal feedback from participants offers the advantage of obtaining feedback immediately after sessions.

This immediacy allows for timely adjustments and improvements in subsequent teaching and training sessions.

- Minimal Data Analysis: The simplicity of collecting informal verbal feedback minimises the time and effort required for data analysis. This aligns with the practical demands of my role and allows me to focus on other aspects of my work.

- Participant Comfort: Participants may feel more comfortable providing feedback verbally, fostering open and candid discussions about their experiences. This comfort level can lead to rich insights and constructive feedback.

- Real-Time Adjustments: Immediate feedback empowers me to make real-time adjustments during sessions, addressing concerns and tailoring content to better meet participants' needs.

Negatives:

- Response Bias: Informal verbal feedback can be subject to response bias, as participants may hesitate to provide candid criticism in a face-to-face setting. This bias can limit the depth of feedback received.

- Lack of Reflection Time: Collecting feedback right after a session does not afford participants ample time for reflection. This limitation may result in superficial or immediate reactions rather than well-considered insights.

- Limited Comprehensive Insight: Relying solely on informal verbal feedback may provide a limited perspective on the effectiveness of teaching and training. It lacks the depth and breadth of more comprehensive evaluation methods.

- Absence of Quantitative Data: The absence of quantifiable data and clinical outcome measures in my current approach limits my ability to gauge the tangible impact of teaching and training on participants.

Analysis

Recognising the need to evolve my feedback and evaluation practices, I have begun to explore the concept of triangulation by expanding the assessment tools I use in teaching and training. By employing multiple methods, I aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of my sessions. Additionally, I have started to consider the timing of feedback collection, understanding that it can impact the depth and accuracy of responses.

Action

As a trainee sport and exercise psychologist, I am committed to improving my teaching and training evaluation practices. This includes establishing a structured feedback loop that allows me to incorporate constructive criticism into future sessions effectively. Furthermore, I will incorporate clear learning objectives into my teaching and training sessions, providing a foundation for my evaluation criteria. My evolving approach to evaluation aims to ensure that I continuously enhance the quality and impact of my teaching and training in the field of sport and exercise psychology.

13/09/23 - Reflection on Commonwealth Games Teaching and Training

Description

This reflection offers an opportunity to examine a teaching and training experience that occurred just over a year ago. The training session was conducted for athletes, coaches, and staff who were preparing to represent Jersey at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. The task was to create a 45-minute session that would enhance group cohesion and be beneficial to all participants.

The training session I conducted drew upon resources from the spotlight profile training I had completed two years earlier. To promote self-reflection regarding participants' mindsets and behavioural styles, I adapted two introductory exercises normally used in spotlight team training. In these exercises, participants were given cards describing various mindset and behavioural style preferences. They were tasked with ranking which cards described them best and engaging in a card trading game with others. The objective was for participants to trade cards that accurately described themselves, fostering reflection on how they think and behave in different situations. This activity also served as an icebreaker, allowing participants who didn't know each other well to interact in a context focused on self-description. Following this, I incorporated a group exercise where participants responded to scenarios such as how they perform under pressure or when things aren't going well. Participants used the cards they had collected to answer these questions and explain their reasoning to their group members. The groups were intentionally composed of individuals who hadn't interacted much before but would be closely involved in the upcoming Games.

Thoughts and Feelings

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. They felt that the session had provided a space for expressing themselves in a way others could understand. The exercise facilitated a substantial exchange of information about each other's behavioural styles and mindsets in various situations. Participants quickly gained insights into the personalities of people they may not have known well before the session. Given that they would soon be living, training, and sometimes competing together, this familiarity seemed invaluable.

Evaluation

The session proved valuable in promoting cohesion among the participants, who were bound by their shared representation of Jersey at the Commonwealth Games. It accelerated the

process of getting to know one another and provided a shared language to understand each other's behaviours and mindsets. In the context of a high-pressure sporting event, this early familiarity was seen as a significant advantage.

Analysis

This experience introduced a novel approach to teaching and training in my role as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist. It was an enjoyable and well-received endeavour that I am inclined to employ again. The exercise not only served as a means of promoting cohesion but also as a tool for understanding the behavioural and mindset dynamics of a diverse group. The structured yet engaging format created a sense of unity among participants.

