

EXPLORING THE CONTRIBUTION OF PERSONAL QUALITIES TO THE EFFECTIVE  
DELIVERY OF SPORT PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE PROVISION

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## **Abstract**

Previous literature within applied sport psychology offers little detailed discussion regarding the personal qualities of sport psychology practitioners and the impact of these qualities on practice. This is despite the development of models of professional philosophy that advocate the person behind the practitioner as the core foundation of practice (Poczwadowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004), and the move within the profession towards utilising approaches grounded in counselling psychology (Hack, 2005); a discipline that has long concerned itself with the personal qualities of its therapists and how these impact upon the therapeutic relationship (Corey, 2009). There has also been limited consideration given to the personal qualities of effective sport psychology practitioners in relation to the roles they fulfil and the environments in which they operate. Sport psychologists may often find themselves operating in an organisational or human-resource-type role in elite level sport environments (Nesti, 2010), yet there is a lack of research that explores the realities of such a role and how a practitioner's personal qualities may aid them. In recent years, the education and training pathways for sport psychology practitioners have been afforded much attention, and provision has developed to provide clear routes to sport psychologist registration. It is clear that aspiring practitioners must be appropriately educated and trained to be able to provide high quality sport psychology support, and as such there exists clearly established 'standards of proficiency' that trainees must meet. However, it is argued that opportunities to explore personal qualities and how they relate to applied practice should be afforded to aspiring practitioners throughout their education and training (Eubank & Hudson, 2013).

In-depth qualitative research was therefore conducted to explore the personal qualities of sport psychologists from the perspective of their professional colleagues as well as practitioners themselves, and to explore how these qualities interact with the professional sport environment. The research programme broadly consisted of two phases:

1. Studies 1a and 1b involved interviews with 13 coaches and sport physicians regarding the personal characteristics and qualities of applied sport psychologists deemed necessary for effective practice (study 1a) and how these personal qualities were perceived to help sport psychologists operate effectively in the professional sport environment (study 1b).
2. Study 2 utilised a number of qualitative research methodologies over a total period of approximately 20 months, to explore the personal qualities of three practising sport psychologists within the UK. A life history was gathered for each of the practitioners, who were then required to maintain reflective diaries and participate in interviews to explore these in greater detail. The diaries and subsequent interviews focussed on the sport psychologist's personal qualities and applied practice.

Combined, the data from these studies provides original and valuable insight into the personal qualities of experienced sport psychologists, and how these contribute to their effective practice in often challenging and ambiguous environments. Coaches and physicians highlighted a number of qualities that they considered to contribute to effective sport psychologist practice, in particular in relation to building relationships and remaining professional. They were also able to discuss these qualities and how they interact with the professional sport environment in terms of a sport psychologist's ability to undertake an organisational psychology-type role and manage relationships with other members of staff. Study 2 provided first-hand accounts of professional practice from sport psychologists currently practising within the UK, extending the insight shared by coaches and physicians. Although the three sport psychologists involved in study 2 highlighted similar personal qualities to one another (such as humility, integrity and resilience), these were discussed in relation to their differing circumstances, both in terms of who they are as people, and the sport environments they work within. The practitioners discussed their varying roles and how

their personal qualities enabled them to survive the challenging and ambiguous nature of elite professional sport.

Findings from study 2 suggest that of key importance is a sport psychologist's level of self-knowledge and self-awareness. Sport psychologists must possess an awareness of 'who they are' and develop and maintain an in-depth knowledge of how they as a person operate within their applied role. This is particularly important given the frequency with which sport psychologists are required to perform within an organisational role, despite lacking the necessary training to do so (Nesti, 2010). The findings from the phases described above are therefore synthesised in a discussion regarding the education and training of sport psychologists, and it is suggested that programmes of study and training must begin to consider personal qualities and their importance to practitioner development. Students and trainees must be supported in exploring these qualities and understanding how they may impact upon their applied work, and provided with sufficient insight into the organisational roles they may be required to adopt in practice. An understanding of self, which was demonstrated by the sport psychologists in study 2, allows them to survive and succeed in their work, and it is therefore the responsibility of education and training providers to ensure that this understanding is developed.

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Figure 1: Hierarchical model of professional philosophy (Poczardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). Page 7 and page 205.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Theoretical framing of the thesis**

At the outset of the thesis, the researcher felt it necessary to detail its theoretical basis and articulate the value of such research to the sport psychology profession. An emphasis on the personal development of sport psychologists has been awarded increased attention within sport psychology literature in recent years. Approaches to practice within sport psychology have broadened to encompass not only the use of problem-solving approaches concerned with mental skills training, but also more humanistic, person-centred approaches that utilise skills grounded in counselling (Hack, 2005). Such a humanistic approach has been likened to various other approaches to include positive psychology from Seligman, self-actualisation from Maslow and person-centeredness from Rogers, all of which place emphasis on an individual's holistic development.

Katz and Hemmings (2009) have highlighted that the disciplines of counselling and psychotherapy can “provide sport psychologists with a rich resource regarding the formation and maintenance of the professional relationship and the process of change” (p. 10). The sport psychology literature is therefore beginning to appreciate what can be learned from counselling psychology regarding the importance of the client-practitioner relationship and the personal qualities of the practitioner that are implicated in its effectiveness. Rogers (1957) in particular, in his work on person-centred counselling, has identified three personal qualities that a therapist must bring to the therapeutic relationship; genuineness, non-judgemental care, and empathy. More recently, literature examining practitioner qualities has begun to permeate the sport psychology literature base (e.g. Nesti, 2004; 2010; Fifer et al., 2008; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). However, unlike counselling psychology, sport psychology literature offers only limited discussions of effective sport psychologists' personal qualities.

A more detailed focus on personal qualities is therefore at the centre of this research. It is worth noting that although all psychological models highlight the importance of the client-practitioner relationship, the humanistic model goes further in emphasising the nature of this relationship and the qualities of the practitioner that are required for effective therapeutic work (Hill, 2001). Therefore this research seeks not to identify the personal qualities of humanistic sport psychologists specifically, but uses this philosophical approach as a basis for exploring why personal qualities are important for sport psychology practice and how they interact with the unique environment of elite professional sport.

### *1.1.1 Understanding 'self' in context*

In their book 'Achieving Excellence in High Performance Sport', Kyndt and Rowell (2012) state that "interpersonal skills are best viewed as the scaffolding that supports, indeed enhances the delivery of our technical skills" (p. IX). They refer to 'people skills' such as how the sport science practitioner relates to others and develops effective working relationships, as well as how they respond as an individual to, for example, increased pressure and stress. Kyndt and Rowell discuss these skills as those which develop from an individual's self-awareness regarding their personality, values, motivations, emotions and behaviours which, in a practical sense, can influence their ability to communicate, influence, work within a team, manage conflict and change, perform under pressure, and inspire and lead others. Consideration of these skills is therefore highly important for a practitioner operating in high performance sport.

Some practitioners may be more 'naturally gifted' in terms of possessing these 'people skills', but Kyndt and Rowell believe that everyone has the ability to develop them in the same way as a learned skill. It could be argued that these 'people skills' are akin to the concept of 'personal qualities' given their representation of the individual and their believed developmental nature. Similarly, the British Association of Counselling Psychology (BACP)

has also alluded to the developmental nature of a counselling psychologist's personal qualities. Within the context of high performance sport, Kyndt and Rowell consider knowing oneself to be of critical importance to the effective practitioner, as self-awareness will aid the individual in understanding and managing themselves, allowing them to exert greater control over who they are and/or who they want to be. The interviewees from Kyndt and Rowell's book were all 'distinct individuals', yet they displayed some common qualities in their pursuit of excellence. For sport psychologists specifically, this distinction is emphasised by Tod and Anderson's (2005) view that they are the tool; they are the means by which their work is carried out and against which their effectiveness is therefore 'measured'. This thesis aims to 'celebrate' the uniqueness of an individual sport psychologist whilst providing valuable insight into the realities of their work, and therefore provide guidance for all practitioners on how to engage in practice driven by an awareness of 'who they are' and the impact 'they' can have.

## **1.2 Research approaches to exploring personal qualities**

The literature on professional practice in sport psychology, and to some extent that on the personal qualities of sport psychologists, gives an indication of the research that is 'missing' within the discipline. The personal qualities of sport psychologists have been awarded some (but little) attention within the literature, and discussions are limited in depth and in their synthesis to the applied environment. The literature that does exist in this area has employed qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews (e.g. Friesen & Orlick, 2010) and consultant narratives (e.g. Fifer, Henschen, Gould & Ravizza, 2008). Similarly, qualitative research interviews have been utilised to explore coach and athlete perceptions of sport psychologists as users of their services (e.g. Anderson, Miles, Robinson & Mahoney, 2004). However there appears to be little research that combines a focus on the personal qualities of the effective sport psychologist and the perceptions of colleagues, and

specifically no apparent research utilising sport physicians as the colleague group. The first phase of the research, therefore, explored coaches' and sport physicians' perceptions of effective sport psychologists' personal qualities.

Simons and Andersen (1995) have highlighted their own thoughts regarding their approach to sport psychology research that resonates with this thesis:

Part of sport psychology is about observing and reflecting upon the richness of the sport experience. Following this flow, we thought it would be educational and enjoyable to get some "lived" history from sport psychology consultants...we also hoped that in this process of recalling their experiences and offering their views, they would drop a few pearls of wisdom on us (p. 450)

This extract encapsulates the value of obtaining first-hand accounts from experienced professionals, and thus formed the basis of the second phase of the research. Martindale and Collins (2010) have previously suggested a need for deeper explorations of how established practitioners arrive at making decisions, given their wealth of professional experience and the declarative knowledge they can provide. Phase two of the current research explored personal qualities in more detail by gathering insight into sport psychologists' own perceptions of their individual personal qualities and how these impacted upon their work within the elite sport environment. This phase involved a 20 month longitudinal study following three highly experienced sport psychologists working in elite professional sport within the UK. Friesen and Orlick (2010) cited the need for case studies of sport psychologists that emphasise the consultants' beliefs and values, and this thesis has extended their recommendation. This research focussed on consultants' personal qualities, with a significant amount of information being gained through the use of practitioner reflective diaries, which informed subsequent interviews to explore the practitioners' reflections in greater depth. In addition, Tod (2007) highlighted the need for qualitative research to explore the life histories of practising sport psychologists in order to recognise how such experiences have contributed to competence

within their current profession, as well as their motives behind pursuing sport psychology as a career. Collecting life histories was therefore a key part of the longitudinal study.

The third and final phase of the research did not involve data collection. Rather, the implications of the findings from the research are explored with regards to the education and training processes for sport psychologists. After listening to coaches, physicians and sport psychologists, and gaining a wealth of information on sport psychology consultants' personal qualities and elite professional sport, it was important to consider how this information could benefit future practitioners. Personal qualities, to the knowledge of the researcher, are not currently studied or developed explicitly within sport psychology education and training. The research borrowed extensively from the counselling psychology literature; Katz and Hemmings (2009) have emphasised the similarities between the two professions, particularly with regards to the relationship between the therapist/psychologist and client/athlete. The personal qualities of the counselling psychologist are considered to play a significant role in developing an effective therapeutic relationship with a client, which in turn will dictate the quality of the therapeutic outcome (Corey, 2009). The BACP describe several 'good personal qualities' that a counsellor should 'aspire to', and suggest that although such qualities are 'deeply rooted' within the practitioner, they are developed through 'personal commitment' (BACP, 2009). One could also assume that, given the structured education and training routes to becoming a sport psychologist, educators and supervisors could also play a vital role in encouraging self-exploration and development in future practitioners. Therefore phase 3 has examined the findings of the research in detail in relation to the development of sport psychologists and how personal qualities and organisational psychology should be awarded greater attention throughout this education and training process.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

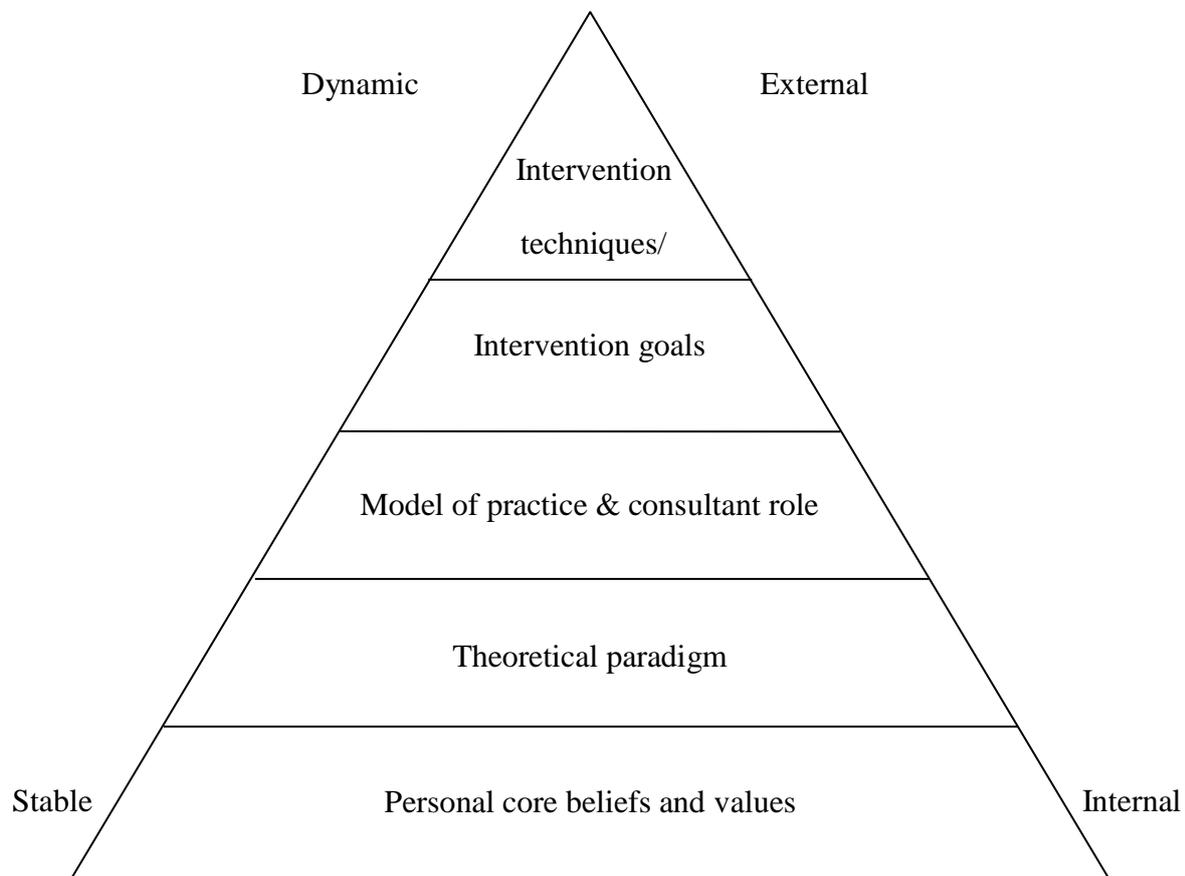
### **2.1 Professional practice philosophy**

Poczwadowski et al. (2004) have conceptualised a hierarchical model of professional philosophy (see figure 1 below) where the foundation of personal core beliefs and values informs the progressively less fundamental layers of theoretical paradigm, model of practice and consultant role, intervention goals, and intervention techniques/methods. The foundation of personal core beliefs and values provides “direction when confronted with the unique situations where there is not an established textbook solution” (Poczwadowski et al., 2004, p.446).

Poczwadowski et al. offer the following description of the professional philosophy that drives practice:

Professional philosophy refers to the consultant’s beliefs and values concerning the nature of reality (sport reality in particular), the place of sport in human life, the basic nature of a human being, the nature of human behavior change, and also the consultant’s beliefs and values concerning his or her potential role in, and the theoretical and practical means of, influencing their clients toward mutually set intervention goals (p. 449)

Poczwadowski et al. argue that the levels are linked interdependently and hierarchically, with greater influence exerted by the lower and therefore more fundamental levels. The practitioner’s personal core beliefs and values form the foundation for their philosophy and model of practice, which subsequently influence the other, more dynamic and external components of applied work; intervention goals, techniques and methods.



**Figure 1. Hierarchical structure of professional philosophy (Poczwadowski et al., 2004)**

The most stable and internal component of the model, therefore, is represented by a sport psychologist’s ‘personal core beliefs and values’. Specifically, these beliefs include “convictions regarding free will versus determinism in human actions, people being rational versus irrational and fundamental goodness (vs. badness) of human nature” (p. 449). A practitioner’s practice is often also informed by values of personal importance, which include respect for truth, privacy, autonomy, and commitments, and concern for the growth and development of people, human equality, and gratitude (Blocher, 1987, as cited in Poczwadowski et al., 2004, p. 450). It is suggested that sport psychologists should reflect upon and question their own beliefs and values to foster their self-knowledge and self-awareness, a notion which has been discussed within the sport psychology literature base (Simons & Andersen, 1995; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas & Maynard, 2007).

## **2.2 Evaluation of the effectiveness of sport psychology services**

This description of the professional practice philosophy that underpins and drives applied work provides, in theory, the layers against which the effectiveness of sport psychology practice may be evaluated. The evaluation of sport psychology services has received considerable attention in the literature. It is necessary for both experienced sport psychology consultants and those in training to continually strive to improve their effectiveness so as to provide the best possible service to their clients. Practitioners should also evaluate and document such effectiveness (Anderson, Miles, Mahoney & Robinson, 2002) as evaluation is athletes (Partington & Orlick, 1987b). Registered practitioner psychologists are required to operate in line with the guidelines regarding the evaluation of the services they provide. For example, the BPS' Generic Professional Practice Guidelines (2008) state that evaluation is a critical part of an applied psychologist's work and that all interventions need to be evaluated during and following their implementation. Evaluation is important ethically, as sport psychologists need to understand what is going on in order to maximally support athletes and protect against any harmful effects of interventions (Partington & Orlick, 1987b), and internal evaluation is necessary in highlighting issues that influence effective service delivery (Anderson et al., 2002).

### *2.2.1 Coach and athlete perceptions*

It is not only important for sport psychologists themselves to evaluate their work, but also to consider the perceptions of those that they work with. It has been well documented that sport psychologists will be subject to evaluation from their clients, which can provide "pertinent evaluative information regarding the consultant's effectiveness" (Anderson et al., 2004). Early research by Partington and Orlick (1987a) and Orlick and Partington (1987) examined coach and athlete perceptions respectively, to establish the characteristics of sport psychologists that they found valuable, as primary users of sport psychology services.

Coaches and athletes valued sport psychologists who possessed good interpersonal skills, who were likeable and easy to relate to, and flexible in their ability to address individual athlete's needs. Coaches also appreciated consultants who demonstrated an interest in and a willingness to learn about the particular sport and any pre-existing mental preparation programmes, and who worked with the coaches to exchange thoughts and ideas. Athletes emphasised the need to like the consultant as a human being, and for the consultant to appear interested and caring. A distinction is evident, therefore, between the organisational preferences of coaches compared to the more personal characteristics highlighted by athletes.

Partington and Orlick subsequently endeavoured to extend their previous research (1987a; Orlick & Partington, 1987) by utilising the Sport Psychology Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF), which was developed specifically for the study. Partington and Orlick considered the CEF to be "a step toward providing sport psychologists in the field with a useful tool for monitoring and improving their own services, and for clients such as sport administrators, coaches, and athletes to use as one of several indices for evaluating their particular consultant" (1987b, p. 310). Of particular interest within Partington and Orlick's (1987b) article are their perceptions of the characteristics a sport psychologist should possess in order to be successful. These included the sport psychologist making sure that their first contact with an athlete or team is at an appropriate time, that they provide individual sessions focussing on the individual athlete's needs, and that they attend training sessions and competitions to gain credibility and an understanding of the sport and its demands.