Action

Looking ahead, I plan to use similar exercises to facilitate bonding and familiarity within large groups when it is appropriate. This innovative approach to teaching and training has opened up new possibilities in my role and highlights the importance of creative and impactful methods in fostering cohesion and understanding among individuals with distinct backgrounds and perspectives.

14/09/2023 - Teaching and Training Development as an AP and PWP

Description

In this reflective piece, I will explore the development of my abilities as a teacher and trainer, particularly in the context of my clinical work as an assistant psychologist and a psychological well-being practitioner.

Over the period from 2021 to 2023, I worked as an assistant psychologist in a complex condition service and, more recently, as a psychological well-being practitioner since March 2023. During this time, I was actively involved in facilitating and co-facilitating psychoeducational courses and groups, both independently and alongside colleagues. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, including dialectical behaviour therapy skills training, emotional coping skills, preparation for therapy, and ad hoc courses such as workshops on sleep and stress management.

Thoughts and Feelings

Initially, I experienced considerable discomfort when speaking in front of groups. The prospect of addressing large audiences or leading sessions was daunting. However, as I continued to deliver numerous sessions in various contexts, my confidence and self-efficacy as a teacher and trainer began to grow. The anxiety I felt at the beginning gradually decreased over time, making it more manageable. Although I do not anticipate ever eliminating nervousness during public speaking or course delivery, I now see some level of nerves as beneficial in enhancing performance.

Evaluation

The positive aspect of this experience is the significant boost it has provided to my self-efficacy and confidence in teaching and training roles. I have transitioned from being hesitant and uncomfortable when speaking in front of groups to feeling much more confident in delivering courses and facilitating discussions on various topics. Furthermore, this newfound confidence has not been limited to clinical practice alone; it has also extended to other contexts, including sports psychology and public speaking.

Analysis

The exposure to a high volume of teaching and training sessions has played a pivotal role in enhancing my skills as an educator. The repeated practice of leading sessions has helped me overcome initial reservations and become more adept at engaging with diverse groups of people. This increase in self-efficacy has benefited my overall professional development.

Action

In the future, I plan to continue delivering psychoeducational courses and groups as part of my role as a psychological well-being practitioner. I also aim to seize opportunities to teach and train in my capacity as a trainee sports psychologist. While teaching and training may not be my primary mode of delivering sports psychology interventions, I recognise the substantial value it holds in certain situations. As my confidence and self-efficacy continue to grow, I believe that I can leverage these skills to become a more effective practitioner in both clinical and sports psychology settings.

Reflective Practice Commentary

Reflective Commentary on Training Experience as a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist

This reflective commentary aims to provide a structured narrative of my training experience, offering insights into the pivotal moments, challenges, and personal growth that have shaped my journey thus far. In these pages, I will explore the multifaceted aspects of my training, with a focus on consulting with clients, adhering to ethical codes of conduct and professional boundaries, fulfilling roles as a teacher and trainer, and engaging in research.

My transition from a novice to a trainee in the field of Sport and Exercise Psychology has been characterised by a continuous pursuit of self-discovery and professional development. I believe that the significance of an event in this journey is not solely determined by its duration or external impact but rather by the profound shifts it elicited in my perspective, values, and approach to this dynamic profession. Through this commentary, I invite you to review my experiences, to understand not only what I did but, more importantly, why I did it and how these experiences have shaped me into the practitioner I am today.

This reflective journey will take you through the intricate threads of my training, unravelling the moments of connection and transformation, as well as the ethical challenges I encountered along the way. It will explore my roles as both a learner and a teacher, shedding light on how the exchange of knowledge has shaped my understanding of the competencies required in this field. Additionally, it will delve into the world of research, demonstrating how scientific exploration has expanded my horizons as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. Furthermore, it will explore reflections on how my experiences have informed the development of my philosophical approach in consultancy, research, and teaching contexts. Through self-reflection, I will candidly address my strengths and weaknesses, recognising that self-awareness is the cornerstone of growth.

Consulting with Clients

Initial Client Interactions

During the early stages of my training as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist, my initial

interactions with clients were marked by a palpable sense of anxiety and the overwhelming

need to be perceived as an expert capable of delivering substantial value. This anxiety

primarily stemmed from my limited practical experience in the field, which had consequently

eroded my self-confidence. As a response to this perceived inadequacy, I adopted a

meticulous approach to session preparation. My practice log entries aptly reflect the

considerable amount of time I allocated to preparing for client sessions, often dedicating an

equivalent amount of time to preparation as to the actual session duration (e.g., a one-hour

session warranted one hour of preparation). On reflection, I am aware that this stive for

efficacy and 'acting on the client' is a common experience among neophyte Sport and

Exercise Psychologists (Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2009), and is a key stage of the

individuation process that is central to practitioner growth (McEwan et al., 2019).

In my attempt to mitigate my apprehensions and offer valuable guidance, my meticulously

prepared sessions were accompanied by a strong emphasis on intervention strategies. A

pivotal resource in shaping my early approach was Josephine Perry's work, "Performing

Under Pressure" (2019). Perry's book, which I extensively referenced, provided valuable

insights into the practical implementation of various psychological skills in a sports context.

Throughout these initial interactions, I relied heavily on psychometric assessments as tools

for understanding and guiding my clients. Notable assessments included the Test of

Performance Strategies (TOPS) (Hardy et al., 2010) and the PCDEQ2 (Hill & Collins, 2019),

both of which I employed to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological aspects

affecting my clients' performance and well-being. My approach to assessments at this stage

was chiefly quantitative, and my understanding of the importance of psychological formulation was limited due to a lack of training and experience in this area. My assessment process typically involved a semi-structured interview coupled with the administration of psychometric instruments. This approach allowed me to gather valuable data while compensating for my initial uncertainty about formulating comprehensive psychological profiles. Furthermore, I often relied on pre-post psychometric assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions I implemented. This quantitative approach to assessment provided a sense of security and tangibility in measuring client progress, as numerical data seemed more quantifiable and "real" in managing my personal insecurities.

In summary, my early experiences with clients were characterised by a strong desire to prove my competence and offer tangible value despite my inherent lack of experience. These interactions were characterised by thorough preparation, structured interventions, and the use of psychometrics as valuable tools in the field of Sport and Exercise Psychology. However, my reliance on quantitative assessments and limited understanding of psychological formulation underscored the areas in which I needed further growth and development as a practitioner.

Client Progress and Personal Growth

Over the course of my training as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist, one of the most significant realisations I had was the apparent correlation between the duration of my engagement with clients and the sense of progress in their journeys. It became evident that longer-term work provided a valuable opportunity to invest in the development of the therapeutic alliance, a critical factor in the success of interventions (Tod et al., 2019). This realisation marked a pivotal shift in my approach to client interactions and profoundly

influenced the trajectory of my professional growth. As I reflected upon my experiences, it became clear that the depth and quality of the therapeutic relationship significantly contributed to the positive outcomes I observed in clients with whom I had engaged in longer-term work. This relationship is, of course, emphasised in the Sport Psychology practitioner development literature (Tod & Andersen, 2012). Consequently, I began to place greater emphasis on rapport-building as an integral part of my practice. I recognised that establishing trust, understanding, and a collaborative relationship with clients were essential foundations for facilitating meaningful change.

Another pivotal aspect of my personal growth as a practitioner was centred on the concept of psychological formulation. During the early stages of my training, I had underestimated the importance of formulation, reducing it to a mere bullet-point needs analysis. However, my reflection and self-assessment illuminated the shortcomings of this approach. I began to understand that effective formulations, rooted in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) principles, played a pivotal role in guiding interventions. As my practice evolved, I integrated a variety of CBT-informed formulation tools in my approach, including five areas formulations (such as the CBT hot cross bun), REBT-style ABC formulations, Friendly Formulations (5Ps), and, on occasion, longitudinal formulations (Simmons & Griffiths, 2017). The ability to select and adapt the appropriate formulation tool for each unique client situation became a hallmark of my growth as a practitioner. As my confidence in my abilities grew, I also felt increasingly comfortable utilising freestyle formulations while maintaining fidelity to the principles of the CBT model that I employed. The evolution in my formulation skills had a profound and positive impact on my practice. Clear and co-created understandings of the issues at hand proved essential for guiding effective interventions. My ability to create and utilise formulations that were both meaningful to clients and aligned with

therapeutic goals contributed significantly to my competence as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist.

In conclusion, my journey through client interactions and personal growth as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist was marked by a growing appreciation of the importance of long-term engagement and the development of strong therapeutic alliances. Furthermore, my understanding and utilisation of psychological formulation evolved significantly, enabling me to provide more effective interventions and enhance my competence as a practitioner in the field.