Gould, Tammen, Murphy and May (1991) also explored coaches' and athletes' opinions of U. S. Olympic Committee-affiliated sport psychologists, and found similar ratings between them regarding consultant effectiveness. However, coaches believed those sport psychologists who could 'fit-in' and were considered trustworthy would have the greatest effect on athletes, whereas athletes themselves believed an ability to be positive,

constructive and to draw on the athlete's strengths to have the greatest impact. Gould et al. did however note a desire by both coaches and athletes for consultants to enhance their knowledge of the sport and to address athletes as individuals, similar to that of Partington and Orlick (1987a). Weigand, Richardson and Weinberg (1999) also explored coaches' and athletes' perceptions of sport psychologists. Valued characteristics of effective sport psychologists included being helpful, knowledgeable, caring, understanding, available, trustworthy, enthusiastic, communicative, task-focussed, maintaining an applied focus, and working as part of the team.

The research discussed thus far offers insight into the attributes that coaches and athletes utilising sport psychology services consider contributory to consultant effectiveness. However this same research was considered anecdotal by Anderson et al. (2004), and they believe that the (predominantly) quantitative questionnaire methods of data collection utilised were limiting in terms of the depth of information gathered. Anderson and colleagues therefore proposed to extend the existing research to "develop understanding of the practitioner's role in effective applied sport psychology practice" (p. 257) through the use of interviews with athletes. They found valued characteristics to include being personable, a good communicator, a provider of a good practical service, being knowledgeable and experienced in sport psychology, and being honest, trustworthy and professional. Athletes also valued being able to 'chat' with the sport psychologist and the opportunity to engage in counselling-related interventions, especially in relation to issues outside of sport. Anderson et al. believed their research to emphasise the need to develop greater understanding of coach and athlete perceptions of sport psychology consultant effectiveness, yet published material that has comprehensively attended to their recommendation still appears to be scarce.

### *2.2.2 Colleague perceptions*

There has been limited research exploring perceptions of the colleagues of sport psychologists' regarding the effectiveness of the latter's work, despite the fact that many practitioners will find themselves working as part of a multidisciplinary team (Reid, Stewart, & Thorne, 2004). Related research has primarily focussed upon physiotherapists' perceptions of psychological interventions within sport (Brewer, Jeffers, Petitpas, & Van Raalte, 1994; Heaney, 2006; Hamson-Utley, Martin, & Walters, 2008), and the integration of sport psychology and sport medicine (Flint, 1998; Mann, Grana, Indelicato, O'Neill, & George, 2007). Therefore, in-depth insights into sport psychologists' effective practice from the perspective of their colleagues are (to the researcher's knowledge) absent within the literature.

## **2.3 Sport psychologists' perceptions**

There are more detailed accounts of effective sport psychology practice from consultants themselves within the literature. These are represented by early accounts of consultancy programs from the late 1980's through to more reflective accounts of effectiveness and personal values in more recent years, with the latter also incorporating neophyte practitioners' views. Such research is of particular importance considering that first-hand accounts of sport psychology practice from consultants themselves provide insights that are not available in textbooks or from classroom teaching (Partington & Orlick, 1991).

### *2.3.1 Early research*

Gould, Tammen, Murphy and May (1989) conducted an early study of sport psychologists' educational and professional backgrounds, the services they provided, how they evaluated those services and any problems they had encountered. The practitioners indicated that the best services they provided were as a result of being able to build trust,

develop a programme, educate coaches and increase athlete confidence and cohesion. Practitioners also highlighted their worst services provided as being due to a lack of time, a lack of trust, not being adaptable and failing to socialise with colleagues. It is interesting to note at this point that the best services described related to the practitioner's competence in the aspects of applied practice detailed above, yet it is factors external to the practitioner that appear to dictate sport psychology service considered their 'worst'.

Partington and Orlick (1991) also explored sport psychologists' 'best-ever' consulting experiences, following on from their earlier research. Both experienced and inexperienced sport psychologists who worked in Olympic sports took part in a workshop, in which discussions were focussed on "how to best ensure that consultants provide the most effective service possible to meet the needs of athletes preparing for the Olympic Games" (p. 183). Results from the study highlighted that sport psychologists' best-ever consultations required them to be able to identify the specific demands of the sport and adopt an individualised, athlete-centred approach. Such consultations were made possible by the coaches and athletes being committed and receptive to what the sport psychologist had to offer, and by the sport psychologist being allowed sufficient one-to-one time with the athletes. The workshops also resulted in practitioners offering several recommendations for effective consultation, which focussed on aspects such as entering and executing a consultation, defining one's role, assessing the commitment from coaches and athletes, the content of consultations, and the consultant's personal characteristics.

Partington and Orlick also highlighted a 'new' and interesting aspect to effective sport psychology consultation in their discussions around the practitioner's personal characteristics. Simons and Andersen (1995) furthered these discussions through their research with 11 experienced sport psychology consultants. The practitioners were interviewed and responded to questions in six main areas: academic and professional background prior to sport

psychology consulting, entry into practice, first consulting experiences, influential consulting experiences and lessons learned, perceptions of the growth in applied practice, and suggestions for the field and professional insights. The practitioners were consistent in highlighting the importance of 'knowing thyself', a concept that will be explored in greater detail throughout this research. Specifically, Simons and Andersen state that "as consultants, we need to ask ourselves, who are we, what are our strengths and weaknesses, why are we in the field, what are our needs, and what are we getting out of working with athletes?" (p. 466). As a result of their research, Simons and Andersen also advocate that sport psychologists focus extensively on themselves, to ensure the ongoing acquisition and development of their consulting skills.

### *2.3.2 Trainee sport psychologists*

Such an emphasis on self-awareness and understanding has extended into the several reflective and first-hand accounts of sport psychology practice that have emerged from early career, and therefore relatively inexperienced, practitioners. Such accounts provide valuable insight into the lived reality of those entering the sport environment to deliver psychological support and their initial learning experiences as they do so. Tonn and Harmison (2004) provide an account of a trainee sport psychology consultant's practicum experience, and advocate reflection as a means to enhance self-awareness. This research is enhanced by that of Cropley, Miles, Hanton and Niven (2007), who state that "reflective practice provides the opportunity to become aware of the characteristics associated with effective consultants, identify current levels of competence within these characteristics, and uncover ways in which this level of competence can be improved, ultimately increasing the effectiveness of practice" (p. 477). Their research therefore examined a BASES supervised experience student (the first author) and how reflective practice aided them in their personal and professional development, in the context of consultant effectiveness characteristics. The first author's

reflections allowed them to develop increased self-awareness, and therefore effectiveness, in five key areas; personable skills, providing a good practical service, communication, application of theory to practice, and professional skills. Their reflections enabled them to analyse the interaction between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours and the context within which they occurred, thus allowing them to make sense of their knowledge, skills and beliefs and consider their effectiveness in practice. Cropley et al. (2007) concluded that their research provided “insight into the utility of reflective practice as a tool for personal and professional development. Furthermore, it has provided a practical demonstration of how reflective practice can increase self-awareness and develop the knowledge in action that is required to meet the constantly evolving environment in which applied sport psychologists conduct their work” (p. 491).

A similar study to that of Tonn and Harmison was conducted by Tod and Bond (2010), but for an extended period of two years, whereby a newly-qualified ‘novice’ sport psychologist was followed to observe changes in their service delivery practices and perceptions. The sport psychologist in question, through a process of reflection, was able to adapt their practice, become more self-aware, and subsequently increase their confidence in practice. More specifically, they became “client-led, long-term focused, a facilitator rather than advice-giver, flexible, comfortable with silence, and aware of the need for strong working alliances” (p. 45). Such research provides insight into how an increased self-awareness can aid a practitioner in learning and adapting to what is required in practice and ultimately align their approach with one that (arguably) implicates the practitioner’s character and personal qualities in their effectiveness.

A final piece of research that utilised reflection was that of Lindsay et al. (2007), whereby a newly qualified practitioner (the first author) reflected upon their “journey toward congruence through the exploration of his personal beliefs and values regarding applied

work” (p. 337). Lindsay et al. consider a sport psychologist who adopts an approach that is underpinned by their beliefs and values to be practising congruently, and if they are not will likely be “at best, inauthentic and, at worst, ineffective” (p. 337). The first author found that as a result of reflecting upon applied sessions, they become increasingly self-aware of their personal beliefs and values, and thus began to practice in a way more congruent to those beliefs. An example of this is evidenced by the first author’s discussions around their development and learning that resulted from them considering their roles outside just that of a sport psychologist (as a son, brother, and so on). This subsequently aided them in realising that they were treating one client as the athlete and neglecting to consider the other aspects to this athlete’s life outside of sport, which proved ineffective and incongruent to their beliefs. By engaging in reflection, and translating their beliefs and values into their work, this sport psychologist became increasingly self-aware and thus effective. Lindsay et al. therefore believe that sport psychology practitioners should willingly choose to travel along the journey towards ‘knowing thyself’.

#### **2.4 The importance of the ‘personal bit’**

The literature discussed previously has emphasised the importance of self-examination and appraisal as characteristics of effective practitioners, and also highlighted the need for sport psychologists to be self-aware and underpin their practice with their own beliefs and values (Simons & Andersen, 1995; Lindsay et al., 2007). A practitioner operating in this manner could be considered congruent, which can increase their effectiveness (Lindsay et al., 2007). Increased awareness of self can also offer the practitioner a deeper understanding of how they should ‘be’ in the applied environment (Cropley et al., 2007). Sport psychologists will face many complex situations and be required to make professional decisions that training alone may not prepare them for (Whelan, Meyers & Elkin, 2002; Zizzi, Zaichkowsky & Perna, 2002). However one must also account for the personal

characteristics of the practitioner and their effect upon competent practice (Orlick & Partington, 1987)

Understanding oneself and one's personal qualities is important for several reasons. The emergence of humanistic approaches to sport psychology practice implicates the personal qualities of the practitioner who adopts such an approach (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). In addition, sport psychologists must recognise that their "personal thoughts, feelings, and desires can influence judgement, assessment and intervention decisions" (Gardner & Moore, 2006, p. 227). Gardner and Moore also highlight that "all professional psychologists know that a strong knowledge base and well-practiced clinical skills are necessary but not sufficient for effective practice" (p. 226). This suggests, therefore, that there is 'something else' that contributes to effective psychology practice. Jones (2007) extends this to sport psychologists in particular, and states that although a governing body's codes of conduct are usually considered the basis of competent practice, alone they are insufficient to ensure ethical and moral practice. Finally, Fifer et al. (2008) emphasise that discovering and understanding oneself is of great importance, yet this is problematic considering that "intuition, experiential knowledge, and developing relationships cannot be taught only in a classroom or by reading a book. These intangible characteristics must be experienced, both in failure and success" (p. 357). Thus, investigating such intangible characteristics is necessary to identify competent practitioners.

As previously described, the field of applied sport psychology practice has seen a relatively recent diversification away from cognitive-behavioural, mental skills approaches, towards more humanistic, counselling based approaches (Nesti, 2004). Such humanistic approaches emphasise a practitioner's personal qualities and their ability to establish and maintain an effective working relationship with the athlete (Hill, 2001; Nesti, 2004). This concept is further emphasised by Gardner and Moore (2006) who state that "as uniquely

interpersonal endeavours, all disciplines of professional psychology...involve personal factors that affect the psychologist and his capacity to relate to clients and deliver services” (p. 226). Interestingly, Orlick and Partington (1987) noted that those who became ‘excellent’ consultants *began* with certain personal qualities and experiences and good interpersonal skills and then went on to learn about their field through academic degrees and trial and error, suggesting that there are deeper aspects of a person that can form the basis of a successful consulting career. In addition, the nature of the sport psychology profession dictates that the sport psychologist is the ‘tool’ in their interventions (Tod & Andersen, 2005), supporting the notion that a practitioner’s personal qualities are implicated in their effectiveness.

Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) extend insight into professional philosophy within sport psychology practice, through the first author’s experiences within English professional soccer, and the provision of sport psychology support in that setting. Gilbourne and Richardson state that “the soccer world (and the world in general) is unpredictable, sometimes irrational, often emotional” (p. 332), and suggest that for a sport psychologist to be sought out and appointed by a club, they must adopt a performance agenda. They equate such an agenda to psychological skills training (PST) and with an emphasis on scientific theory and knowledge. However Gilbourne and Richardson perceive successful practice to be held together by a sport psychologist’s capacity to care: “a caring dimension to practice is anchored at the extreme by a psychologist’s ability to embrace the self-awareness and empathic qualities that engender compassion” (p. 333). The emphasis therefore is on caring qualities that align with a humanistic philosophy, rather than on scientific knowledge as the key to successful practice, and whilst not intending to undermine the importance of science and theory, they question the profession’s dependency on PST (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Nesti, 2004).

Although a sport psychology practitioner may be required to adopt a performance agenda to gain entry, Gilbourne and Richardson recognise that the need to implement work that incorporates PST is rare. Rather, their work may often focus more so upon lifestyle or personal aspects of athletes' lives. A practitioner operating within a caring agenda will build trust and respect, will be other- rather than self-focused, and will be empathic, all of which are perceived to be ever-present in the practitioner and part of their person. Gilbourne and Richardson observe how such qualities contribute to a practitioner 'fitting-in' to a professional soccer environment; "they are seen as invaluable without being necessarily linked directly to performance...rather than being the central support focus, they are often seen as a critical part of a much bigger picture" (p. 335). Also described in this paper is one psychologist who, after working with a player who had been dropped from the squad, did not feel the need to tell the manager what he had done. Gilbourne and Richardson consider that although this may not help the practitioner to demonstrate accountability, such an approach highlights their personal qualities of integrity and humility, which aided the practitioner in establishing themselves within the team or 'bigger picture'. A caring agenda, and sport psychologist practice overall, is perhaps best encapsulated by Gardner and Moore (2006); "to effectively provide psychological services, an individual must possess a genuine concern for enhancing the well-being of others" (p. 227). The engagement of holistic agendas and qualities within the practitioners' service philosophy can, it is argued, be nurtured (to a degree) by professional training and continual professional development. However it is also argued that such engagement implicates a consultant's core values and beliefs about the nature of reality and human behaviour change, which will continually drive and impact upon one's practice (Poczwadowski, Sherman & Henschen, 1998).

Gilbourne and Richardson's discussions contribute to a wider debate regarding the focus of sport psychology practice and whether this should be driven by performance or a

desire to care. Brady and Maynard (2010) have provided their thoughts concerning this debate regarding the role of the sport psychologist, with Maynard offering the perception that because those involved in sport ‘live and die’ by success, a sport psychology practitioner’s work should focus on enhancing this performance. Conversely, Brady believes that to enhance performance, athletes must possess an established sense of personal well-being, and therefore sport psychologists should and do use appropriate processes to support them in this manner. The authors acknowledge that in all likelihood, a sport psychologist will be required to adopt a performance agenda driven by a caring approach to practice, yet what drives this caring approach remains unclear.

#### *2.4.1 Personal qualities literature in sport psychology*

While the literature on the personal qualities of sport psychologists is scant, this section reviews the small number of studies that do appear to have gotten a little closer to the concept. Dorfman (1990) stated their belief that “particularly in professional sports, if the sport psychologist has the athlete’s confidence and trust, he will reveal the deeper problems interfering with performance” (p. 342), and lists the practitioner’s professionalism, credibility, and personality as impacting upon their ability to do so. The ability to develop a positive relationship with athletes and coaches, and demonstrating a true commitment and desire to help, were also highlighted by Partington and Orlick (1991) as essential for a sport psychologist. The following recommendations were also offered by the consultants in Partington and Orlicks’ study:

The most effective consultant keeps his or her own life in perspective through rest, relaxation, overall fitness, and a good balance between work, play, and relationships. They maintain a positive, confident attitude and project warmth, openness, and support. Guard against being defensive, critical, judgmental, cutting, all-knowing, dogmatic, or always right (p. 192)

Partington and Orlick also highlight the need for sport psychologists to “establish a positive, caring, supportive relationship with athletes and coaches, where a low-profile approach is an

important part of this process” (p.190). Their comments suggest that a sport psychologist must be humble and personable as well as authentic, as demonstrated in the following quote:

If you don't have your act together, or if you are not there for the right reasons, you are not likely to be very effective. It is difficult to fake mental training interest, personal commitment, or a joy in helping, or living, if it is not there. For high-performance results you should either “be there” totally and carry the right perspective or not be there at all (p. 192)

Partington and Orlick therefore portray the effective sport psychologist as possessing a combination of personal, professional, and life skills, who is able to establish a sense of caring for the athlete and who has a genuine interest in helping them.

Jones (2007) highlights similar qualities to those that Gilbourne and Richardson debate, when discussing the development of ‘good’ sport psychology practitioners. Jones emphasises humility and integrity, as well as courage and good judgement, as essential personal qualities in maintaining professionalism and practising ethically and within one’s area of competence. Jones also states that sport psychology practitioners must be aware of the importance of moral character and the aforementioned personal qualities to ensure they do the right thing at the right time and for the right reasons. Personal character, traits and virtues influence applied ethical practice (Jones, 2007); virtue relates to those individuals who are self-aware and motivated to do good, with integrity being a key aspect of this (Meara, Schmidt, & Day, 1996). Moral integrity has been defined as “the character trait of a coherent integration of reasonably stable, justifiable moral values, together with active fidelity to those values in judgement and in action” (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994, p. 473, as cited in Meara et al., 1996, p. 42). Such literature provides us with an understanding of how a sport psychologist’s character and qualities relates to wider aspects of their ethical and professional practice.

Jones’ article offers some interesting thoughts on the importance of a sport psychologist’s ability to recognise how their character can impact upon effective and ethical

practice. Additional research has also explored the personal qualities of sport psychologists and how these interact with their applied practice. Fifer et al. (2008) present highly experienced sport psychology practitioners' perceptions of what works when consulting with athletes. The practitioners all operated within a humanistic or person-centred philosophical approach, however the authors emphasise the distinct differences that exist between practitioners, and that "a large part of the effectiveness of these three applied sport psychology consultants lies in the uniqueness of each individual and their comfort with both themselves and their unique approach" (p. 358). The practitioners from the Fifer et al. (2008) study state that initially, one must pass the 'good guy or gal' test based upon coaches and athletes' swift judgement of whether a sport psychologist is down to earth and respectful. They also highlight that athletes appreciate support staff who are "professional but fun loving, don't mind being teased, are flexible and adaptable, and respect athlete accomplishments but are not enamoured with famous athletes or teams" (p. 361). In addition, athletes need to feel and see compassion, empathy, care, and sincerity from the sport psychologist in order to be able to trust them, which is key in establishing effective and meaningful relationships. An effective sport psychologist will be one who acts as a team player, and who quietly goes about helping athletes to achieve their goals whilst remaining in the background, again implicating humility as a key personal quality.

Taylor (2008) reflected upon his 22 years as a sport psychology consultant to provide a first-hand account of the qualities and abilities observed amongst successful consultants. The first was motivation, which he believes key to succeeding in a profession with limited opportunities. In conjunction with motivation is patience, as it can take several years to establish one's success and a comfortable living from consultancy work, and an aspiring practitioner must therefore remain focussed and concerned with long-term professional development. Thirdly, consultants require a multitude of skills to include counselling, public

speaking, and writing, in order to broaden the range of prospective clients and effectively help them once acquired. Finally, creativity is considered essential to practitioners in finding their own individual and effective methods of providing sport psychology services.