Handling Difficult Cases

Working with children under the age of 16 presented a notable set of challenges during my training as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. Beyond the ethical considerations that working with minors inherently entails, I encountered practical difficulties in establishing rapport, as compared to my interactions with adult clients.

One primary challenge I encountered when working with children was the complexity of establishing a rapport comparable to that formed with adult clients. Constructing a foundation of trust and collaboration is crucial in therapy, regardless of the client's age. However, I observed that children often presented unique challenges in this aspect. Their interactions were sometimes less open or more guarded, posing difficulties in cultivating the necessary trust and comfort for therapeutic progress. Additionally, children typically exhibit a lower level of self-awareness and limited psychological insight compared to adults, making the application of psychoeducation and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) informed

approaches more challenging. These methods often rely on introspection and self-reflection, which might be less pronounced in younger clients.

Reflecting on Henriksen et al.'s (2014) insights, it becomes evident that young athletes constitute a distinct client group with unique needs. They require a holistic skills package to navigate existential challenges, emphasising the importance of considering their developmental stage. The involvement of the broader environment, including coaches, experts, and teammates, is crucial for effective interventions. In my experience, the struggle to establish rapport with children could be attributed to the nuanced nature of their developmental phase. Children, as distinct from miniature adults, may require specialised skills and strategies that align with their cognitive and emotional capacities. Integrating a long-term focus into interventions with young athletes, as suggested by Henriksen et al., highlights the need for patience and persistence in building therapeutic relationships, considering the dynamic nature of their growth and psychological development. This reflection underscores that I need to develop my ability to tailor my approach to the unique characteristics of young clients, acknowledging their distinct needs and embedding interventions within a comprehensive, long-term framework.

My exposure to working with brief interventions, notably during my engagement with the Jersey team at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022, illuminated the complexities of providing short-term support. This context necessitated engaging with athletes on a brief basis, often without prior long-term involvement. The demands of brief interventions compelled me to adapt rapidly and accumulate experience within a relatively short timeframe. Before this experience, my exposure to brief interventions was limited, leaving me feeling relatively inexperienced in this domain. However, the circumstances demanded

swift learning and adaptation. Reflecting on Gutkind's (2004) insights, athletes at all levels, including those at major competitions, can benefit from brief, solution-focused interventions in such circumstances. The theoretical framework of solution-focused brief counselling (SFBC) emerges as a relevant approach in major games settings. In my experience, the challenge of providing brief interventions aligned with Gutkind's observations, emphasising the critical role of mental and emotional support, particularly in high-stakes competitive environments. The steep learning curve I documented in my reflective diary underscores the dynamic nature of brief interventions and the need for practitioners to swiftly and effectively adapt to provide meaningful support to athletes facing the challenges of major tournaments. This is therefore an approach which I hope to strengthen my knowledge and skills with, to use in future scenarios which may be similar.

In conclusion, the difficulties encountered while working with children and engaging in brief interventions have been integral components of my training journey as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. These challenges underscore the importance of adaptability, the need to tailor therapeutic approaches to the developmental stage of the client, and the significance of continuous learning and growth as a practitioner in this dynamic field.

Ethical Codes of Conduct and Professional Boundaries

Understanding and Applying Ethical Principles

In the realm of Sport and Exercise Psychology, ethical conduct is paramount to ensure the well-being and rights of clients. The British Psychological Society (BPS) provides a comprehensive ethical framework, characterised by four principles: Respect, Competence, Responsibility, and Integrity (British Psychological Society, 2021).

Respect serves as a foundational ethical principle, emphasising the inherent worth of all individuals regardless of their social status, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics. It underscores the importance of providing equal moral consideration to all. One prominent aspect of practising respect I see in my consultancy is consistently making clients aware of the boundaries of confidentiality and seeking their consent to retain their data. This practice has not only upheld the ethical principle of respect but has also fostered transparency and trust within the therapeutic relationship. Similarly, in my research endeavours I have consistently prioritised the ethical principle of respect by diligently collecting informed consent from participants and ensuring thorough debriefing afterward. These experiences have significantly developed my ethical practice by emphasising the importance of respecting individuals' autonomy and rights in both clinical and research contexts.

Competence pertains to Sport and Exercise Psychologists' ability to provide services within their areas of expertise, knowledge, training, and experience, emphasising the importance of adhering to professional standards. In my own practice, a notable example of adhering to the principle of competence emerged during my work with a client who presented with a complex clinical profile, potentially linked to childhood sexual abuse and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (cPTSD). Recognising that this case extended beyond my boundary of competence, I made the ethical decision to refer the client to their General Practitioner (GP) with suggestions for onward referral based on my experience in mental health services. This experience has been instrumental in my development as an ethical practitioner, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the limits of one's expertise and prioritising the client's well-being by facilitating appropriate referrals to ensure they receive the specialised care they require.

Responsibility, an integral element of professional autonomy, requires psychologists to accept appropriate responsibility for their actions and decisions. It highlights the significance of accountability, prevention of harm, and ethical conduct. Demonstrating responsibility in my practice has involved professional accountability, consistently taking steps to ensure that my clients are well-informed about the evidence base for the interventions we explore together. This practice aligns with the ethical principle of responsible use of knowledge and skills. By discussing the evidence base for interventions with clients, I not only empower them to make informed decisions about their well-being but also uphold the ethical commitment to providing effective and evidence-based interventions. This approach has contributed significantly to my growth as an ethical practitioner by reinforcing the importance of transparency, accountability, and evidence-based practice.

Integrity encompasses honesty, truthfulness, accuracy, and consistency in professional actions. It necessitates setting aside self-interest, being open to challenge, and upholding fairness and objectivity. Maintaining professional boundaries, particularly in a small community where professional and personal contexts often overlap, has posed unique challenges. Several instances, such as having training partners become clients and receiving treatment from a physiotherapist who subsequently became a client, have required careful management. Adhering to the ethical principle of integrity, I navigated these situations with transparency and objectivity, setting aside personal interests to ensure that professional boundaries were upheld. Reflecting on these experiences, I have gained valuable insights into managing potential conflicts of interest and the importance of maintaining the highest ethical standards, even in complex interpersonal dynamics. These experiences have significantly contributed to my ethical practice by reinforcing the need for integrity, objectivity, and professionalism in all aspects of my work.

In reflection, integrating these ethical principles into my professional practice has been instrumental in upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct. These experiences have not only enriched my ethical decision-making but have also deepened my commitment to ethical practice as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. They have reinforced the importance of respecting autonomy, acknowledging competence boundaries, fostering transparency, and maintaining the utmost integrity in all aspects of my work. Overall, these principles have not only guided my ethical practice but have also contributed significantly to my growth as an ethical practitioner in the field.

Experience as a Teacher/Trainer

In the realm of Sport and Exercise Psychology, the role of a teacher and trainer extends beyond conventional educational settings, encompassing diverse contexts that call for adaptability and a multifaceted skill set. Reflecting on a series of teaching and training experiences spanning the duration of my studies, this section delves into the evolving roles and contexts in which I have engaged as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist.

Reflecting on my teaching roles, it is crucial to acknowledge the diverse educational landscapes I have navigated. Teaching at Highlands College exposed me to the challenges of adapting content to different education levels. The transition to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to explore digital teaching methods and engage with students in virtual spaces. In contrast, the experience at La Moye Prison confronted my initial biases and demonstrated that effective teaching transcends the environment, emphasising the role of nurture over nature in shaping individuals. These experiences highlighted the need for adaptability in teaching and training roles. Whether in an academic institution, a virtual

classroom, or a prison, the ability to tailor content to specific audiences and engage learners effectively is paramount.

My journey into teaching and training continued with roles as an assistant psychologist and, more recently, as a psychological well-being practitioner. During this period, my responsibilities involved facilitating psychoeducational courses and groups, addressing topics ranging from dialectical behaviour therapy skills to emotional coping and stress management. Notably, these early contexts served as a foundational stage for honing my teaching and training skills. At the outset, I harboured a degree of apprehension, as speaking before groups was intimidating. However, the continuous exposure allowed my confidence and self-efficacy as a teacher and trainer to grow over time. These initial experiences underscored the transformative impact of mastery experiences in teaching and training roles. As Bandura's self-efficacy theory suggests, repeated practice in leading sessions helped reduce my initial anxieties (Bandura et al., 1999). This exposure not only boosted my self-efficacy but also revealed the value of embracing nervousness as a means of enhancing performance.