A final key piece of research into the personal qualities of effective sport psychologists is that of Friesen and Orlick (2010). Similar to the individuals and articles that have highlighted the sport psychology profession's development towards more humanistic or caring approaches to practice, Friesen and Orlick discuss a holistic approach that focuses on both athletic performance and quality of living. Their paper presents five highly experienced sport psychologists' accounts of their holistic practice, focussing on beliefs and values, theoretical paradigm, model of practice, intervention goals, intervention strategies, and additional practice philosophies. Friesen and Orlick discovered three key qualities to practising holistically; caring, authenticity, and professionalism. Caring, or unconditional positive regard, is considered most fundamental to a holistic approach. To be able to invest in the therapeutic relationship and work towards athlete improvement, the sport psychologist must establish a sense of caring for the athlete. The sport psychologist must care about the whole person, not just the performer; otherwise the athlete may not invest in the relationship if they do not feel genuinely cared about.

Authenticity is also cited by Friesen and Orlick as essential for holistic effective sport psychology practice. Authenticity has been described as owning one's personal experiences and acting in accordance with the true self, thus "expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter, 2002, p. 382). One of the consultants in Friesen and Orlicks' study described authenticity in terms of accurately representing who they are as a practitioner and educator, and their gifts and abilities being a part of themselves. Another practitioner discussed the importance of self-knowledge, including an understanding of their frailties, and bringing that self into their work. A consultant who represents

themselves authentically will also be honest and possess humility, which aids them in connecting with the athlete and thus strengthens the working relationship. The final quality discussed by the consultants was professionalism. The consultants highlight the importance of maintaining a balance when establishing a sense of caring and representing oneself authentically, as doing so may threaten professional boundaries and see the professional relationship evolve into a personal friendship. Sport psychologists must therefore be able to recognise the point to which they should reveal themselves to their client; a balance between establishing a connection and trust between themselves and the athlete, and maintaining appropriate psychological distance.

#### *2.4.2 Personal qualities and the therapeutic relationship in sport*

Katz and Hemmings (2009) highlight that “mainstream psychology, counselling and clinical, and the related disciplines of counselling and psychotherapy provide sport psychologists with a rich resource regarding the formation and maintenance of the professional relationship and the process of change” (p. 10). Katz and Hemmings (2009) and Tod and Bond (2010) emphasise the similarities between the sport and counselling psychology professions, in particular with regards to the relationship that exists between therapist/sport psychologist and client/athlete. Sport psychology, however, offers limited discussion regarding the role of the professional relationship between the sport psychologist and athlete, and how the personal qualities of the practitioner are central to positive psychological change (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). This could be considered a serious oversight, considering Nesti’s (2010) emphasis that it is not counselling skills and techniques that are of most importance to effective practice, but the ability of the psychologist to become immersed in the client’s world.

The personal qualities highlighted above have been discussed as contributing to effective sport psychology delivery, with these personal qualities having a significant impact

on the client-practitioner relationship that develops. The quality of this relationship subsequently impacts upon the quality of the therapeutic outcome (Tod & Andersen, 2005), and building this and other relationships is emphasised as the most important aspect of a sport psychologist gaining entry to an athlete or team (Fifer et al., 2008). Tod and Andersen highlight several key characteristics of effective sport psychologists. These include relationship building and interpersonal skills, with the latter including being likeable, trustworthy, empathetic, approachable, positive and warm. Trust is also emphasised by Gardner and Moore (2006) as an essential foundation from which to build the therapeutic relationship. Perhaps Nesti (2010) best summarises the importance of this therapeutic relationship; “athletes and sport psychologists, irrespective of approach, will be unable to do useful and meaningful work together without developing trust and a strong working relationship” (p. 40).

Similar to a counsellor and their client, the working alliance between sport psychologist and athlete is considered central to positive and meaningful work, as long as it is strong, caring, and mutually respectful. Andersen and Speed (2006) also state that “as trust and the therapeutic relationship develops, other ‘personal issues’ begin to emerge” (p. 6), therefore suggesting that a sport psychologist adopting a counselling approach may be better positioned to delve deeper into an athlete’s problems, akin to the rigorous self-examination as described by Corlett (1996a). The emphasis, as Corlett alluded to, is therefore on the sport psychologist’s personal qualities, which is reflected in Katz and Hemming’s (2009) description of the boundaries between a sport psychologist’s professional and personal self as ‘porous and fluid’. Corlett (1996a) discussed Sophist and Socratic approaches to sport psychology practice, with the latter emphasising knowledge as the source of what matters in life and that the essence of human nature is to seek happiness. Such happiness is achieved by living a ‘good’ life which, according to modern Socratics, incorporates an individual’s life in

sport and the challenge of realising what life's (and sport's) real goods are. Socrates believed that obtaining knowledge of these goods can only be achieved by asking difficult questions of oneself through 'rigorous self-examination and intellectual hard work'. In sport, it is considered to be deficient self-knowledge that is the root of an athlete's problems, and a Socratic intervention would therefore see the sport psychologist and athlete working together to arrive at an honest appraisal of these problems. Such work may create discomfort in those athletes engaged in Socratic counselling because of the rigorous self-examination required, but it is contended that meaningful improvement takes time and effort and that there are no shortcuts to goals worth reaching. Corlett asks several interesting questions regarding the qualities that can contribute to the effectiveness of a sport psychologist who adopts a counselling approach to practice. Although Corlett does not go on to explore such qualities in detail, he does state that "the most difficult counselling situations often illuminate the difference between curing and caring. The demand is seldom on one's competence in the psychology of sport but often on one's competence in the humanity of sport" (p. 91). This extract emphasises that the sport psychologist's person is implicated as an important influence within an approach driven by Socratic values. The growing emphasis on the person behind the sport psychology practitioner provides an opportunity for a deeper exploration of the literature around the personal qualities required for effective practice.

## **2.5 Counselling psychology and the personal qualities of effective therapists**

Unlike sport psychology, counselling psychology literature offers extensive discussions of the personal characteristics and qualities of effective therapists. The literature around personal qualities of counselling psychologists could provide valuable information for practitioners adopting a comparable approach within sport. Strupp (1978) contends that "the therapist's theoretical orientation...is over-determined and deeply rooted in one's biography. Therefore to understand the mainsprings of a therapist's theoretical orientation, one has to

understand the therapist as a person” (p. 314). Unlike sport psychology, counselling psychology literature offers extensive discussions of the personal characteristics and qualities of effective therapists, which are considered representative of them as a person.

### *2.5.1 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), within their Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy (2009), have highlighted fundamental values of the therapist, to include:

- Respecting human rights and dignity
- Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships
- Alleviating personal distress and suffering
- Increasing personal effectiveness
- Enhancing the quality of relationships between people

The BACP also state that such values inform and direct important ethical responsibilities of the therapist. These include being trustworthy, promoting the client’s well-being, and fostering their own self-knowledge. Finally, the BACP emphasise the importance of a therapist’s ‘good personal qualities’ for clients, and that “it is fundamental that these personal qualities are deeply rooted in the person concerned, and developed out of personal commitment rather than the requirement of an external authority” (BACP, 2010, p. 4). The BACP (2010, p. 4) cites these qualities to include empathy (“the ability to communicate understanding of another person’s experience from that person’s perspective”), sincerity (“a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done” and similar to the concept of authenticity), integrity (“commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence”), resilience (“the capacity to work with the client’s concerns without being personally diminished”), humility (“the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one’s own strengths and weaknesses”), and courage (“the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty”) and are considered by the

BACP to help guide therapists in upholding ethical principles and decision-making. Of particular interest is that the BACP advises therapists to *aspire* to these qualities, which therefore suggests that although personal qualities are ‘deep rooted’ within the therapist, they are not necessarily innate, and can be developed.

### *2.5.2 Revisiting personal qualities and the therapeutic relationship*

It has long been considered that the relationship that exists between counsellor and client will have a significant influence in effecting constructive psychological change. Early research into the therapeutic relationship has focussed on the association between this relationship and therapeutic outcome, yet more recently has developed to explore the relationship between the therapist’s personal qualities and the development of a positive relationship (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). Brenner (1982) states that a therapist’s “theoretical orientation and corresponding techniques are not related crucially to therapeutic outcome” (p. 1), and that they must bring certain qualities to the professional relationship to effectively help their client, citing these qualities to be empathy, composure, readiness to discuss everything, encouragement, and purposefulness. Strupp (1978) echoes Brenner, stating that the person of the therapist is of greater importance to successful outcomes, particularly for the client, than their theoretical orientation. As Lambert and Bergin (1994) summarise, “this is not to say that techniques are irrelevant but that their power for change is limited when compared to personal influence” (p. 181).

Lambert and Bergin (1994) believe the therapeutic relationship to be characterised by trust, warmth, and acceptance. Many of the personal qualities described in the counselling literature can be summarised as representing empathy, non-possessive warmth and genuineness, which in turn can be likened to the conditions proposed by Carl Rogers in 1957 as necessary and sufficient for behaviour change. These represent descriptions of the therapist’s attitudes and personal qualities rather than just effective techniques (Truax &

Carkhuff, 1976). Corey (2009) states that “counselling is a personal matter that involves a personal relationship...honesty, sincerity, acceptance, understanding, and spontaneity are basic ingredients for successful outcomes” (p. 463). Corey goes on to discuss ‘certain personal qualities’ that a therapist must have in addition to the above ingredients, to include warmth, congruence, concern, respect for the client, and openness.

In addition, Jennings and Skovholt (1999) explored the characteristics of ‘master’ therapists, or the ‘best of the best’ among mental health practitioners. Jennings and Skovholt identified several qualities of master therapists within three domains; cognitive, emotional and relational. Within the cognitive domain were qualities such as being voracious learners and valuing the ambiguity of the human condition. Qualities discussed within the emotional domain included being self-aware, mentally healthy, and able to ensure their own emotional well-being. Finally, within the relational domain, were qualities such as possessing strong relationships skills and a belief that the foundation for therapeutic change is a strong working alliance. It could be argued that such qualities are similar to those beginning to emerge within sport psychology literature, therefore supporting the notion that sport psychology practice can be similar to, and could learn a significant amount from, counselling psychology (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). However, one must also account for the unique environment of elite, professional sport, which will be very different to that which the counselling psychologist works within.

## **2.6 The ‘sport’ in sport psychology: Culture and environment of elite professional sport**

Hardy, Jones and Gould (1996) state that “elite athletes do not live in a vacuum; they function within a highly complex social and organisational environment, which exerts major influences on them and their performances” (p. 239–240). A sport psychologist must therefore appreciate the organisational, social and interpersonal processes of the sport

environment they are working within, and operate alongside its management and coaching structures (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). Based on his experience working alongside sport psychologists, performance coaches, and directors of performance, Nesti presents his perceptions and experiences of working in high performance sport, specifically Premier League football in the UK. He describes culture as a concept that ‘may sound a rather philosophical, esoteric and intangible term’ yet one that is actually ‘deeply practical, solid and very real’ (Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank, 2014).

Shteynberg (2010) has defined culture as “the human ability to form social groups in which shared understandings of what is true, good, and real are constituted” (p. 683). More specifically, organisational culture has been defined as “the visible and less visible norms, values and behaviour that are shared by a group of employees which shape the group’s sense of what is acceptable and valid. These are generally slow to change and new group members learn them through both informal and formal socialisation process” (Wilson, 2001, p. 356). The culture of an organisation is therefore evolutionary in nature and represents a core template of working practices, ideas, strategies and philosophies, brought together by key stakeholders to determine the organisation’s aims (Nesti, Littlewood, O’Halloran, Eubank, & Richardson, 2012; Wilson, 2001). Within elite and professional sport, an organisation’s culture will likely prevail if it is one which supports sustained optimal performance, persists over time despite the unpredictability and therefore variability of results, and which leads to consistent high performance (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012).

However, high level sporting performance (i.e., success) is difficult to sustain and creates a number of challenges for the organisation and its members. According to Eubank et al. (2014) the culture of performance sport at this level is ‘traditional, conservative and closed’, characterised by a resistance to change and a suspicion of outsiders entering the organisation. With regards to football in particular, Nesti describes an interesting and perhaps

ironic contrast between the resistance to organisational change, and the constant changing of staff and players which contributes to the volatility, unpredictability and insecurity of these environments (Eubank et al., 2014). Woodman and Hardy (2001) have identified some of the main sources of organisational stress to be ineffective communication strategies resulting in a lack of common goals and therefore overall direction, a lack of role definition and structure, and tension between staff. Likewise, Eubank et al. (2014) have highlighted interdepartmental communication problems, coach athlete conflict, interference from owners, negative reporting in the media and financial pressures as challenges for the high performance sport organisation. These challenges are culturally-driven, and provide an example of the difficulties an organisation can face in maintaining their optimal level of functioning.

#### *2.6.1 Multidisciplinary support teams*

The growth of sport science as a discipline has also brought about the development of multidisciplinary sport science support teams, and it follows that increased numbers of practitioners will have implications for some of the cultural and organisational challenges described above. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) requires their practitioners to contribute to and work collaboratively within a multi-disciplinary team, and understand the need to build and maintain functional professional relationships (HCPC, 2009). A sports team or organisation represents a small, self-contained community of individuals, and it is therefore inevitable that athletes, management, and support team members will be in increased contact with one another (Moore, 2003). In addition, multidisciplinary teams are a relatively new concept within sport and require cooperation and collaboration, yet the unique nature of these teams can often make this difficult. Although discussing World Class Performance Plans specifically, Collins, Moore, Mitchell, and Alpress (1999) state that increased levels of funding available through these plans, coupled with the increased use of sports medicine and sport science support, has brought about “a

parallel need for support workers to consider the organisational dynamics necessary for most effective work” (p. 208).

Multidisciplinary teams within sport are often a by-product of accessing different services, some of which are not present ‘on-site’ and may only be brought together when a team is touring or competing (Reid et al., 2004). Within “a high pressure environment where decisions are made quickly and may have both immediate and ongoing impact on performance” (Reid et al., 2004, p. 206), the lack of full team meetings and the competitive win-lose culture can make collaboration between support staff difficult. Kyndt and Rowell (2012) discuss an effective team as one which “commits to outcomes that individuals cannot achieve alone” and which “has a clear sense of purpose, [with] team members [who] manage the challenges of their relationships honestly and openly” (p. 118). However, given the potentially large number of practitioners within this team, it is essential that each individual’s role be clearly defined and communicated; colleagues should recognise that their jobs are interconnected and interdependent, but ensure that they do not ‘get in the way’ of each other. Such teams therefore require a considerable amount of coordination, especially when they come together to support athletes and teams at major games and championships as described by Reid and colleagues (2004).

The sport psychologist can play a key part in the creation and facilitation of an effective and functional multidisciplinary team (Reid et al., 2004) and will often be identified as the most appropriate person to perform this role (Nesti, 2010). As a result of this growth in multidisciplinary support teams and the associated challenges that increased numbers of practitioners brings, the sport psychologist can often be identified as a suitable individual to address such challenges. They may therefore spend a considerable amount of time providing less traditional sport psychology services such as staff development (Dorfman, 1990), and peer support and management (Males, 2006); services that are acknowledged by Nesti (2010)

to be akin to that offered by an organisational psychologist. Nesti's work as a highly experienced sport psychologist has involved delivering in an organisational psychology role within elite professional soccer in the English Premier League, and he is therefore well-placed to describe the need for and realities of such a role. In engaging in such support, sport psychologists must balance providing specific psychological services with consultation to coaches and management (Moore, 2003). Sport psychologists possess a good understanding of group dynamics based on both their theoretical and experiential knowledge, and should therefore be appropriately placed to identify markers against which optimal performance can be developed (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012).

### *2.6.2 Organisational challenges for the sport psychologist*

As previously described, many sport psychologists will experience culturally driven practical challenges and organisational demands that they may be expected to address, in addition to what would be considered their traditional sport psychologist role (Nesti, 2010; Eubank et al., 2014). Moore (2003) cites such challenges to include those related to building and maintaining professional relationships, confidentiality, time and location of services, boundaries of competence, and the necessity to engage in indirectly therapeutic organisational activities. Nesti (2010) described how sport psychologists may be required to create job descriptions for staff, the need for which is supported by the findings of a study by Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne, and Richardson in 2010. Relvas et al. discovered that the majority of football clubs involved in their research "did not appear, or at least were unable to articulate, a clear (or at least explicit) and/or well-defined list of roles and responsibilities for all of their staff" (p. 179), although they recognised the importance and therefore need for this to be created as soon as possible. This is one example of an organisational challenge that may present itself to a sport psychologist. Cruickshank and Collins (2012) have highlighted the need to further examine and advance how sport

psychologists can contribute to the creation and management of high-performing cultures, given that this is emerging as a key component of their role.

However, it has been argued that sport psychology education programmes within universities and the literature pertaining to research within the area focus too heavily upon mental skills training and therefore fail to adequately prepare individuals who may be required to fulfil organisational roles (Nesti, 2010). In addition, Woodman and Hardy (2001) suggest that sport psychologists may play an important role in the stress management of a sport organisation's members, yet support Nesti's notion that sport psychology courses do not provide students with the necessary expertise to operate in an organisational role. This is further supported by Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009), who believe that "questions remain as to whether applied sport psychologists currently possess the authority and competencies to meaningfully intervene at an organizational level...[yet] for those who overcome these barriers the potential to effect change is considerable" (p. 433).

### *2.6.3 Sport psychologist personal qualities in elite professional sport*

When considering the disciplines of sport and counselling psychology in the context of the practitioner's work, the key difference is the environment within which such therapeutic work will take place and the relationships that therefore exist. Counselling psychologists will typically consult at pre-determined locations and during 'normal' working hours, with limited or no contact outside of this professional relationship. Sport psychologists, on the other hand, will be expected to deliver their support 'as and when' regardless of their location, and will likely spend a lot of social time with athletes, especially when away training or competing (Andersen, Van Raalte & Brewer, 2001; Katz & Hemmings, 2009). A sport psychologist will therefore be operating as a professional but often in a 'semi-professional' context, and must manage their working relationships accordingly. One unique aspect of sport is the relationships that exist, which can be a

complex and intricate mix of ‘function, respect, friendliness, power and emotion’ (Kyndt & Rowell, 2012).

There are also cultural and political aspects to sporting organisations that those working within it must be mindful of. A sport psychologist must be able to effectively read and integrate within any given environment, but ultimately be prepared to come up against resistance from others within the organisation. To perform effectively within such an environment, therefore, a sport psychologist must gain an understanding of the sport or organisation’s culture, and identify those considered to be highly influential (Fifer et al., 2008). Woodman and Hardy (2001) state that “unlike business, medical, and military milieus for example, sport organizations (in the UK) may sometimes appoint team managers on the basis of loyalty to their sport rather than on their managerial skills. This can create a difficult working relationship between members of the executive board, senior technical staff, coaches, support staff, and performers” (p. 229). Although the concept of organisational culture is as applicable to sport as it is to other high performance environments, the unique features of sport (such as the appointment of team managers or ‘leaders’ as described by Woodman and Hardy) make day-to-day practice challenging and unpredictable. This is a good example of why concepts from other fields of psychology cannot be extrapolated to the unique environment of sport.