Shifting the focus to a unique sporting context, my role as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist involved designing a session aimed at enhancing group cohesion for athletes, coaches, and staff preparing for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. Drawing on my training in the SpotlightPROFILE, I employed innovative exercises to promote self-reflection regarding participants' mindsets and behavioural styles. The session's success lay in its ability to provide participants with a shared language to understand each other's behaviours and mindsets, fostering cohesion among a diverse group of individuals. This experience revealed the potential for creative teaching and training methods to facilitate bonding and familiarity within large, diverse groups. The structured yet engaging format

emerged as a valuable tool for promoting unity among participants with distinct backgrounds and perspectives.

Expanding beyond the traditional boundaries of Sport and Exercise Psychology, I was presented with the opportunity to deliver training to a financial services organisation. This endeavour required me to adapt my teaching and training skills to an entirely new context. The workshop, based on the principles of the SpotlightPROFILE, was well received and encouraged me to consider the broader applications of Sport and Exercise Psychology in diverse settings. This experience illuminated the transferability of Sport and Exercise Psychology principles to non-sporting domains. It reinforced the importance of aligning teaching and training methods with the needs and goals of specific contexts, promoting the versatility of my role.

As I navigated these varied teaching and training contexts, an essential aspect of my role revolved around gathering feedback and evaluating the effectiveness of my sessions. Initially, I relied heavily on informal verbal feedback as the primary source of information. While this method offered advantages, such as immediacy and participant comfort, it was accompanied by limitations, including response bias and a lack of deep reflection time. Recognising the need for a more structured feedback loop, I began exploring the concept of triangulation. By incorporating diverse assessment tools and considering the timing of feedback collection, I aimed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of my teaching and training.

In conclusion, my teaching and training roles as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist have evolved in response to diverse contexts, each demanding adaptability, and a nuanced

approach. These experiences have instilled the value of mastery experiences, creative teaching methods, and feedback evolution. As I continue to expand my horizons, I remain committed to refining my teaching and training practices, ensuring their effectiveness in both sporting and non-sporting domains.

Experience as a Researcher

Engagement in Research

During my training as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist, my engagement in research projects has been a defining aspect of my journey. These research endeavours have played a pivotal role in shaping my identity as a practitioner and have provided me with invaluable skills, insights, and a deeper understanding of the field. From the outset of my training, I recognised the fundamental role that research plays in the development of Sport and Exercise Psychology. It became evident that research is the bedrock upon which evidence-based practice stands. As a trainee, I actively sought opportunities to immerse myself in research projects, eager to contribute to the body of knowledge and enhance my professional competence.

One of the key projects that significantly impacted my development as a researcher was the umbrella review on the efficacy of psychological skills training (PST) for enhancing performance in sport. This project involved a comprehensive analysis of systematic, meta-analytic, and narrative reviews that summarised the effects of PST interventions. Through this undertaking, I honed my skills in literature review, data synthesis, and critical appraisal. I gained insights into the challenges of synthesising and interpreting research findings, particularly when dealing with a diverse range of review methodologies and quality assessments. My involvement in the study on the SpotlightPROFILE personality profiling

tool further enriched my research journey. This project delved into the realm of coach-athlete relationships, exploring how a psychometric tool could enhance this critical dynamic. Through this experience, I delved into mixed-methods research, balancing quantitative analysis with qualitative insights from joint coach-athlete interviews. This project illuminated the complexities of human relationships within the sporting context and underscored the importance of holistic approaches in understanding athlete-coach dynamics. In addition to these projects, the study on practitioner attitudes towards psychometric measures provided me with a unique opportunity to explore the multifaceted landscape of attitudes within the sport psychology community. Employing thematic content analysis (TCA), I analysed interviews with practitioners at various stages of their professional development, shedding light on diverse perspectives, purposes, benefits, limitations, and ethical considerations surrounding the use of psychometric measures in practice. This study underscored the ethical dilemmas and practical design issues that can accompany research in this field and emphasised the importance of ethical considerations and the need for a balanced approach when working with sensitive data and complex professional relationships.

Reflecting on my engagement in research, these experiences have equipped me with a diverse skill set. I have developed proficiency in quantitative and qualitative research methods, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. These skills have proven invaluable in my practice as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist, allowing me to offer evidence-based interventions and tailored support to athletes, coaches, and teams. Moreover, my journey as a researcher has reinforced the profound significance of research in the field of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Research not only informs evidence-based practice but also fosters innovation and advances our understanding of the intricacies of human behaviour within the context of

sport and exercise. It serves as the bridge between theory and practice, enabling practitioners to make informed decisions and optimise performance outcomes.

In summary, my engagement in research during my training has been transformative, equipping me with the skills and insights essential for my role as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. These experiences have underscored the vital role of research in the field, emphasising its contribution to evidence-based practice and the continual evolution of Sport and Exercise Psychology.

Contributions to Knowledge

My journey as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist has not only been marked by active engagement in research but has also yielded meaningful contributions to the field's knowledge base. These contributions have not only expanded my competencies but have also presented challenges that have enriched my understanding of research within this specialised domain.

One of the significant contributions from my research work is the umbrella review on the efficacy of psychological skills training (PST) for enhancing performance in sport. This comprehensive analysis of existing reviews revealed that while 90% of the reviews concluded that PST interventions can enhance performance, a staggering 97% of them were critically low in quality. This finding highlights the need for discernment when assessing the review-level evidence for PST interventions. It underscores the importance of rigorous methodology in evaluating the effects of psychological interventions in sport—a crucial insight that I have carried into my practice. The study on the SpotlightPROFILE personality profiling tool added another layer to my contributions. Although the quantitative analysis did not yield statistically

significant differences in coach-athlete relationships, the thematic content analysis unearthed valuable qualitative insights. Themes such as 'increased insight into self and partner' and 'accelerated the development of a shared framework for working together' shed light on the nuanced impacts of this intervention. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the role of psychometric tools in enhancing athlete-coach relationships - a dynamic area within sport psychology. Additionally, the study on practitioner attitudes towards psychometric measures illuminated the ethical dilemmas and practical design issues that can accompany research in this field. This experience emphasised the importance of ethical considerations and the need for a balanced approach when working with sensitive data and complex professional relationships.

Engaging in research has undoubtedly enhanced my competencies as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist. I have developed proficiency in research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. These skills have empowered me to approach complex issues with a critical and evidence-based mindset. I have learned the importance of meticulousness, patience, and adaptability—traits that are equally valuable in research and practice. However, my research journey has not been without its share of challenges and lessons. The arduous process of seeking publication, particularly for the systematic review, taught me resilience and the importance of tenacity in navigating the intricate landscape of academic publishing. It underscored the need for continuous refinement and adaptation in response to peer review feedback, reinforcing the iterative nature of research.

In summary, my contributions to knowledge through research have not only expanded my competencies but have also brought to light the challenges and nuances that characterise this domain. These experiences have enhanced my appreciation for evidence-based practice and

instilled in me a commitment to the continual advancement of the field of Sport and Exercise Psychology.

Philosophical Evolution

Throughout my professional journey as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist, my philosophical approach has undergone significant evolution, whereby shifts in both my ontological and epistemological stances have been reflected in my roles as consultant, teacher and researcher.

In terms of ontology, I've experienced notable shifts in my conceptualisation of reality, especially concerning the essence of human experiences within the sporting context. Early in my training, I may have leaned towards a more deterministic view, presupposing clear-cut definitions of reality. However, over time, I've come to appreciate the complexity and individuality of these experiences, acknowledging the nuanced and dynamic nature of human perception and adopting a more critically realist ontology. Epistemologically, my journey has seen transformative developments in how I perceive and seek knowledge. Initially, there may have been a reliance on traditional, compartmentalised ways of acquiring knowledge. However, embracing the interconnectedness of various sources and recognising the value of experiential learning has become integral to my evolving epistemological stance.

This philosophical evolution significantly impacts my consultancy approach. I've moved away from a stance of rigid certainty, realising the fluidity and complexity inherent in psychological processes. The shift towards a collaborative approach, acting 'with' rather than 'on' the client, reflects a deeper appreciation for the collaborative understanding of meaning within the therapeutic space.

In research, the blended use of quantitative and qualitative methods represents a conscious effort to mirror my evolving philosophical stance. It embodies an acknowledgment that there are many different ways in which reality can be perceived, which in turn demands a comprehensive methodological approach to capture its richness. In the domain of teaching, my philosophy now embraces flexibility, recognising that varied clients and contexts necessitate adaptable approaches. This flexibility is anchored in the understanding that knowledge acquisition is diverse, and teaching strategies should resonate with the unique learning styles and backgrounds of my audience, and crucially must be tailored to the context in which they are delivered.