The culture and politics of an elite sport environment can also make it a volatile and arduous one, and it is therefore argued that sport psychologists need to possess qualities such as resilience, commitment, presence, authenticity, and empathy to survive (Nesti, 2004; 2010). Simons and Andersen (1995) state that working with professional sport or a large organisation requires a sport psychologist to demonstrate understanding and great perseverance. Kyndt and Rowell (2012) highlight that “under the intense pressure of elite sport, certain coaches and applied practitioners are able to thrive and deliver outstanding

support that helps those athletes they work alongside to reach the podium. However, many others with equal technical prowess, falter and fail...performance directors, institutes of sport, and national governing bodies all want coaches and applied practitioners who have more to offer than just their technical excellence” (p. IX). The implication is therefore that practitioners require certain qualities in addition to their technical expertise that allow them to operate effectively within highly pressurised sport environments. Although organisational and cultural aspects of elite and professional sports have been afforded increased attention since Hardy and colleague’s 1996 paper, the demands and challenges faced by sport psychologists in particular continue to be overlooked within the literature (Nesti, 2010). Therefore, there remains the need for a detailed exploration of the realities of a sport psychologist engaged in such work, and the personal qualities that can influence a practitioner’s ability to survive and succeed in this type of organisational role within sporting organisations.

## **2.7 Sport psychology education and training**

The term ‘psychologist’ is governed by law and typically represents those educated within mainstream psychology (McCullagh & Noble, 2002). With the title ‘psychologist’ comes the notion that the individual is certified to address psychological issues and that using the title ‘psychologist’ is illegal without licensure (Hack, 2005). Within a UK sport psychology context, trainees complete a British Psychological Society (BPS) accredited undergraduate psychology or sport and exercise psychology degree, followed by an MSc in sport psychology as the requisite knowledge base of their education. The BPS Stage 2 Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) represents the practice dimension of professional training. Stage 2 trainees must undertake this period of supervised practice for a minimum of two years (or the part-time equivalent) under the guidance and support of a registered and approved supervisor.

The Stage 2 professional training qualification is approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), meaning that those who have completed the training are eligible for entry on to the HCPC register. The HCPC oversees the regulation of 15 health professions, including psychologists, and sets out standards of proficiency that their practitioners must adhere to. The HCPC has the power to protect named titles, one of which being sport and exercise psychologist (or any derivative thereof), and therefore govern the title, standards, skills and behaviour of their registered practitioners.

### *2.7.1 Standards of Proficiency of Sport and Exercise Psychologists*

The HCPC have ‘standards of proficiency’ for entry onto their register, which includes the generic standards for practitioner psychologists and the specific standards for Sport and Exercise Psychologists. The HCPC requires psychologists working within sport to have an understanding of core and sport psychology, and to be able to plan and deliver interventions and support others’ learning in applying psychological skills. They also require the ability to assess social context and organisational structures, understand the dynamics of athletes and their sporting environments, consider power imbalances and their management, and evaluate their service provision (HCPC, 2009).

To achieve the HCPC standards, trainees are required to achieve competencies that represent an individual’s aptitude, skill and expertise to conduct applied practice safely, independently and without supervision. The Stage 2 QSEP structures its competencies around 4 key roles common to all trainees that are to be maintained throughout a practitioner’s professional life:

- Key Role 1: Develop, implement and maintain personal and professional standards and ethical practice.

- Key Role 2: Apply psychological and related methods, concepts, models, theories and knowledge derived from reproducible findings.
- Key Role 3: Research and develop new and existing psychological methods, concepts, models, theories and instruments in psychology.
- Key Role 4: Communicate psychological knowledge, principles, methods, needs and policy requirements.

### *2.7.2 Personal qualities within education and training*

According to Jones (2008), “the effective training of psychologists is an important responsibility that undoubtedly must be upheld. Due to the nature of the profession, and its potential level of influence in peoples’ lives and the broader community, psychologists must be equipped in the best possible way to ensure that a sound and competent ‘modus operandi’ is maintained” (p. 38). It is therefore important that the education and training available to future sport psychologists be thorough and of a standard that promotes the development of individuals into competent and ethical practitioners (Smith, 1989). The credentialing process ensures that practitioners can identify the competencies and training required for a certified professional to provide quality services, which also provides them with a “standardised route to obtaining given levels of competence relating to knowledge, skills and professional conduct” (Manley & Meijen, 2009, p. 44). Likewise, Zizzi et al. (2002) state the benefits of certification to include accountability and professionalism, recognition, credibility, professional preparation and public awareness. Achieving registered status and adhering to professional guidelines should represent, in the least, a practitioner’s fitness to practice and ability to be ‘good’ at what they do.

Anshel (1992) offers an interesting proposition with regards to education and training, emphasising that certification does not guarantee expertise. In this regard, coaches and athletes have highlighted the importance of a sport psychologist’s personal and professional

characteristics, in addition to their skills and competence, and that many experienced and certified practitioners have failed to gain entry and respect with athletes due to this issue (Orlick & Partington, 1987). In essence, Anshel believes that “credentialing arbitrarily wrongly discriminates between individuals who are more ‘qualified’ than others in failing to consider the unique skills, previous experience, and knowledge that each professional brings to the consulting venue” (p. 273). The issue being raised here focuses on the need for professional training systems to capture the skills, competencies *and* personal qualities that combine to engender expertise. By the same token, Zizzi et al. (2002) highlight the difficulties faced by those attempting to generate codes of practice for sport psychologists, stating that “no other area in an applied profession generates as much attention and controversy as codifying standards for professional preparation and practice, because the practice of a profession serves as the primary interface of the field with the general public and encompasses both legal and professional issues” (p. 459). Perhaps the ‘safest’ conclusion to be drawn is that while education and training should prepare an individual for sport psychology practice and accommodate the different philosophies and approaches of the individual practitioner, it must also account for their personal characteristics and the unique sport environment they work within as key factors impacting competent practice (Orlick & Partington, 1987).

## **2.8 Aims and rationale**

Based upon the review of relevant literature, and in light of recent and current developments in education and training, the personal characteristics and qualities of sport psychologists, alongside professional development, require studying for several reasons. Firstly is the need to produce sport psychologists with a self-awareness of their values and belief systems (Poczwadowski et al., 2004) and who are of good moral character who do the right thing at the right time and for the right reasons (Jones, 2007). Secondly, those

individuals who embark on education and training routes to become a sport psychologist must receive adequate knowledge, information and supervision to develop both personally and professionally (Cropley et al., 2007) in light of the challenging sport environments they are likely to face (Nesti, 2004). Thirdly, a more comprehensive outline of the characteristics, qualities, and values that underpin the practice of effective sport psychologists needs to be created. Although there is an emerging breadth of literature that addresses this, it is a depth of information regarding exactly what these characteristics and qualities are, their innate and developmental nature, and how they interact with the professional sport environment that is required. The researcher would argue that currently there exists little literature within the discipline to serve as a 'guide' for sport psychologists who find themselves operating in difficult circumstances and/or within roles that they did not expect. Although guided by the disciplines of counselling and organisational psychology, and the concepts of personal qualities and organisational culture respectively, this research will endeavour to address the gap in the sport psychology literature with regards to these 'core' psychology disciplines and subsequently consider how findings may impact upon the education and training of sport psychologists.

The aims of the research are therefore as follows:

- 1) Explore the underlying personal qualities exhibited by sport psychology practitioners
- 2) Investigate the impact of personal qualities on sport psychologists' professional practice in high level sport environments.
- 3) Consider the implications of the research findings for sport psychology practice and the education and training of future sport psychologists.

## **2.9 Philosophical framing of the thesis**

### *2.9.1 Sport psychologists' personal qualities and methods of scientific enquiry*

For an applied discipline that devotes a significant amount of education, training and research to the development of its sport psychologists, Nesti (2010) has highlighted a lack of 'theoretical breadth' within the sport psychology literature, represented by an over-reliance on mental skills and "research that asks more and more about less and less" (p. 2). In particular, Nesti describes young practitioners and inexperienced psychologists (working in football) who have criticised the dominance of positivist research delivered within their education. Through this one applied example, it is possible to define the contribution and critically evaluate the impact of orthodox and idiographic approaches to scientific enquiry and their relative merits for applied sport psychology research. While the rationale for the research paradigm used is typically provided within the methodology of a particular study (and as such this will be presented for each study within this research), the author felt it necessary to consider the overall aims of the research in terms of the 'type' of scientific inquiry involved prior to presenting each study. In other words, why was the researcher's chosen approach suitable for ensuring they were able to collect such complex personal and contextual data throughout the thesis? The answer to this question is explored by examining the researcher's philosophical beliefs, the salient research paradigms and associated literature base, and ultimately focuses on how and why the participants were selected so carefully for the studies.

### *2.9.2 The researcher's philosophical positioning*

According to Morrow (2007), "it is common for qualitative researchers to make their worldviews, assumptions, and biases explicit" (p. 209) so as to make their stance regarding the research clear to the reader. This thesis was driven by my fundamental belief that to fully

understand people, one must qualify their experiences. In other words; people are not numbers and should not be represented as such. Since the second year of my undergraduate study I have pursued a career in sport psychology, moving on to postgraduate study and developing my expertise through teaching and research in the form of previous dissertations and the current thesis. Although I have engaged in little applied work myself, I have developed an in-depth understanding of, and therefore strong views on, applied sport psychology practice and 'how it should be done' by focussing my research on the practical application of sport psychology, from the point of view of practitioners themselves. Although I recognise and appreciate the benefits of quantitative, positivist research, I subscribe to the belief that such approaches are reductionist and therefore undermine the 'uniqueness' of an individual, as well as the cultures and contexts within which they operate with regards to the current research.

The current research would not have achieved its aims had such a reductionist approach been adopted. Indeed, the research may not exist had my views on such research been different! To fully realise the potential of the research required in-depth, idiographic, long-term, qualitative research. People are complicated, and intelligent, reflective psychologists working in challenging, complex environments are perhaps even more so. The emphasis was therefore on creating a detailed picture of sport psychologists, firstly by talking to their colleagues, and secondly by working with sport psychologists themselves. In study 2, it was important to give the sport psychology practitioners a voice to articulate their personal experiences; practitioners were able to tell a 'story' that encapsulated 'who they are' both inside and outside of their work. The following accounts of orthodox science and the idiographic approach provides the reader with additional theoretical information to support the researcher's approach to this thesis.

### 2.9.3 *Orthodox science*

Martens' (1987) account of orthodox science suggests that through the use of objective, empirical research methods, one can fully comprehend a given phenomena. More specifically, studying psychology through the paradigm of orthodox science assumes that cognitive processes are individualistic, static and passive, and can be investigated in their pure form, unaffected by other elements. The fundamental tenets of such an approach to scientific inquiry align with those of positivism, a paradigm which is based upon an ontological assumption of a single, tangible reality and an epistemological assumption that the observer can be separated from the observed. The aim of positivist inquiry is to create nomothetic knowledge in the form of generalisations that remain true in any context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Such an approach to research may have its place but not, Martens argues, when it comes to studying human behaviour; positivist or orthodox scientific methods are too limited for the study of something so complex and individual. Martens (1987) comments:

I sense a tendency on the part of those sport psychologists who have a need for neatness, exactness, and simplicity to stay away from the humanistic and complex problems of humans in sport. Their criticism of those who undertake the study of these tough problems with less reliable methods is not so much a criticism of the methodology as it is a criticism for asking that particular question. This indicates a preference for neatness over new knowledge about human behaviour (p. 47)

It can prove problematic, therefore, when attempting to utilise 'neat' orthodox science to study the inherent 'un-neatness' of human behaviour. Martens calls into question whether "isolated psychological studies that manipulate a few variables, attempting to uncover the effects of X on Y, can be cumulative to form a coherent picture of human behaviour" (p. 43). There is also a problem, he contends, with the orthodox scientific approach that tries to reduce the complex to the 'simple', thus destroying the phenomenon to be studied. Martens concludes his argument against orthodox science with the following quote: "It is not difficult to develop a thesis that practising sport psychologists who use tacit knowledge derived from

experience have a stronger knowledge base than academic sport psychologists who rely exclusively on orthodox science” (p. 45). Martens therefore suggests the following:

As scientists we must first approach the subject not as an object but as a unique entity. No other person is exactly like this person. Next, we will have to gain the confidence of our subject so that he or she will cooperate in sharing experiences. We will have to come to know this unique being intimately through in-depth study. Consequently, we will need to place much greater emphasis on the idiographic approach of studying humans. Case studies, in-depth interviews, extended participant observation studies, and comprehensive content analyses of a person's oral or written records are examples of the idiographic approach (p. 49)

#### *2.9.4 The Idiographic Approach*

The idiographic approach to scientific enquiry, seen in the contemporary personal qualities research examples previously discussed, could be perceived as one that sits within a heuristic paradigm as described by Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993), or a naturalistic paradigm as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The naturalistic paradigm emphasises that realities are multiple and constructed, that the knower and known are interactive and inseparable, and that inquiry is value-bound. The key features of research housed within a post-positivist or naturalistic paradigm include a natural setting with a human instrument, the exploration of tacit knowledge, qualitative methods that incorporate an idiographic approach, purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, the development of grounded theory, an emergent design, the tentative application of findings, and specific trustworthiness criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The heuristic paradigm emphasises the importance of studying the “whole, subjective experience of individuals” (p. 127) and, the objective is to synthesise information rather than create reductionist, generalised explanations (Côté et al., 1993). It is therefore with a heuristic or naturalistic ‘view’ that the current research was undertaken.

Qualitative research involves studying an individual from their point of view in order to understand the empirical world (Schmid, 1981); it helps to address the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of

people's experiences, not just the 'why' (Morrow, 2007). Schmid highlighted the basic principle of naturalistic enquiry; that behaviour is influenced by the physical, sociocultural, and psychological environment, and it was the researcher's intention to understand sport psychologists in this respect. Morrow (2007) states that with qualitative approaches to research, "using language as a tool, the researcher is able to plumb the depths of this experience to glean meanings that are not otherwise observable and that cannot be gathered using survey or other data-gathering strategies" (p. 211). Qualitative research can aid a researcher in exploring variables about which little is known, or which have yet to be identified (personal qualities), and topics for which there is little prior existing literature. It can help to build theory and generate new or unexpected knowledge, and such approaches "are able to delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of human phenomena" (Morrow, 2007, p. 211). An in-depth exploration of the elite sport environment and those who practise within it was required in order to address the aims of the study and 'do justice' to the complexities of sport psychology practice. An idiographic approach using qualitative research methodologies was therefore adopted, which utilised the colleagues of sport psychologists and practitioners themselves.

#### *2.9.5 Researcher trustworthiness*

It is important at this point to consider the research credibility principles that were used within this research to ensure a true representation of the data (Shenton, 2004), in accordance with an idiographic approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Firstly, a description of the lead author's research background was provided to all participants within each study, given that they could be considered the primary instrument in data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). Providing such information also aids the reader in their judgement of the trustworthiness of the research (Anderson et al., 2004). Prior to this thesis, the lead author had completed and contributed to several qualitative research projects and studies and was

therefore experienced in conducting and analysing research interviews. This previous research also provided the first author with a thorough knowledge of the literature base pertaining to this thesis, having completed BSc and MSc research projects in applied sport psychology, on subjects related to philosophies of practice and practitioner congruence.

All subjects were purposively sampled for the research. These individuals were all highly experienced in their work; coaches and physicians had worked alongside sport psychologists for many years, and across a wide range of elite professional sports. The sport psychologists themselves all benefitted from extensive experience as a practitioner; two have been practising for many years, whilst the other is employed full-time and therefore embedded within the applied environment on a daily basis. Purposive sampling, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), increases the likelihood that a wide range of multiple realities will be uncovered, and therefore allowed the current research to explore the realities of individuals who were known to have a depth and breadth of information to offer. In addition, Martens (1987) states that one must approach the subject as a unique individual unlike no other, and gain their confidence so as to encourage their sharing of their experiences; known as the idiographic approach. It was essential for this research that once sampled, the participants felt comfortable in sharing their experiences and knowledge, particularly for the sport psychologists who openly shared a significant amount of occasionally sensitive information about their own practice. Without this information, and that of the other participants, the unique and original data regarding sport psychologists' personal qualities and their interaction with the elite sport environment would have been impossible to uncover. Although participants were recruited to the studies through purposive sampling, effort was made to ensure they represented as diverse a range of sports and experience as possible, therefore ensuring data was collected from multiple and varied sources. Member checking was employed, whereby each interview transcript was sent via email to their respective participant

for confirmation that the content could be analysed and discussed, and with the option of editing or deleting content. The accuracy, fairness, completeness and validity of all data transcripts were therefore confirmed (Patton, 2002).

Throughout the thesis, the researcher has sought to address the issue of trustworthiness in accordance with recommendations by Morrow (2005). The researcher's philosophical positioning has been articulated, and the participants and research process are discussed in detail for each study, thus allowing the reader to "assess the relevance, or transferability, of the findings to her or his own context" (Morrow, 2007, p. 219). This is particularly important given the focus of the thesis on the individual sport psychologist and the differing contexts within which they work. The researcher has sought to enhance the credibility of the approach through prolonged engagement with participants (in Study 2 specifically), and by providing rich descriptions of the participants' accounts. Dependability has been addressed through detailed articulation of the research process and its development; clear rationales for each phase of the research have been provided, including the development from study 1 to study 2, and the evolution of the final chapter. Finally, confirmability requires the findings to represent what is being researched rather than the views of the researcher and it was therefore important that they managed their subjectivity. Subjectivity is an inherent part of qualitative research with both promise and limitation, and which can be balanced by accounting for the researcher's philosophical positioning and beliefs and emphasising the idiographic approach (Morrow, 2007). By focussing on the individual rather than collective experiences of sport psychologists in Study 2, the researcher sought to represent each practitioner's 'story' as confirmed by the respective practitioner and triangulated between their 3 sources of information (life history, reflections, and interviews). It is also worth noting that throughout both studies, coaches, physicians and sport psychologists alluded to personal qualities and their impact on practitioner ineffectiveness as well as effectiveness. This does

not mean to say that the practitioners who were discussed or who participated in this research were not effective, but that they recognised that sport psychology practice is not ‘plain sailing’. In this sense, the research awarded as much control as possible in semi-structured researching approaches to the participants and analysed data in light of this.

Analyst triangulation was achieved through frequent meetings between the researcher and their supervisors to discuss the findings at each stage of data analysis, thereby offering a wider perspective from which to develop interpretations of the data (Shenton, 2004). Although the researcher led the analysis and development of common themes, the research supervisors also reviewed the transcripts from the interviews and identified what they believed to be the key messages emerging from the data. Within study 1a and 1b, themes were identified to represent similarities as well as unique data across the participant group. Subsequent discussions occurred between the researcher and their supervisors at each stage of the analysis and theme building, which therefore allowed their interpretations to be debated and the common themes to be confirmed. Analysis of study 2, the longitudinal study with sport psychologists, was more complex and required each participant’s data to be scrutinised individually to ensure that each practitioner’s ‘story’ was represented fully and accurately.

## **Chapter 3: Study 1 - Coach and sport physician perceptions of sport psychologists' personal qualities**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As previously highlighted, approaches to sport psychology practice have diversified in recent years, and now include those that utilise skills akin to that of a counselling psychologist (Hack, 2005). Research regarding the relative merits of these diverse approaches and how they influence the effectiveness of applied practice has begun to permeate the literature base (e.g. Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard, 2007). In addition, literature is beginning to appear which argues that the personal qualities of the sport psychologist are implicated in their ability to be effective in their work (Nesti, 2004). Within the counselling psychology profession, the personal qualities of the practitioner, such as empathy and congruence, are considered to play a significant role in developing an effective therapeutic relationship with a client, which in turn will dictate the quality of the therapeutic outcome (Corey, 2009). The same could therefore be said for a sport psychologist seeking to operate in a similar manner (Hack, 2005), especially if “the sport psychologist is the primary consulting tool and the practitioner-athlete relationship is the main intervention” (Tod & Andersen, 2005, p. 309). However, unlike counselling psychology, sport psychology literature offers only limited discussions of effective sport psychologists' personal qualities.