As I reflect on these shifts, I anticipate a continued evolution of my philosophical approach. The journey has not only refined my understanding of ontology and epistemology but has become a cornerstone in shaping my practitioner identity. Moving forward, I envisage an ongoing commitment to embracing the dynamic nature of both reality and knowledge, fostering an ever-deepening connection between my evolving philosophy and the impactful practices of consultancy, research, and teaching.

Self-Reflection and Personal Development

Strengths and Weaknesses

As a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist, I have had the opportunity to assess my strengths and acknowledge areas where improvement is needed. One of my notable strengths lies in my ability to connect with individuals and build rapport effectively. This skill has been particularly valuable when working with athletes, coaches, and teams, as it fosters trust and facilitates open communication. Moreover, my capacity for empathy allows me to understand and address the unique psychological challenges faced by athletes, helping them develop

resilience and mental fortitude. Another strength is my dedication to continued learning and self-improvement. Throughout my journey, I have actively sought opportunities for professional development, whether through formal training, research projects, or reflective practice. This commitment to growth has enabled me to stay updated with the latest advancements in the field and refine my competencies as a practitioner.

However, I am not without areas where improvement is necessary. One significant area of weakness I have identified is the need for a more structured approach to assessment and evaluation in my teaching and training roles. While I have relied on informal verbal feedback, I recognise the importance of incorporating more comprehensive feedback mechanisms and clear learning objectives to enhance the quality of my sessions. Additionally, my reliance on informal verbal feedback may introduce response bias and limit the depth of insights obtained.

Enhancing Competencies

To further develop as a practitioner, I have outlined specific plans and strategies to enhance my competencies. Building on my strengths, I intend to capitalise on my rapport-building abilities and empathy by continuing to prioritise the establishment of trusting relationships with clients. This will involve active listening, empathy, and creating a safe space for individuals to express their concerns and emotions.

In response to my weaknesses, I plan to incorporate structured feedback loops and clear learning objectives into my teaching and training sessions. This approach will allow for more comprehensive and balanced evaluations, mitigating response bias and providing a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of my sessions. Additionally, I will explore the use of

assessment tools and outcome measures to quantitatively assess the impact of my interventions, ensuring evidence-based practice.

In conclusion, my self-reflection as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist has allowed me to recognise my strengths and weaknesses. By capitalising on my strengths and addressing my weaknesses through structured feedback and assessment mechanisms, I aim to continually enhance my competencies as a practitioner. My commitment to self-improvement and dedication to the field will continue to drive my professional development in the dynamic and ever-evolving domain of Sport and Exercise Psychology.

Conclusion

My journey as a trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist has been a dynamic process of self-discovery and professional growth, shaped by diverse experiences and a commitment to ethical practice. In the initial stages of consulting with clients, I established a solid foundation in building rapport and fostering trust. These interpersonal strengths became pivotal in navigating ethical codes of conduct and professional boundaries. I realised the critical importance of safeguarding the well-being and confidentiality of clients, while also acknowledging the boundaries inherent in the practitioner-client relationship. This early insight laid the groundwork for my ethical approach to practice, emphasising the need for continuous self-awareness and ethical vigilance. Teaching and training roles have further enriched my journey. From the classroom at Highlands College to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and even within the unique confines of a prison environment, I have adapted my pedagogical approach and developed an appreciation for the diverse contexts in which education can thrive. These experiences have sharpened my adaptability, empathy, and commitment to evidence-based teaching and training. Engagement in research has deepened

my understanding of Sport and Exercise Psychology. From systematic reviews to mixed-methods studies, I have honed my research skills and gained a profound appreciation for the importance of rigorous methodology and ethical considerations in research. These experiences have contributed not only to my own growth but also to the broader knowledge base of the field.

Self-reflection and personal development have been at the core of my journey. Recognising strengths in rapport-building and a dedication to learning has bolstered my confidence as a practitioner. Identifying areas for growth, particularly in structured assessment and feedback, has underscored my commitment to refinement. As I move forward, I am invigorated by the potential of the ever-evolving field of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Each challenge and opportunity encountered along this journey has formed me into a more adept, empathetic, and passionate practitioner. I am committed to empowering athletes, coaches, and teams in their quest for excellence, all while upholding the highest ethical standards. The future holds the promise of continuous innovation and the optimisation of human performance—an art and science that I wholeheartedly enjoy. My journey continues, and I am eager to contribute to the growth of Sport and Exercise Psychology while continually refining my own practice.

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