There remains a similar lack of research regarding the realities of the sport psychologist role within elite sport environments, and their personal qualities that can influence their ability to survive and succeed within sporting organisations. A sport psychologist must also appreciate the organisational, social and interpersonal processes of the sport environment they are working within, and align their approach with its management and coaching structures (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). This is particularly important given the

aforementioned development of multidisciplinary sport science support teams and the associated organisational challenges (Kyndt & Rowell, 2012), challenges that the sport psychologist will often be expected to address (Nesti, 2010). Although such organisational and cultural aspects have been afforded increased attention since Hardy and colleagues' paper, the demands and challenges faced by sport psychologists in particular continue to be overlooked within the literature (Nesti, 2010). The nature of an elite sport environment can make it a volatile and arduous one, and it is therefore argued that sport psychologists need to possess qualities such as resilience, commitment, presence, authenticity, and empathy to survive (Nesti, 2004; 2010). Therefore, the first phase of the research aimed:

- a) To explore the personal qualities of sport psychologists deemed necessary for their effective practice (study 1a), and
- b) To consider how these qualities manifest, and contribute to effective practice, within the elite sport environment (study 1b)

In light of the development of support teams working with high performance sport, the researcher believed that it would be useful to explore colleagues' perceptions of sport psychologists. Such colleagues will work closely with psychologists, now more so than ever, and should be able to provide detailed and articulate insight. The physicians and coaches who were interviewed were all experienced and effective practitioners in their own right, and all had worked or were currently working with sport psychologists. It therefore followed that such practitioners had sufficient experience of working with sport psychologists to be able to offer detailed discussions regarding the work that they do from an 'outside' perspective. The value in adopting an idiographic approach to work closely with sport psychologists has been outlined, but a broader and less 'involved' perspective from colleagues is useful in establishing an overview of their qualities in relation to the impact they can have on other practitioners. This provided some interesting information in relation to different sport

psychologists working within different sports and the relationships that the coaches and physicians had with them (both good and not so good!). Although the coaches and physicians were articulating others' practice rather than their own, this first study provided a basis from which to draw initial conclusions and develop an early understanding of what personal qualities are and how they may impact upon sport psychology practice.

## **3.2 Method**

The following methodological approach applies to both study 1a and 1b. The focus of the results and discussion sections differ for each study, and two additional, individual method sections are therefore included for each study with regards to data analysis.

### *3.2.1 Participants*

A sample of five sport physicians (four males and one female), one Head of Medical Services (male), and seven coaches (all males), who had worked or were currently working with sport psychologists gave their informed consent to be interviewed. The participants worked within a range of elite sports (e.g. Premier League football, rugby, tennis, gymnastics, boxing, and with several other Olympic sports). The sport physicians had all worked as General Practitioners prior to their involvement in sport, with their experience of working with sport psychologists ranging between eighteen months and ten years. The Head of Medical Services was a physiotherapist by training but had over ten years of experience in their current role. At the time of interview, four out of the six participants were working full-time in their field, and one physician approximated to be working 60% of their time within sports medicine and 40% in General Practice and lecturing. The remaining physician had recently left their job as a sports physician to return to General Practice full-time. Physicians' experiences of sport psychologists' work included collaboration as part of a multidisciplinary

support team, as well as both the physician and the psychologist being contracted in for periods of work.

Three of the coaches were employed within universities; one no longer coached in any capacity, one acted as a coach mentor and one worked in a coaching capacity within the university. The four remaining coaches were all employed in senior coaching-related roles. Four of the seven coaches came from an ex-participation background within the same sport as they were currently employed by. Coaches' experience of working with sport psychologists ranged between eighteen months on a near-daily basis and twenty years more sporadically. Participants worked with or alongside sport psychologists in a variety of ways, to include coach education, support as part of a team away on tour, and providing athletes with the means to contact a sport psychologist but having little further contact. Coaches and physicians discussed the sport psychologists' roles as involving educational group sessions, as well as one-to-one counselling with athletes, and also working closely with coaches and other colleagues.

### *3.2.2 Why sport physicians?*

It has become increasingly common for a sport psychologist to work within a multidisciplinary team, and therefore the perspective of other sport professionals with whom sport psychologists are likely to develop a close working alliance can offer an insightful and unique view of their personal qualities in practice, including the sports physician. Significantly, the importance of character and personal qualities as indicators of success within effective physicians has also been documented, and are afforded attention within their education and training. A physician's character, integrity, personality, attitude, and personable qualities have been cited as impacting the effectiveness of physicians (McGaghie, 1990; Glick, 2000). The medical professional therefore offers an interesting parallel as, similar to that of a sport psychologist, their practice is underpinned by a professional training

and qualification framework housed within an established governing body, which results in the potential for significant impact on athlete well-being. Given this, and the often difficult and challenging sporting environments within which they both work (Glick, 2000; Nesti, 2010), sport physicians were deemed to be a population who could offer genuine insights pertaining to the effective practice of sport psychology.

### *3.2.3 Instrument*

The researcher had considerable prior experience of qualitative research and interviewing after using these approaches for their undergraduate and postgraduate research. The benefit of such research with regards to the aims of the thesis has been articulated, and it was important to develop an interview schedule that addressed the focus of the study whilst eliciting data which fully represented the views of the coaches and physicians interviewed. Data collection therefore took the form of a semi-structured one-to-one interview with each participant. The questions were open-ended to allow the participants to fully express their thoughts and opinions, and ensure the responses were truly representative of their variations and experiences in practice. Probing questions were utilised where necessary to further explore the participants' stories, encouraging them to elaborate on information pertinent to the research question (Berg, 2009).

The interview guide was developed after reviewing the literature addressing sport psychologist effectiveness using similar methodologies (e.g., Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987; Anderson et al., 2004), was adapted to address the specific research question, and made relevant to the participant group. These previous research studies have primarily utilised coaches and athletes as the participants, and the researcher therefore used these studies to provide a basis for the structure and types of questions asked. For example, Anderson et al. (2004) asked participants to describe the sport psychologist(s) they had worked with and to discuss their effectiveness. Broadly, this was the focus of Study 1,

with the addition of a more specific emphasis on the personal qualities of the sport psychologists who the coaches and physicians worked with, as well as the relationships they themselves develop with the sport psychologist and their understanding of the environment.

Each interview began with a small section of non-threatening, demographic questions (Berg, 2009) designed to determine the background of each participant with regards to their qualifications, the extent of their general and sport-specific experience as a coach or physician, and the sports in which they currently or had previously worked. For example, all participants were asked ‘Could you explain to me whether you have experienced working with (a) sport psychologist(s) and if so the context around that, (i.e., amount of contact, depth of contact)’. The main body of the interview schedule included questions relating to the participants’ experiences of working with sport psychologists and the personal qualities they believed made them effective in their work. Participants were questioned about the relationship they had with the psychologist(s), as well as that between the psychologist and athlete, whether the psychologist(s) were able to get along with athletes and other members of the support team, and the extent to which the sport psychologist was perceived to understand the environment they were operating within. Coaches and physicians were also asked to articulate their knowledge of education and training routes to becoming a sport psychologist, in relation to their perceptions of what contributed to their effective practice. Although divided into 2 separate studies, the data for study 1a and 1b was collected via one interview schedule, which differed only slightly between coaches and physicians (see Appendices 2 and 3). The slight variation between these two interview schedules was designed to acknowledge the differences in their relationships with the sport psychologists; the coaches’ interview schedule was phrased in light of their being both users of sport psychology services as well as colleagues of the practitioners, whereas physicians were solely the latter.

### *3.2.4 Procedure*

Following ethical approval, seven coaches, five sport physicians and a Head of Medical Services were approached through purposive sampling of the contacts of the authors (Patton, 2002), with inclusion criteria being that they had sufficient experience of working with sport psychologists to be able to discuss thoughts about their effectiveness. Purposive sampling was required to strategically select information-rich participants who were able to provide an in-depth understanding of the focus of the study and had the necessary unique insight. The 13 participants were selected because of their close working relationships with sport psychologists, therefore providing them with a high level of collaborative insight to inform powerful and detailed thoughts and opinions of their experiences. Sport psychologists were not contacted to identify coaches and physicians with whom they had worked so as to avoid any bias in participant selection and potentially creating an inaccurate representation of coaches' and physicians' perceptions of sport psychologists.

The 13 participants were interviewed in person at a location suitable to them, either at work or at home. Each coach and physician was provided with the interview guide and a participant information sheet in advance, which detailed the interview questions and procedure and informed them that the data would be kept confidential and of their right to withdraw. The interviews typically lasted 60 – 90 minutes.

### *3.2.5 Data analysis*

Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, reviewed for grammatical accuracy, and re-read for familiarity by the first author. Transcripts yielded 298 pages of 1.5 spaced interview data. Data was then analysed through the use of content analysis, defined by Patton (2002) as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453).

This qualitative data analysis protocol has been used previously within similar interview based research studies (Anderson et al., 2004). More specifically, the researcher was guided in their analysis by Côté and colleagues' description of interpretational qualitative analysis, whereby "elements, categories, patterns, and relations between properties emerge from the analysis of the data and are not predetermined" (p. 129), and the researcher creates a structure for the data to make the studied phenomenon easier for the reader to understand. Firstly the data is 'tagged', with the aim being to "produce a set of concepts which adequately represent the information included in the interview transcripts" (p. 130). Following this process of tagging, the researcher must create categories, whereby tags with similar meanings are gathered together and labelled to capture the overall topic. As an example in the current study, the coaches and physicians discussed sport psychologists' personal qualities in relation to ethics, having confidence in their practice, and being happy to remain in the 'background' which were tagged by the researcher. These then came together to form the category of 'Professionalism in practice'; this category as well as a full representation of the findings are presented in sections 3.3.1 and 3.4.1. Each salient quotation was tagged to identify the interviewee from which it originated, allowing the researchers to identify the contributors for ease of reference between and within interviews.

### **3.3. Study 1a**

Study 1a represents the data pertaining to sport psychologists' personal qualities and their applied role. Following data collection, and after the initial data analysis procedures were carried out as described above, quotes were sorted into four main categories. To better understand the influence of personal qualities on sport psychologists' practice, the relevant data was presented initially as the first category. The contexts in which these qualities were used e.g., the importance of trust in building relationships were explored, which resulted in a

further two categories (relationship building and professionalism in practice). Similarities in personal qualities between the psychologist and physician were also reported.

### *3.3.1 Results*

#### *3.3.1.1 Personal qualities*

The coaches and physicians discussed a number of personal qualities they had experienced in effective sport psychologists or believed they should possess. Coach 5, when describing sport psychologists, stated that “ultimately they need to be good people”. Participants also described the qualities and beliefs that they valued in the sport psychologists they had worked with, which were representative of them as people not just practitioners. Physician 3 described the sport psychologist they knew as possessing ‘good human qualities’:

Character traits in terms of being open and honest and decent and fair...the idea that somebody can improve or people are prone to error and that's normal, yeh I think [they are] traits of a human being that I respect.

Coach 4 elaborated on this and stated that what they value in sport psychologists is “openness and honesty and humility...I think those things are important...I value them generally in people”. The participants also discussed empathy as a quality of the effective sport psychologist, with Coach 4 stating “you would hope that [a sport psychologist has] got a fundamental interest and empathy with people...I think that the ability to be empathetic is something that comes from the person”. This ‘hope’ was driven by the physicians and coaches’ perceptions that the personal qualities of empathy and trustworthiness result from the sport psychologist caring for their client, with Physician 3 highlighting the importance of “empathy and honesty and trustworthiness” and that “you have to strive to have an understanding of what’s driving your patient and you have to care, and if you do both of those you’ll be honest and trustworthy”. However, a practitioner will need to be operating with an open environment and possess sufficient prior knowledge to be effective:

Being a good listener and being open and trustworthy are probably the most important things...but without the right environment and the right experience and then the right openness, trustworthiness, you need all of that before you can even start to be a psychologist and modify people (Physician 3).

The emphasis on personal qualities in the context of sport psychology practice was also emphasised by Physician 3: “you can have all the empathy and all of the knowledge in the beginning but you’ve still got to transfer that into a coherent structure that you use for the rest of your career”. Empathy was also deemed an essential quality that enabled the sport psychologists to communicate effectively with their athletes, with Physician 5 emphasising that “if you’re dealing with other human beings, to get the best out of them you’ve got to be able to communicate well, so you’ve got to have empathy with them”. Another stated:

You have to have a good understanding of what an athlete is going through...do I have to have been an elite athlete, no, do I have to understand what kind of sacrifices they make, yes...in other ways have I made similar-ish sacrifices to my life, yes...use whatever your personal experiences are and I think it's important that you're able then to sometimes relate that to the athlete you're talking to (Physician 1).

These extracts suggest that an ability to empathise and communicate this empathy to an athlete is a quality necessary for practice within a profession that is primarily concerned with people. Furthermore, an athlete in an elite sporting environment will be concerned with achieving performance excellence, and thus the sport psychologist must use their own ‘relatable’ experiences to develop an understanding of the athlete’s situation.

Trust was also considered a related key quality that sport psychologists must value and be able to establish between themselves and the athletes they work with. This was discussed both in terms of trust in the sport psychologist as a person, and also in their professional skills:

[You need] a knowledge base that makes it obvious to the person you’re dealing with that you’ve dealt with this sort of thing before, to have trust in you, not just you as a person, but trust in your clinical skills (Physician 3).

With regards to trusting the sport psychologist as a person, participants also deemed it important that the athlete recognises and trusts that their interventions and advice are solely to help the athlete, and that they are not acting in a self-serving manner. Coach 2 described the development of trust in this respect, stating “trust is built up when the player realises whatever you say and whatever you're asking them to do and whatever you do is to help them become better, and they're not for your own motives” and another describing sport psychologists specifically: “they need to be trustworthy don't they, I think they need to show that they're not going to undermine the person or persons that they're dealing with, and that can only be built up over time” (Coach 5). In addition, results seem to indicate that practitioners operating within a ‘caring’, people-orientated profession, such as medicine or psychology, must endeavour to understand their patient and be naturally driven to care for them. Physician 6 described the sport psychologist they had worked with as giving “a sense of caring” and as having a “softer nature”. Coach 1 recognised this when discussing sport psychologists “who’ve got a core philosophy that's about helping people...I’m presuming that practitioners actually have a genuine wish to help people” and another stating that “they have people at heart, I think they genuinely wanted to help the kids and the people in their charge...you have to be someone who's very giving and prepared to give of yourself” (Coach 5).

### *3.3.1.2 Relationship building*

The participants emphasised certain personal qualities that were considered to significantly impact upon the ability of a sport psychologist to build effective working relationships. Physicians and coaches alike emphasised how important they perceived personal qualities to be with regards to communicating and connecting with others, in a profession where this relationship is key to effectiveness. Coach 1 was of the belief that “you could go to the extreme and say a sport psychologist needs a personality in order to be able to

do their job properly because they interact on this very intimate basis rather than at a distance”. Physician 2 supported this notion in their contention that sport psychology practice is “about personality...none of this is about how clever you are, ever, it's always a mistake to think that if you're super bright that you're good at talking to people”. Although the term ‘personality’ could be seen to undermine the developmental nature of personal qualities proposed in this thesis, these quotes do lend support to the importance of the person behind the practitioner.

The personal qualities of sport psychologists described by coaches and physicians also included being approachable, agreeable, and possessing an overall ability to get on with people. Such qualities were considered essential in building and maintaining a relationship, with Coach 1 emphasising “if you're talking about a relationship, then I think that's at the core of much of what we talk about in sport science”. The ability to develop relationships was something that came naturally to sport psychologists according to Physician 2 who stated, “it's just a natural ability to connect with people...not everybody can do that, some people can some people can't, but the couple of psychologists who haven't been quite so successful have struggled with that”. Participants also discussed the sport psychologist's ability to build relationships with regards to their communication and people skills, with Coach 6 describing a sport psychologist they knew as “quietish...a good listener, they were a real kind of peopley person [who] just likes being around people, which I guess is probably one of the traits that you probably need”. Another stated:

You have to be a good communicator, so in other words athletes have to be comfortable around you...and you've got to be a people person 'cause you've got to get your message across, first thing for anybody to listen to you is they've got to be comfortable in your presence (Coach 2).

As previously highlighted, trust was discussed by all participants as of great importance when building connections and thus relationships, which is considered essential when working as

part of a multidisciplinary team. Physician 4 emphasised the importance of this trusting relationship, stating “if you haven’t got a relationship with someone you don't trust them...a team works well if everyone respects each other and trusts each other and gets on with each other...forming a relationship and maintaining it is absolutely crucial”. Gaining trust and developing relationships by making people feel comfortable is therefore a prerequisite for a sport psychologist wanting to present new ideas and gain support for their work.

Building trust was also considered important during initial contact with an athlete, to negate any doubt the athlete may have in sharing information with the sport psychologist as highlighted by Coach 4 who said “the ability to build positive relationships fairly quickly as a sport psychologist is absolutely very important...the ability to nullify and get over those [disclosure] issues fairly quickly I would say is a quality of a sport psychologist”. Such a connection can be created by the sport psychologist making the athletes feel at ease and gaining their trust and respect, which in part is down to the psychologist themselves being a ‘normal’ person. Participants described the ‘normal’ person as being someone who their clients could connect with in a social or friendship capacity as highlighted by Physician 5 who stated “[the athletes] trusted [the sport psychologist]...partly because they were a normal person...who had a good sense of humour and went out and enjoyed their self with the players and the manager”. Physician 1 described a similar experience of working with a sport psychologist: “[they’re] not there the whole time but certainly when [they are] there you can you can switch off from work and have a bit of banter... making jokes... carrying the kit and all mucking in”. Coach 7 discussed this in relation to a football environment specifically:

You've got to be confident and bubbly and those kinds of things in a football environment, you've got to have the banter if you want to call it that, you've got to be able to take a bit of stick and take it as only a joke... just being prepared to go for a beer with the lads... it creates a team environment in which people are open and honest with each other and as I said before, it then creates not discreet individuals but helps to break the barriers to become more integrated.

The importance of this ‘banter’ and ability to enjoy themselves was underlined by the sport psychologist’s professional and committed approach as highlighted by Coach 3:

It was a relationship that built amongst the players and the staff... [the sport psychologist was] down to earth, sense of humour, approachable, there's no pretentiousness, there's no preciousness, they were just one of the group...they were one of the ones who were having a laugh and did spend social time with them...they were always just there, and even when there's times where there's clearly no role for them actually to be there

Therefore, the coaches and physicians emphasised the importance of the sport psychologist ‘fitting in’ and alluded to ‘humility’ as a quality in doing so. Akin to the ‘good human qualities’ earlier described, such qualities were valued in developing respect and trust with athletes. This was highlighted by Coach 1’s comment regarding the type of person a sport psychologist is versus their theoretical knowledge:

If you a hundred percent knew what you were talking about but you were thirty percent a nice person then I wouldn’t work with you, if I found that you were even sixty percent useful to me or sixty percent knew what you were talking about and you were a nice person, then I’d work with you

What is clear is that the participants perceived a need for such personal qualities to compliment the sport psychologist’s academic knowledge and formal education, thus creating the foundation for effectiveness, as discussed by Physician 3: “if you’re of a certain age and you’re a university professor and you’re open, you have both the...educational kudos and gravitas and the open, friendly personality, it's quite a nice blend of things to have”.

### *3.3.1.3 Professionalism in practice*

Professionalism in practice represents coaches and physicians’ views of sport psychologists relative to their competence, ethical practice, ability to work within a multidisciplinary team, and humility. Both physicians and coaches recognised the potential for athletes to become dependent upon the input of a sport psychologist, with Coach 1 stating “there’s a real danger of dependency as well... [they] start to become reliant on psychologists and they’ll come back to the coach and say well my psychologist says this”. This was

discussed in greater detail by one physician with regards to their experience of a sport psychologist who they perceived to be working outside the boundaries of what they were qualified to do, and offered their opinion as to why this may have occurred:

[I worry they're] creating a dependency on the player, so only that player can speak to them about those things...you can't get rid of me because I'm so important to the team that they can only talk to me...I think fear is one of the underlying reasons why [they] delve down those aspects...I think that there are some insecurities, either in [their] self or in [their] role or both that make [them] go down these routes (Physician 1).

A sense of security appeared to refer to the self-confidence the sport psychologist had in themselves in practice, which was described as a characteristic or quality of the sport psychologist by Physician 1 who said "I'm not sure that everyone can [be a sport psychologist]...just with training etcetera...I think that's particular of anyone working with athletes...you have to have a certain security in yourself". The same physician elaborated on how that insecurity may affect their response to being an outsider entering the environment:

You do have a rapport and a banter that then if someone is in and out, some people are able to deal with it and some people aren't, they feel that they're the outsider, and by us [being] more tight knit...[it] just reinforces that sometimes, if you've got that kind of insecurity (Physician 1).

This physician appeared to perceive that a person insecure by nature would not be suited to the world of sport psychology support work especially considering the nature of the sporting context, which the physician described as 'malevolent' and 'high-pressured'. This was supported by Physician 5 who described the need for a balance, again implicating humility in not appearing 'over-confident':

I think for somebody to be good at their job, particularly in elite sport, you've got to be confident...you've got to know what you're talking about so I think you've got to display confidence without being over-confident, you've got to be assured

Physician 1, who described the sport psychologist as creating a dependency from the athletes, posited that perhaps, as part of a multi-disciplinary support team, the sport psychologist may

have felt a need to prove themselves and cement their position within the team. Thus, the sport psychologist was perceived to be addressing athlete issues outside of their boundaries of competence, and not sharing the nature of their work with the team.

Although maintaining confidentiality is a key aspect of ethical sport psychology practice, to effectively help an athlete and generate rapport within a team, all participants deemed it essential for that team to be aware of an athlete's situation. Coach 3 highlighted how the sport psychologists they worked with "wanted ownership over everything; 'you can't do this anymore, we're doing this and we're working on that'... [they] ring-fenced stuff which just doesn't help, and when you're building a squad or a team you just can't do it". Physician 5 agreed with this sentiment, and stated that "you can see an athlete and treat them well but actually if you don't communicate well with fellow professionals, it doesn't help very much so you've got to be a team player as well". Coach 7 further elaborated on the importance of the sport psychologist being a 'team player':

If [a sport psychologist] wants to be an integrated part, and you want people to open up and you want people to be inquisitive and say well come on just tell me a little bit more about what this is and how we can use this as a tool to aid the players... you have to build those relationships with people... if you're going to get the full potential out of it, [it] has to be an integrated process, it can't be separate entities, working independently, so staff have to work with staff, they have to understand how each of them intertwine and affect each other.

Coach 4 went on to explain the reality of this in practice, stating that they give the sport psychologist "the professional license to do what they think is appropriate, and not expecting them to tell me everything, but certainly expecting them to keep me informed when it's appropriate". Coach 1 adopted a similar view: "[the coach] said to [the sport psychologist] straight away 'I want you to tell me what the athletes are talking to you about', and [the sport psychologist] said I can't do that, it's in confidence. Well you're no good to me then". Physician 1 elaborated on why this information sharing was so important:

I think there is within sports a need to understand...things will be discussed within a multidisciplinary team and that is from my point of view still within our boundaries, medically, psychology, whatever, within the boundaries of confidentiality...you need to be able to communicate with your colleagues, that is professional etiquette and professional responsibility and if you hide behind confidentiality and don't actually communicate with your colleagues, then I think you're erring on the side of misconduct.

This physician is referring to the potential for a sport psychologist to use confidentiality to justify keeping one's work with an athlete private to such an extent that it damages working relationships between members of multidisciplinary teams, who may feel unable to adequately help the athlete without fully understanding their experience. As a psychologist working within the sporting environment, a security within oneself is also necessary in recognising the often small part played in the overall success of the athlete. Physician 1 also described a sport psychologist as an individual who is "happy to make...a small difference... happy to enable people to perform and... also happy to take a back seat and not be at all interested in taking any of the glory of other people's success". Coach 6 also commented:

Ultimately, [a sport psychologist is] quite selfless because they're doing everything for everybody else... [they have to] be prepared not to get the recognition [and] quite happy for other people to take all the plaudits, just so they can fit in the background of the team

Humility is therefore implicated as a personal quality in sport psychologists who operate in this withdrawn manner, mediated by a security of self in the knowledge that they do have an impact. Coach 3 noted that "when people feel the need to bowl you over with what they're allegedly coming from, it generally falls apart anyway", and this was elaborated upon by Coach 6:

I would say they're modest 'cause they wouldn't be singing and dancing type people, I think they'd be...I think they'd be quite in the background but because of the work they do they'll understand...the effect that they've had 'cause they'll be reflective people.

Recognising and accepting the withdrawn, 'background' sport psychologist role in this respect, and being truly happy with that, appears important if one is to maintain professional

boundaries and practice ethically within a support team. Coach 2 noted how sport psychologists are “at ease with themselves, they know what they're bringing to the party” with Physician 1 elaborating with the statement that “[as a sport psychologist] you have to be secure in yourself that you know that you are a very small part in someone else’s success and I think unless you’re really comfortable with that, I think you’re going to run into problems”. Such practitioners were humble enough not to see themselves as the expert in the relationship, or being of utmost importance to the athlete, but will consider themselves as equals within a multidisciplinary support team and recognise the athlete as the creator of their own success. Physician 2 stated that “everybody has their part to play, and no one bit of it is more valuable than others” and that “the people who come in on a consultancy basis just want to feel part of it all, you don't want to be put on a pedestal or treated in any way better than everybody else, you just want to feel like you belong”.

Participants’ discussions suggested that sport psychologists can display such humility by presenting themselves and their work in a way accessible for those who may not come from an academic background. Coach 5 appreciated the sport psychologist’s ‘subtle’ approach: “it wasn't sciencey at all, I think that might have been a put off I think if it had been too academic and sciencey” and Coach 7 highlighted that they must “make it accessible to the person which you're explaining to, so not putting academic papers in front of them, or talking academic language, just tell me in layman’s terms what this is going to do to enhance athletes”. Such an approach was also described by Physician 5 in terms of giving responsibility over to the athlete, with the sport psychologist making sure the work they did “empowered the players...it didn't force anything onto the players”. The participants also considered a sport psychologist ineffective if they portrayed themselves as all-knowing or ‘above’ other people, and instead appreciated the humble practitioner who could identify with those around them. Physician 3 described how there are “too many people at universities that

live in their own ivory tower who can't relate to people, then there are other people who can relate to people but don't have the gravitas to pull it off and so [for the sport psychologist] to have both was good". Unfortunately, a number of the participants had experienced working with sport psychologists who could be seen as lacking humility and were therefore considered ineffective. Physician 2, for example, highlighted a sport psychologist who "came in with the sort of big I am...this is what we're going to do, I am the expert...it's just not the way to handle it". Coach 3 spoke of a team of sport psychologists who "came to the club...they'd sit everyone down and give them a forty-five minute PowerPoint of how amazing they were and what qualifications they had and why they were the best". This same coach elaborated on their experience:

[The sport psychologists] would try to wow you at every occasion about what [their] background was, what [they'd] done, just up front, every time trying to tell you how good [they were]...when people feel the need to bowl you over with what they're allegedly coming from, it generally falls apart anyway (Coach 3).

Another coach highlighted this as characteristic of many individuals involved in sport, but that this was not necessarily the case for the sport psychologists discussed, nor would it ideally be:

I think there's a lot [of sport professionals] that are on an ego trip for themselves, they're very ambitious, they couch in this very ambitious framework but ultimately...you have to be someone who's very giving and prepared to give of yourself, and I think those [sport psychologists] fit that model (Coach 5).

Coach 4 also described humility relative to a sport psychologist recognising and acknowledging if their work has not been of an appropriate standard, stating that sport psychologists possess "humility that by the nature of professional competencies...you must have the ability to go you know what I barely earned my money today, I shouldn't have taken money for that I was poor".

The participants also appreciated a subtle, more withdrawn approach to a sport psychologist's work. Several physicians and coaches recognised that in sport there is a degree of resistance to utilising the services of sport psychologists, and that their work can often be met with suspicion. Physician 7 noted that "in football, we have issues with people not being happy with change or with new ideas, and as a consequence can be quite defensive" and that as a result, a sport psychologist needs to be "open minded [and] trying to push boundaries". However a sport psychology practitioner must also adopt a "low-key approach", and one that empowers the client and does not force anything upon them. This was summarised well by Physician 1:

Those qualities of a sport psych I like are the ones that are able to take a back step and look at things...with a novel approach and challenge those of us who are working day-in, day-out with athletes, and quietly suggest x y z...that would be the extra quality if you will...subtlety...not intuitiveness...maybe a lateral approach to things.

Thus it also appears beneficial for a sport psychologist to be the member of the support team who observes the environment and the work that's required more objectively, by providing a degree of mental distance from the support 'front line'. This is particularly important in certain environments, as described by one coach:

[They] would just be there in the background the whole time... [they'd] be pitch side, [they'd] be in the gym... making observations, and making [themselves] available, 'cause I think one of the things in rugby, it's a very, what's the word, a very charged atmosphere, and for one of these guys to put their hands up and go I'm struggling here is difficult, so I'd say they had it balanced far better 'cause they were constantly available (Coach 3).

Other coaches added to this when discussing how their own practice had benefitted from the sport psychologist adopting this withdrawn role:

[The sport psychologist] watched us without telling us really what was going on and then flagged it up for us, which I would never have been able to reflect on that I don't think as myself and needed a nudge, just in terms of are you aware of what you [do] (Coach 6).

Giving you feedback on how you were coaching and how your communication was... you do lose your rag with [the athletes]... I can be a right stropky, I have

a tendency to just tell people how it is, and in a very nice way, one of the [sport psychologists would] say to me... 'who do you think has the upper hand when you did that', yeh fair enough (Coach 3)

It would therefore appear that a sport psychologist's comfort within themselves to adopt a withdrawn role and remain tightly within their professional competence boundaries can impact upon the effectiveness of the work they carry out, particularly in terms of developing relationships with and supporting other staff.

#### *3.3.1.4 Similarities between psychologist and physician*

The physicians in the study offered several interesting comparisons between sport psychologists' work and their own. The authors considered it important to highlight these similarities due to the perceived aforementioned similarities between the two practitioner groups and thus emphasise what each could learn from the other. Physician 3 discussed the influence that the sport psychologist's or physician's personality and presence can have on the outcome of a consultation:

The idea that the intervention is the person, or their ability to work...it's the same as a GP...the idea that there is a placebo effect from just the doctor, the doctor is a drug himself...the idea that you come into that environment and your ability to heal is very much to do with your own personality and your own ability to deal with people... I would've thought the same sorts of things would apply to psychologists.

The concept of the practitioner as the intervention implicates personal qualities and their potentially significant impact on the 'healing process', which supports the rationale for the research. Although the term personality was used again here, the same physician did speak of the 'learning curve' that exists for both physicians and sport psychologists in terms of developing the 'knack' to swiftly create rapport with patients during consultations:

There's a lot of personal development that could only really occur by giving consultations, in the same way as a GP, I can see somebody now...and have a rapport with my patient in under ten minutes, I couldn't have done that in half an hour...ten years ago...that knack only comes with time and with practice (Physician 3).

A final comparison made between sport psychologists and physicians focussed on the practitioner being suited to that particular role. The person behind the practitioner is again brought to the fore, in particular their underlying drive to care for their patients and their ability to communicate:

People who want to build machines and do Lego and...don't want to talk to people they become surgeons and orthopaedic surgeons, people who are more interested in the person underneath the illness will probably become a GP...to be a GP or a Psychologist you've got to talk to people, and communicate with people, to be a surgeon you have to do a bit of that but, a bit less so (Physician 4).

I might say...go and see this bloke, they're not the most gifted communicator but they're a bloody good surgeon for instance, that doesn't matter...because you're sending them to have some surgery, but as a communicator and psychologist that is essential (Physician 5).

The physicians here are emphasising that given the caring nature of General Practice and psychology professions, greater emphasis is placed on the personal qualities of the practitioner, in contrast to a skill-focussed profession such as that of a Surgeon.

### *3.3.2 Discussion*

The purpose of this study was to examine the personal qualities of sport psychologists and better understand how they contribute to their effective practice. This was achieved by examining the views of coaches and physicians with significant experience of working with sport psychologists. Interviewing coaches and sport physicians allowed several themes to emerge based upon their perceptions of the qualities required for effective sport psychology practice and their impact upon the applied environment. Previous research within the sport psychology domain has afforded some attention to the characteristics of effective sport psychologists (Anderson et al., 2004), yet has generally failed to focus upon the more personal qualities of effective sport psychologists and their influence on practice. The coaches' and physicians' views from the current study therefore contribute to the existing

knowledge base, and offer some interesting insights into the impact of personal qualities upon practice.

The current study extends previous research by establishing the personal qualities of practitioners and what they mean in sport psychology practice. One physician referred to the ‘good human traits’ of the sport psychologist they had worked with, which emphasises the person behind the practitioner, and their values and predispositions. This view resonates with that of Jones (2007), who discussed the need to develop sport psychology practitioners of good character, who do the right thing, at the right time and for the right reasons, and who understand the virtues of trust, integrity and courage. In addition, participants perceived empathy to be a prerequisite to effective sport psychology practice and as aiding practitioners in communicating and building a relationship with an athlete. Empathy is widely considered within counselling psychology to be a quality that must be portrayed by a therapist if they are to be effective in their work. Rogers (1957) cited empathy as one of the conditions necessary for therapeutic change; understanding the client’s world and communicating this understanding to the client is essential.

The trustworthiness of the sport psychologist was another quality cited frequently by the coaches and physicians. The need for a sport psychologist to establish respect and trust has been further emphasised within the literature (Dorfman, 1990; Cropley et al., 2007; Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008). In particular, trust was perceived as a necessary prerequisite to forming a connection with individuals, valued as a characteristic of the sport psychologist as a person, and considered particularly important in their ability to build and maintain relationships with athletes and colleagues. Nesti (2010) states that sport psychologists and athletes “will be unable to do useful and meaningful work together without developing trust and a strong working relationship” (p. 40), and it has long been the contention within counselling psychology that the success of therapy is dependent on the

quality of the relationship between the therapist and client, the maintenance of which will be impacted by the therapist's personal qualities (Corey, 2009). This research has provided additional information regarding the qualities that contribute to the development of relationships between sport psychologists, and not only athletes, but the wider sport science support team.

The coaches and physicians frequently mentioned being agreeable, approachable, and friendly, and having the ability to 'get on' with the people around them as qualities of a sport psychologist that enabled them to establish relationships with athletes and colleagues. One physician described the sport psychologist as making their work fun and engaging; Anderson et al. (2004) and Cropley et al. (2007) have both described such qualities as key to understanding and developing a relationship with a client. Participants also suggested that the personal qualities of the sport psychologist are not sufficient in isolation to have significant impact on their effectiveness. Sport psychologists require a 'blend of characteristics', which includes possession of some/all of the personal qualities identified, combined with a strong theoretical knowledge base and good professional skills, and the ability to read the environment. Taylor (2008) suggests a sport psychologist can establish credibility through academic accomplishment, previous consulting experience, and expression of one's personality. Of significance is that Taylor equates the sport psychologist's establishment of credibility to building trust with the athlete, which is known to be a significant feature of an effective working relationship (Nesti, 2010), and which was described by the participants in this study. There is no denying the importance of a sound education in the psychology of sport and the ability to apply this to a given sporting environment, but the current study emphasises the need for these to be combined with certain personal qualities, the latter of which are a mostly unacknowledged factor within the literature in terms of their impact upon effective sport psychology practice.

Coaches and physicians in the current study also discussed how a sport psychologist's personal qualities can interact with their professional role. One physician described a sport psychologist who they perceived to be operating outside of their professional boundaries, and posited that this may be due to insecurity, or a lack of self-confidence, that extended to their perceived ability within their role and an apparent reluctance to work with other well-qualified professionals. This appeared to engage the sport psychologist in issues outside of their competence and they were therefore alleged to be overly secretive in their work, 'hiding behind' confidentiality and preventing the support team from fully understanding the athlete's situation. This notion of insecurity relates to the quality of authenticity, whereby one is accepting and trusting of themselves and their choices despite the anxiety that may accompany (Nesti, 2004; Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Fifer et al. (2008) state that a large part of a sport psychologist's effectiveness comes from their uniqueness and comfort in themselves and their approach. Therefore, as witnessed by the physician, an insecure and potentially inauthentic sport psychologist may be predisposed to practice ineffectively, particularly in relation to competence and professional boundaries.

Defining and practising within one's professional boundaries can be a challenge for a sport psychologist (Simons & Andersen, 1995), but it is also their ethical responsibility to practice within their area of competence (Moore, 2003). There are clear guidelines in place regarding such issues; the HPC (2009) for example requires its practitioners to 'be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession' (p. 6) and recognise their own personal limits within these boundaries. Specifically, a practitioner must 'understand the importance of and be able to maintain confidentiality' (p. 7), yet also be able to 'work collaboratively as part of and contribute effectively to a multi-disciplinary team, and communicate information and professional opinion to colleagues' (p. 9). Although not suggesting that a sport psychologist should break a client's confidentiality, the physicians

believed that all members of a support team must be kept 'up to date and informed' to a certain degree, to be able to best help the athlete.

A security of self was also considered necessary for a sport psychologist to recognise the small part they play in an athlete's success. The participants believed that a unique quality of a sport psychologist is their subtlety, or ability to take a withdrawn approach, which allows the sport psychologist to look at things from more of a creative, lateral perspective and make novel suggestions based upon their observations. Balague (1999) states that a sport psychologist must be helpful without becoming a central figure, and that the athlete's needs must take precedence. The sport psychology trainees from Stambulova and Johnsons' (2010) study also recognised the need to prioritise the athlete's welfare and well-being and to 'stay in the background' when working with clients. The physicians also discussed how a sport psychologist, who considers themselves of too great an importance, will be unable to read the environment and relate to those within it. Dorfman (1990) supports this view; for a sport psychologist to demonstrate professionalism they "must have limited ego needs and be self-effacing rather than self-serving" (p. 344). It could be argued that individuals such as those described by the physicians lacked a degree of humility, which is considered essential in allowing the athlete to dictate their own path (Friesen & Orlick, 2010) and as a component of good moral character that directs a practitioner to 'do the right thing' (Jones, 2007).

An interesting finding from the study was the extent to which the physicians likened their practice to that of the sport psychologist. The first of these relates to the personality and personal qualities of the practitioner; physicians discussed how their ability to heal relates to their personality and that 'the intervention is the person'. The personality of the sport psychologist has been similarly implicated in their ability to establish an effective therapeutic relationship and therefore the effectiveness of their work. This ability to build rapport was also highlighted by the physicians as important for their practice, and physicians and

psychologists alike require time to develop a 'knack' for quickly forming connections with their patients. Finally, the subjects alluded to the need for both physicians and psychologists to be driven by an underlying need to care for people which directs them to practice within such a profession. Dorfman (1990) suggests that of utmost importance is that an athlete must know that the sport psychologist cares about them. Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) also cite a psychologist's capacity to care as essential for successful practice, which is dictated by their "ability to embrace the self-awareness and empathic qualities that engender compassion" (p. 333). Caring has been alluded to in more recent sport psychology literature; Andersen (2009) states that "sport psychologists, their personalities and their abilities to form caring, non-contingent, positive relationships...are what fuel change" (p. 13). The consultants in Friesen and Orlicks' (2010) study considered establishing a sense of caring for a client as "a necessary component to their practice" (p. 241), and those unable to do so would find it difficult to invest in the relationship.

Medical school applicants are judged not only on their academic achievements but also their personality (Glick, 2000; Bore, Munro, & Powis, 2009), personal qualities (Lumsden, Bore, Millar, Jack, & Powis, 2005) and personal background (McGaghie, 1990). Perhaps, therefore, the sport psychology profession should adopt a similar approach based upon the personal qualities highlighted in this study. It may be suggested that similar to that of the counselling and medical professions, applicants to sport psychology programmes of education and training should also be judged based upon their personal qualities prior to enrolment. Moreover, there is scope within these programmes for trainee sport psychologists to consider their own personal qualities as integral to effective practice, and to place emphasis on the importance of these in self-examination of their applied work and personal development.

### **3.4 Study 1b**

Study 1b represents data pertaining to sport psychologists' personal qualities in relation to the professional sport environment. Following data collection, and after the initial data tagging procedures were carried out as described above, the data was re-organised into three main categories relating to the role of the sport psychologist in the context of high performance sport. The first category focussed on the specifics of the sport psychologist role and their understanding of elite sport environments and cultures. Secondly, the reality of the wider sport psychology role within the elite sport environment was explored. The final topic examined the sport psychologist's ability to work within multidisciplinary teams in these environments. The personal qualities of the sport psychologist were discussed throughout.

#### *3.4.1 Results*

##### *3.4.1.1 Understanding high performance sport environments and cultures*

Coaches and physicians offered insight into how a sport psychologist can operate effectively in elite professional sport environments, and that this is dictated by their ability to understand the organisational processes and culture of such environments. Coach 2 stated that "each sport has its own language, and if you don't know that language, you ain't going to last in that sport", with Physician 5 stating that the sport psychologist must be "the right person for that environment". Coach 5 also commented that "you've got to know where you're allowed and where you're not allowed, you've got to know what's acceptable and what isn't...the political landscape". Sport psychologists must be able to understand, and practice in accordance with, the specific culture of each individual sport and the 'politics' that accompany it. Coaches and physicians believe sport psychologists can gain this understanding by patiently developing an overall picture of the sport organisation they are working within, before implementing any interventions. According to the coaches, this can be

achieved by “mooching, observing around the environment and lots of informal conversations that...develop into more formal stuff” (Coach 5) and “just collecting [information] and talking to people” (Coach 4). Doing so was considered especially important for the sport psychologist to be able to accurately identify the work they would be required to do, which was further emphasised by one physician:

Psychology's a waiting game, you've got to just bide your time and understand the team dynamics and the way the different individuals work, and then start to decide on what strategies to take on board, so it's a bit of a slow-burn sometimes really, but absolutely vital, especially at the elite end (Physician 2).

In relation to this subtle (yet deliberate) approach, coaches and physicians also discussed the sport psychologist as an individual who benefits from being on the periphery, yet who is still able to understand central ‘goings on’:

You've got to be prepared to take a back seat on stuff...be kind of the grey man if you like...‘cause they need to be behind everything but picking up the vibe on what's going on, and it might just be some little bit that they're picking up but it could be really valuable, that little bit of advice that they're giving (Coach 6).

In relation to personal qualities, what the participants appear to be describing here are the qualities of the sport psychologist in assessing the unique culture of a sport organisation, whilst remaining in the background and maintaining a degree of both physical and metaphorical distance. This is particularly important in some environments in which there existed resistance from colleagues to an ‘outsider’ attempting to make an impact within the organisation, with Physician 3 stating that “the idea that somehow or another [the organisation] could lose control to an external influence, they disliked immensely”.

Coach 6 alluded to the quality of modesty, stating that the sport psychologist they worked with was “modest, because they wouldn't be singing and dancing type people...I think they'd be quite in the background but because of the work they do they'll understand the effect that they've had”. An effective sport psychologist, who truly understands the culture in which they operate, will therefore allow others to be able to recognise the importance of their

work, without the need to 'advertise' and 'shout about its benefits from the rooftops'. This was further emphasised by another coach:

Be prepared not to get the recognition...they'd have to be a person that's really quite happy for other people to take all the plaudits, just so they can fit in the background of the team, but then they need to be a person who's got enough character too, if they really have got a belief that something needs driving through, they're going to have to stick to their guns (Coach 6).

This coach recognised the need for the sport psychologist's to possess a degree of humility, but that this must be coupled with the integrity to be able to step in and have the courage to be more direct in initiating change where this is required. Also implicated, therefore, is the quality of authenticity in a sport psychologist initiating this change in congruence with their own beliefs about 'doing the right thing'. This was also alluded to by Physician 6, who stated that "[a sport psychologist] needs to be authentic and be who they are, and that's unique... to be able to tell the truth is very important as well, and that kind of goes in line with authenticity, sometimes it's not easy to tell somebody the truth and you need to be strong to do that".

The coaches and physicians commented on the ability of effective sport psychologists to understand organisational hierarchy and to appropriately position themselves within it to be able to do their job well. This is particularly important given the ambiguity that can exist around the sport psychologist role in elite sport environments:

Another quality that's really important [is] flexibility, really important for a sport psych, for anyone, but for a sport psych in this environment... the role is unclear of a sport psychologist so you have to be very flexible, and any kind of situation can be thrown at you in this environment, that you've not experienced before (Physician 6).

Coach 7 elaborated on this by stating that "different situations require different [personal qualities] at different times, with different contexts, with different people, depending where you sit in the hierarchy of staff, how long you've been in the organisation, how well you know the philosophy...your status". Coaches and physicians elaborated by describing how a

sport psychologist's personal qualities can contribute to their understanding of the elite sport environment in greater detail, with Coach 4 highlighting that sport psychologists require "[qualities] such as respect of the way that they fit into a wider picture". Another coach stated that a sport psychologist needs "to understand the sporting world and what it takes or what's going on in a sports person's mind... [and have] some idea of how you might approach things and give you some empathy with the environment" (Coach 5).

#### *3.4.1.2 The wider organisational role in high performance sport*

Coaches and physicians discussed sport psychologists they had witnessed taking on more organisational psychology-type work within their role. Coach 1 generalised by commenting that "our current sport psychologists [have moved] away from teaching discrete elements of things like focus, concentration... [they are] focussed now on the environment in terms of trying to get the environment right". Physician 4 discussed their experience of a sport psychologist who "took on a much bigger role than just being a psychologist" and they observed that this "is what quite a lot of sport psychologists end up doing isn't it, go into management". Physician 3 commented that "the sport psychologist was given a wider remit than just being sport psychologist...almost a human resources type of role there as well". They also discussed what such a role might entail:

[The sport psychologist] did make themselves readily available to all...they were doing other things in terms of away days...to try and help with the development of [the] whole sport science department...so the human resource side of things, making sure the whole department was ticking along, in a difficult circumstance I would say (Physician 3).

A sport psychologist may therefore be of significant value to an organisation when in a position to effectively address 'human resource' issues, thus encouraging the development of a functional and successful working environment. This appears to be of particular importance when that environment is a difficult and sometimes ruthless one to work within, as reported by the participants in this study. Physician 3 commented, "I think you've got to be fairly

rigorous...the [sport psychologist] I worked with was very rigorous in terms of knowing what they wanted to do and finding out where they could help and try and mould things". Despite this rigorous approach, Physician 3 also highlighted the difficulties the sport psychologist faced because of the environment:

The rug was pulled out from under their feet when the management decided to change their mind on whether they liked their presence there or not and that was things that are beyond football, that was personality clashes, but again it wasn't the sport psychologist's fault (Physician 3).

This quote highlights that despite the rigorous work the sport psychologist did to try and create a functional environment, the often volatile and 'political' nature of elite sport meant their impact was ultimately determined by the lack of support from the organisation. Physician 3 also highlighted that "both myself and the sport psychologist were of the opinion when we joined, that as long as they were said in private, that conflicting and contrary views would be respected, and I'm not sure that was the case eventually". This also suggests that the sport psychologist must possess a degree of resilience and commitment, to be able to maintain their effectiveness in a challenging environment and in a job where freedom to express one's views is limited.

The coaches and physicians also identified less effective sport psychologists as those who neglected to account for the environment when working with an athlete, or failed to address wider issues within a sport organisation. Coach 4 commented: "I've got no doubt [the sport psychologist] was helping the athlete, but they weren't as effective because they were focussing on just the athlete as opposed to focussing on the athlete but in the environment".

The importance of this wider focus was further emphasised:

It's the relationship between the coach, the athlete and the training, or the coach, the athlete and any event which needs working out...the idea that coaches and athletes work in isolation is just so naive...you're not just dealing with the athlete, you're dealing with the squad, the wider picture (Coach 4).

In addition, Coach 4 highlighted that sport psychologists "don't deal with wider structural

issue, well the good ones do, but...quite often we come across the people who don't get that kind of wider multi-support picture". These perspectives suggest that a sport psychologist's capacity to help an athlete or member of the staff team will be limited by an inability or unwillingness to consider the context, specifically the environmental and organisational constraints that will impact their performance, development and well-being. It appears that presence is a personal quality implicated in a sport psychologist's ability to address organisational issues; they must be 'readily available' to athletes and support staff alike whilst maintaining the subtle, withdrawn role previously described. Presence therefore refers not only to the physical presence of the sport psychologist, but also to the influence they are able to exert within a sport organisation.

#### *3.4.1.3 Working with support staff in high performance sport*

A key aspect of a sport psychologist's organisational role is their ability to manage people. This was considered particularly important to ensure the effectiveness of a support team; support which may even extend to the head coach or manager. For example, Physician 3 summarised this need, stating that "to be honest the person who needed the sport psychologist more than the players was the manager". Physician 6 also discussed how the sport psychologist "ended up working more with the manager", and further elaborated on why such work was required:

The manager's job is very lonely, and he gets isolated, so the biggest function I think [the sport psychologist] had, which is very valuable, is just to give him somebody to speak to and trust... it's quite a unique thing isn't it and you can't really be trained to do that I don't think.

Of particular interest is Physician 6's perception that the ability of a sport psychologist to operate in this manner cannot be taught, implying that there is 'something else' behind effective practice in this sense. Coach 2 also highlighted the benefits of a sport psychologist working with colleagues; "I think that sport psychology is very, very successful and probably the most successful way, is for the sport psych to work with the coaching team". Such quotes

emphasise the coaches and physicians' views regarding the good sport psychologist being one who can assess the needs of the whole team and ensure it operates effectively:

I think the psychologists often work with the whole team rather than just the athletes...making sure the team works as well...good psychologists, they don't just do the athlete stuff they look at the team as a whole, the team dynamics (Physician 2).

Another physician commented on why such work was so important:

That's crucial, trying to get the management team to work properly...there are often more issues in the management team than there are in their players...having a psychologist coming in and pointing out to other members of the management team that there are different ways to communicate and you have to sympathise with what drives some person may not drive [others]...that's a really useful role for a psychologist (Physician 4).

It appears that a particular benefit of having a sport psychologist working within a sports organisation is their work towards enhancing and optimising communication between members of that organisation. This is summarised well by Physician 2:

Looking after the whole team is really quite key, I say looking after, I don't mean looking after in a sort of health sense, I mean being involved in the whole team...the good psychologists became sort of tools of communication between different factions of teams

The coaches in particular recognised the importance of a sport psychologist fulfilling such a role with regards to their communication with athletes:

[Sport psychology] can also be used as an educational tool for a coach because I think a coach has to be a psychologist, or a form of a psychologist, all the time and actually it's something in terms of my development that I want to know more about, and I think most coaches do need to understand that 'cause it's a pivotal part of elite performance (Coach 7).

[The sport psychologist] flagged it up for us...I would never have been able to reflect on that myself and needed a nudge, just in terms of are you aware of how you speak to all the players, do you speak to them the same, and for me as an individual...that's going to stick with me (Coach 6).

When you're working with a team of coaches, I think it's very important to have a sport psychologist who can actually work with the team and help the process that the team have to go through, because the interaction between the coaches feeds through to the players (Coach 2).

Coach 7 is discussing what they can learn from the sport psychologist to then utilise sport psychology concepts within their own practice, whilst Coach 6 highlights their appreciation of a sport psychologist's ability to draw attention to aspects of coach communication they may otherwise have been unable to identify for themselves. Coach 2 extends this when discussing the importance of functional communication between the support team, and a sport psychologist's role in facilitating this, and stated that "if I had the budget I would have a sport psychologist working with the coaching team (...) because it allows the coaching team to get a wider perspective on how to deal with issues". In addition, Physician 5 described a sport psychologist they had worked with who "wasn't boring, they were fun, they did [sport psychology] in a way that was engaging...and they didn't just involve the athlete they involved all the staff as well so it actually meant something".

Coaches and physicians described the personal qualities of sport psychologists who were able to help the support team to function effectively. Subtlety was highlighted as an essential quality in this regard, enabling a sport psychologist to direct staff within the environment in a positive way and highlights aspects of their practice that may otherwise go unnoticed:

[The sport psychologist] will come out with something a little bit 'have you thought about this, have you thought about that'...they will challenge you in a positive way of how you deal with a stressful situation or your comments about an athlete or whatever so there are sometimes two aspects to a sport psych (Physician 1).

It also seems essential that sport psychologists must be trustworthy in order for other members of the support team to respect their views and insights:

[The sport psychologist must] build the trust with the individuals where they respect others' opinions but again when you're putting your opinion across, it has to be put across in a certain way that is not confrontational or where it's downgrading what other people are saying, it's more suggested have you thought about this because these might be the benefits, so it's more selling your idea rather than criticising other ideas (Coach 7).

The subtle and trustworthy qualities implicit within this theme also reflect the humility and overall presence of the practitioner. In this support team context, humility helps to ensure that any thoughts and advice offered by the sport psychologist is done in a helpful and collaborative way, and not one that suggests their knowledge is of greater importance than a colleague's or that forces it upon them. Presence is again implicated as an essential quality of the sport psychologist in 'commanding' the respect of the support team and working to effectively support them, and ultimately survive in the elite sport environment.

However, the coaches and physicians did discuss some individuals within certain sports offering resistance to 'outsiders', with one physician describing an example from football. They stated that "there's very much a prejudice...from the football people as in 'we're the football people, this is the football environment, we know all about it and you're just on the peripheral thinking you know something but you don't" (Physician 3). This physician went on to describe how the sport psychologist in question, despite being very open and trusting with these same individuals, was not afforded the same level of trust from the 'football people' who have "a very regimented, institutionalised way of looking at things".

### *3.4.2 Discussion*

The purpose of this study was to explore the role and personal qualities of sport psychologists who operate in an organisational psychology role within elite sport environments. The results supported and extended existing knowledge of elite sport environments and highlighted the importance of a sport psychologist's understanding of the culture that exists within them. Previous literature has begun to examine the organisational psychology type role that a sport psychologist may carry out (Nesti, 2010), yet the reality of what this involves and the personal qualities of the practitioner that can aid the effective 'doing' of this work remain unexplored in any great depth.

Coaches and physicians offered insights into the individual nature of different sport organisations, and emphasised the importance of a sport psychologist's ability to understand the politics that exist in a given environment and recognise what behaviour is and is not acceptable. Ken Ravizza, when interviewed about his applied practice (Fifer et al., 2008), recognised the importance of this:

I have to assess...the subculture of the sport, the politics of the organization, the team and staff dynamics, and the amount of support that I will have. The subculture of the sport and the politics overlap, I must learn who the decision makers are, who the leaders are, and who the 'gatekeepers' are (Fifer et al., 2008, p. 365).

Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) commented that "consultants attempting to implement organizational service delivery should remain cognizant of Ravizza's (1988) recommendation that they pay careful attention to the constantly unfolding 'organizational politics' within elite sport" (p. 432). Politics in this context, especially in elite and professional sport, should be understood as referring to the often more informal and less transparent mechanisms of power and influence in the organisation. These are difficult to recognise easily because very often they sit invisibly alongside formal structures and systems, and are sometimes based on personal loyalty and previous professional relationships (Lussier & Achua, 2009). This notion is supported by Dan Gould, one of the practitioners interviewed in Simons and Andersen's (1995) study, who remarked, "there's a lot of stuff out of your control. You can put a really good program together and really have effects, but many times the social and political environment of the NGB can really screw you up" (p. 456). The current study suggests that a quality of the effective sport psychologist is their ability to read the environment, attempt to acquire a good understand the politics and culture of that environment, and manage oneself by maintaining a balance of a subtle, at times humble, approach yet retain the courage to stick to what they believe is right. Coaches and physicians emphasised that sport psychologists should work to develop this understanding over time

through informal observations before deciding on the work that needs to take place, which will aid them in integrating with a team or organisation. In Simon and Andersens' (1995) study, Betty Wenz discusses how she gained acceptance with one national governing body (NGB) by "learning how to roll with the punches and be persistent, but low key" (p. 456). The coaches and physicians in the current study considered these personal qualities and 'practitioner positioning' as essential for a sport psychologist's prolonged involvement with a sport, particularly in the elite environment.

Nesti (2010) has also described how sport psychologist's interactions with athletes or colleagues are often carried out in an informal and low key manner, which may often result in 'good work' going unnoticed. This can be a challenge at times when operating in elite sport cultures where staff are normally expected to identify their achievements and for these to be subject to evaluation by others. However, the coaches and physicians in the current study saw this as a positive feature, and how being an effective sport psychologist in this regard was related to the possession of personal qualities such as humility. Dorfman (1990) suggested that "by using a self-effacing approach you enhance your image by not enhancing your image" (p.344), a statement supported by the value that the coaches and physicians placed upon the aforementioned qualities. The sport psychologist who is internally secure about the impact they have without requiring external recognition and reassurance for their work is better able to maintain the withdrawn, low key and 'one step removed' role described, while staying true to one's beliefs and being prepared to 'stick to their guns'. Nesti (2004) refers to the existential phenomenological term of authenticity to describe this type of behaviour. Operating authentically is about more than being consistent; it requires the sport psychologist to know themselves well enough to be able to remain true to their deepest core values and beliefs, and to live this out in their work.

Previous research has highlighted the organisational type roles that sport psychologists may be required to carry out (see Timson, 2006 & Nesti, 2010 for examples). Coaches and physicians also recognised that sport psychologists may be required to operate within such a modality, which they described as a ‘human resource-type role’ that focussed on ‘getting the environment right’, although some highlighted that this is not what they would have expected the focus of the sport psychologist’s work to be. Such sentiments are echoed by Cal Botterill, who was one of several highly experienced sport psychologists interviewed about his practice (Friesen & Orlick, 2010); “my job was to tackle the psychological effects in the environment by working with all of the people to produce a more conducive setting for excellence” (p. 231). Coaches and physicians also discussed many aspects of sport psychologists’ roles as being similar to those of national performance directors (NPDs). Fletcher and Arnold’s (2011) interviews with NPDs observed roles to include staff management, lines of communication, and organisational and team atmosphere. It is interesting therefore that these were all discussed in some capacity by the coaches and physicians in this study as aspects of the role of sport psychologist’s they had encountered.

Weinberg and McDermott (2002) interviewed sport and business leaders regarding the factors essential for organisational success, with a key finding being the ability to flexibly adopt a variety of leadership styles, requiring ‘interpersonal competencies’ of listening, empathy and trust. Such qualities have long been associated with effective sport psychologists (Nesti, 2004), so it is unsurprising that these practitioners are often called upon to adopt a leadership role, at the very least on an informal, ad-hoc basis. One physician discussed how a sport psychologist operating in an organisational psychology type role was forced to do so because of ‘difficult circumstances’ within the organisation, yet in trying to ‘mould’ the environment to help develop the whole support team, the organisation became un-nerved by their presence at this level. The coaches and physicians discussed the need for

sport psychologists to be present within the organisation, have empathy with the environment, and be rigorous in their work within an organisational role, whilst remaining on the periphery. Such qualities are similar to those described by Nesti (2004), who stated that “to survive and indeed thrive in such an arduous climate [as elite professional sport], sport psychologists will need to possess resilience, commitment and...presence, authenticity and empathy” (p. 91). Presence, as implicitly described by the coaches and physicians, seemed to refer to both the physical and emotional quality of the sport psychologist in supporting individuals within a sport organisation.

Coaches and physicians also described the effective sport psychologist as one who is able to integrate and help manage individuals within a multidisciplinary support team. Coaches and physicians commented that there were often more ‘issues’ with the management team than with athletes, which has been reported previously by Rodgers (2006) during her work as HQ psychologist within a Team GB Olympic holding camp. After one incident, Rodgers reflected on feeling “annoyed that again staff had got caught up in their own empire building issues which (I felt) took them away from the issues of the holding camp and the athletes” (p. 18). Coaches and physicians valued a sport psychologist who was able to enhance team cohesion and group processes (Nesti, 2010) to help ensure staff maintain the roles they are employed to carry out, and in helping them to develop communication skills and become more self-aware of their communication style when interacting with others. The coaches and physicians in the current study explained the value of having a sport psychologist who was courageous enough to challenge other members of staff, yet Nesti (2010) describes how staff often feel uncomfortable and become suspicious of sport psychologists with academic knowledge and ideas that challenge their own. However, coaches and physicians in the current study welcomed being challenged by a sport psychologist, particularly if it allowed them to reflect upon and thus improve their own

practice. The onus is therefore on the sport psychologist's ability to challenge other staff in a constructive way that avoids confrontation and devaluing others' input. The coaches and physicians stated that this could be achieved by the sport psychologist willingly translating their academic knowledge and theory into practice, and making it accessible to their recipients.

From a personal qualities perspective, coaches and physicians suggested that sport psychologists who did this well were those that were willing and able to use this knowledge subtly, and be modest enough to recognise that their impact is 'contributory', rather than 'revolutionary'. Having the humility to accept a 'cog in the wheel' status and acknowledging others' input as being of equal importance as their own was considered crucial for their successful integration and acceptance into the support team. This is especially important in an environment described by one coach as 'survival of the fittest', where the temptation of self-promotion for personal gain must be avoided (Nesti, 2010).

The lack of previous research exploring the sport psychologist in an organisational type role means they are unlikely to have received sufficient training in preparation for it (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2010), and have likely gained their organisational role-related knowledge through experiential 'on the job' encounters. The current research emphasises the likelihood that sport psychologists will operate within these roles, and therefore the individuals responsible for educating and training future practitioners should take this into account. In addition, previous research has highlighted specific aspects of an environment that require resolution, for example role conflict and organisational stressors (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009) and are seen to fall within the sport psychologist's remit. However, the reality, based upon the findings of the current research, is that the need for organisation psychology type work can stem from deeper underlying issues within an organisation such as the politics that exist and communication issues between staff. There is

therefore a clear need for education and training programs in sport psychology to provide students with (at the very least) an introduction to organisational psychology theory and explore it's synthesis to the elite sport environment. In addition, the findings suggest that sport psychologists in training should explore their own personal qualities and how these could impact upon their work within the applied environment, especially with regards to the organisational sport psychologist role and the challenging nature of the elite sport environment.

### **3.5 Conclusion and synthesis**

Studies 1a and 1b of the research aimed to explore personal qualities of sport psychologists deemed necessary for their effective practice and to consider how these qualities manifest, and contribute to effective practice, within the elite sport environment and from the perspective of coaches and sport physicians. Within study 1a, several personal qualities were discussed relative to relationship building, professionalism within the applied environment, and perceived similarities between the physicians and sport psychologists. Study 1b highlighted perceptions of the sport psychologist's understanding of elite sport environments and cultures, the reality of the wider sport (organisational) psychology role within the elite sport environment, and the sport psychologist's ability to work within support teams in these environments.

The findings both support and extend previous counselling and sport psychology literature, offering detail regarding how a sport psychologist's personal qualities can interact with their practice environment. Furthermore, the role of the sport psychologist, particularly in elite and professional sport environments is becoming increasingly diverse, typified by those who now find themselves working in an organisational or human resource-like capacity (Nesti, 2010). Study 1a highlights physicians' and coaches' discussions of a sport psychologist's personal qualities such as humility and a security of self that allowed them to

recognise the ultimately small part they play in an athlete's success. Study 1b elaborates upon why these qualities are essential for a sport psychologist operating within elite professional sport. For example, coaches and physicians suggested that possessing a degree of humility enables sport psychologists to integrate themselves within a support team and to offer advice in a collaborative and helpful way. Study 1a also highlighted authenticity as a key personal quality of effective sport psychologists and relates to the aforementioned security of self and the degree to which one is accepting and trusting of themselves and their decisions. Study 1b furthers this information and highlights the importance of authenticity in environments where a sport psychologist's work, and therefore core values and beliefs, are often challenged. Remaining authentic by 'sticking' to these beliefs and values is essential in making sure the 'right' work is carried out. Such qualities have drawn some attention in the sport psychology literature, and considerably more so within counselling psychology, and this study provides new information and insight regarding what these qualities mean in sport psychology practice. Interviewing colleagues of sport psychologists provided insight into how, for example, humility was displayed by the sport psychologists they worked with and how it aided them in their practice, rather than the colleagues' understanding of humility alone. 'Real-life' examples brought these qualities in practice to life in this respect, and offered initial information to act as a basis for Study 2.

What seems to be clear is that a sport psychologist's personal qualities will both impact upon and be impacted by the elite sport environment they operate within. This does not mean to say that certain personal qualities (those discussed in studies 1a and 1b for example) are prerequisites for effective sport psychology practice and that without them a sport psychologist will not be effective in their work. Rather, those certain personal qualities may contribute to effective sport psychology practice and a sport psychologist needs to be aware of the relationship between themselves and their environment. The coaches and

physicians who work alongside sport psychologists provided a richer perspective of what they think is important for the psychologists working in their ‘world’. However, every ‘world’ is different and what is yet to be determined is if sport psychologists are aware of their position in these evolving and challenging environments. One physician emphasised that the two sport psychologists that they had worked with in two different sports were very different people, who had very different approaches, and who worked in very different environments, so it is important to explore this further.

The implications are thus two-fold. Firstly, it would appear important to consider how personal qualities could be incorporated into the education and training programmes of future sport psychologists. Findings suggest that the sport psychology profession would be wise to explore what can be learned from the counselling and medical professions in terms of the training of practitioners and the personal qualities that can impact upon their success. There is also a need to consider how prepared these future practitioners are for work within elite professional sport. In particular, previous literature has suggested that organisational psychology is not currently incorporated into the education and training of sport psychologists (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2010), yet the findings show that this is often a key part of a sport psychologist’s practice. There certainly seems scope, therefore, to at the very least introduce sport psychology trainees to concepts of organisational psychology and explore how these could relate to elite professional sport environments. In doing so, education could be designed in such a way so as to better prepare sport psychologists for the potential realities of their future role.

Secondly, different sport psychologists will likely possess different and/or additional personal qualities to those discussed in studies 1a and 1b. If personal qualities are representative of the person as proposed, then a true account of these for each individual would not be determined by speaking to others. The coaches and physicians did describe

sport psychologists and experiences that alluded to certain qualities, which provided sufficient evidence of the importance of these qualities in practice even if they were not clarified and discussed in detail. This phase of the research was very much an introductory part of the thesis in terms of conceptualising personal qualities in practice, stimulated by the request for colleagues to consider the person as well as the practitioner rather than describe their skills or characteristics as per previous research into consultant effectiveness. Colleagues of sport psychologists have not been used as a participant group to any great extent, and physicians specifically appear to have been overlooked entirely. This study therefore offers some novel methodological contributions with regards to the theoretical focus and the insight into sport psychology practice that physicians can provide. The perspective gained from working with colleagues of sport psychologists is important in emphasising that practitioners do not work in isolation, and it allowed the researcher to take a 'step back' and explore personal qualities in a broader context. However, to obtain detailed insights into a specific individual and their personal qualities in context, it is important to explore first-hand accounts of sport psychologists'. This would allow for an in depth exploration of an individual sport psychologist's personal qualities, their awareness of self with regards to these qualities, and their own perceptions of how these interact with the particular sport environment they operate within.

## **Chapter 4: Study 2 - Sport psychologist reflections**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The findings from studies 1a and 1b go some way in addressing the previously limited attention afforded to the personal qualities of sport psychologists within the sport psychology literature. Coaches and sport physicians perceived the sport psychologists they had worked alongside to possess certain personal qualities that contributed to their effective practice within the elite sport environment. It was felt that these personal qualities and their interaction with the sport environment deserved even greater investigation, through exploration of the perceptions and experiences of sport psychologists themselves. Gathering these first-hand accounts aligns with the philosophical beliefs of the researcher as previously outlined, in that people must be given a voice to articulate their unique selves and experiences.

Three UK-based practising sport psychologists were engaged in the research for approximately 20 months. Throughout this time period, several research methods were utilised in order to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the sport psychologist both as a person and as a practitioner and, furthermore, detailed insight into the realities of working as a sport psychologist in elite professional sport. Qualitative research measures, namely a life history and practitioner reflective diaries with follow-up interviews, were employed. As previously discussed, this research was approached through a heuristic or naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Côté et al., 1993), characterised by the in-depth, idiographic study of individuals as unique entities (Martens, 1987). Morrow (2007) states that the qualitative researcher must treat their participants with utmost respect; the relationship that exists between researcher and participants is often intimate, and the latter typically share emotional and sensitive information. By working with only three sport psychologists over an extended period of time, the researcher was able to develop strong

working relationships with the participants, thus strengthening the credibility of the research (Morrow, 2005); ultimately the approach was inspired by Simons and Andersen's (1995) rationale behind their research:

Part of sport psychology is about observing and reflecting upon the richness of the sport experience. Following this flow, we thought it would be educational and enjoyable to get some "lived" history from sport psychology consultants who have experienced the maturing of the field. We wanted to let some of those who have been delivering services for the past 15 to 40 years tell us how they became involved, how they view past developments and the future of the field, what experiences had most influenced them, and what were some of the important lessons they have learned. We also hoped that in this process of recalling their experiences and offering their views, they would drop a few pearls of wisdom on us. We were not disappointed (p. 450)

## **4.2 Methods of data collection**

### *4.2.1 Life histories*

Tod (2007) states that "life histories of eminent [sport psychology] practitioners might provide insights into how childhood and adolescent experiences contribute to individuals' service-delivery practices" (p. 105). Tod also states that an exploration of sport psychologists' motives and needs, and how these impact upon their service delivery practices, could contribute to the existing knowledge base in applied sport psychology. Researching the participants' life histories contextualised their background and experiences en route to their careers and gave a comprehensive understanding of each individual. Specifically, life histories are "made up of the values, beliefs and aspirations one has lived by" (p. 11) and therefore allowed the research to address the gap in the sport psychology literature. This gap is represented by the lack of studies that have delved to a deeper level with regards to personal qualities and values of sport psychologists that govern their life both as people and practitioners, rather than superficially 'scratching the surface' by investigating generic skills and characteristics.

To the knowledge of the researcher, no literature exists that explores the life histories of practising sport psychologists, beyond that of the suggestion made by Tod (2007) that such research could be of great benefit to the profession and its future practitioners. Although limited, counselling psychology does offer some literature into the personal lives and backgrounds of counselling psychologists. For example, Dlugos and Friedlander (2001) conducted a qualitative study of ‘passionately committed’ psychotherapists’ experiences, whereby participants were “interviewed extensively about their personal experiences of work in the context of the rest of their lives” (p. 298). Radeke and Mahoney (2000) also conducted research comparing the personal lives of psychotherapists with those of research psychologists. Such studies, however, did not make use of the ‘traditional’ life history interview as a method of data collection and were focussed more so on gathering personal information relative to a specific topic. There have been a limited number of research studies that explore the life histories of athletes, in particular those with spinal cord injuries (see Smith & Sparkes, 2004; 2005). The methodology sections of both papers emphasise that when conducting life history interviews, the participant must be allowed to tell their own story and in their own words.

According to McAdams (2001), “life stories are based on biographical facts, but they go considerably beyond the facts as people selectively appropriate aspects of their experience and imaginatively construe both past and future to construct stories that make sense to them and to their audiences, that vivify and integrate life and make it more or less meaningful” (p. 101). The researcher adopted a narrative approach to creating life histories of the participants, whereby they sought to understand the individual sport psychologist’s unique perspective as influenced by context (including both social structure and time), rather than concentrating on questions of fact. This particular approach is also useful as although it is located in the present, it also includes memories of the past as well as future anticipations (Miller, 2000),

which was useful in gaining a substantial insight into the effect of participants' life experiences on their practice, throughout the duration of their careers. As with the overall idiographic approach, conducting a life history interview requires the researcher to establish rapport with the subject and allow them to feel comfortable in sharing personal meanings and memories (Atkinson, 1998).

#### *4.2.2 Reflective diaries*

The main focus of Study 2 was the sport psychologists' reflective diaries, and the subsequent interviews to explore these reflections in greater detail. These interviews also allowed the researcher to explore any potential synthesis between the reflections and the data gathered from the life histories. In light of the aims of the research, and specifically Study 2, the following information provides a theoretical background to reflective practice and the benefit for practitioners who engage in it.

##### *4.2.2.1 Value of reflective diaries*

The reflective diaries formed a significant part of the research, both in terms of quantity of data and in gaining a detailed insight into the practitioner's work. Gibbs (1988) believes that having an experience is not enough in itself to bring about learning. Rather, it is the feelings and thoughts that emerge from reflecting on this experience that generates new concepts and generalisations, and allows for the effective tackling of new situations. Schön's (1983) writings on the reflective practitioner provided a strong basis for the focus of the sport psychologists' reflections and the benefit of them engaging in such practice. Schön highlights that competent practitioners often know more than they can say, which is reflected in their tacit knowledge, or 'knowing in practice'. Of particular relevance to the current research is Schön's contention that practitioners will utilise this tacit knowledge "to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice" (p. 9) as "practitioners are frequently

embroiled in conflicts of values, goals, purposes and interests” (p. 17). Considering the nature of professional sport, this capacity to utilise tacit knowledge seems of utmost importance.

Schön goes on to describe how a practitioner’s reflections in and on their practice will be varied and personal, based on the phenomena they are confronted with and the individual knowledge they already possess. In particular, the practitioner “may reflect on the feeling for a situation which has led [them] to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which [they have] framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role [they have] constructed for [themselves] within a larger institutional context” (p. 62). As a practitioner working within professional sport, a sport psychologist will often be required to make decisions and reflect upon their role in the context of a high performance organisation. Each sport psychologist worked within markedly different contexts, driven by their individual philosophy and in response to the individual demands of the environment. The sport psychologists in this study were therefore asked not only to reflect upon their personal qualities and values, but also to consider these in relation to the work that they carried out.

#### *4.2.2.2 Reflective practice in sport psychology*

Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) suggest that “reflective practice is being increasingly recognized as an important process within the broader canvas of applied sport psychology” (p. 505), based on the training requirements of BASES and the BPS and the increasing number of published reflective accounts. For example, the BASES Supervised Experience (SE) Competency Profile (2009) states that SE candidates must complete reflective accounts that demonstrate competency in areas such as Technical Application of Knowledge and Skills, and Self Evaluation and Professional Development. In addition, under the latter competency, a candidate must possess the ability to self-reflect and more specifically “understand the value of reflection on practice and evidence engagement in the process” (p. 9). Likewise, the BPS requires its Stage 2 candidates to maintain a Practice Diary and

Reflective Log throughout the period of supervised practice, to provide evidence for the 3 key practice competencies:

- 1) Develop, implement and maintain personal and professional standards and ethical practice.
- 2) Apply psychological and related methods, concepts, models, theories, and knowledge derived from reproducible research findings.
- 3) Communicate psychological knowledge, principles, methods, needs and policy requirements.

Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) also highlight the number of reflective accounts beginning to permeate the sport psychology literature, to include several accounts from early career practitioners (see Cropley et al., 2007; Lindsay et al., 2007; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008 for examples). Such accounts provide excellent examples of the benefits of reflective practice for sport psychologists and their associated applied work. For example, Pete Lindsay as the first author (Lindsay et al., 2007), a BPS chartered and BASES accredited sport psychologist, reflected on his applied practice and provides an account of these reflections. Lindsay himself cited the process of reflection as central to developing his applied practice, and the subsequent discussion within the article suggests that it “underpinned the progression toward greater congruence between his personal philosophy and the methods used” (p. 348). Likewise, Brendan Cropley as the first author and a probationary sport psychologist, reflected on his practice and provides a subsequent account of how reflection helped develop his practice in relation to ‘consultant effectiveness characteristics’. Cropley et al. (2007) recognised that much of the content of previous literature reporting sport psychologist’s reflections has not focussed on accounts that explore their own characteristics as an effective practitioner. They state that “reflective practice provides the opportunity to become aware of the characteristics associated with effective

[sport psychology] consultants, identify current levels of competence within these characteristics, and uncover ways in which this level of competence can be improved, ultimately increasing the effectiveness of practice” (p. 477).

In relation to their hierarchical model of professional philosophy, Poczwardowski et al. (2004) suggest that sport psychology practitioners should explore and reflect upon their core beliefs and values to foster their self-knowledge and self-awareness. They also discuss the sport psychology consultant’s role as one that may involve extending their services beyond athletes, and that this can be driven by both the consultant themselves and external demands. The current study therefore proposed the use of reflective diaries to explore not only sport psychologists’ values, beliefs, and personal qualities, but also how these related to their role within the high level sport environments they worked in. Although provided with guidelines for how to keep a reflective diary and their suggested content, the practitioners were encouraged to structure their diaries as they wished and focus on the aspects of themselves and their practice that they deemed to be of most significance (Holly, 1997). Reflective diaries are a “personal and interpretive form of writing” (Holly, 1997, p.6), and entries can be factual, emotional, thoughtful or impressionistic depending on the mood of the author. The open-ended and personal nature of reflective diaries is a strength, and it was envisaged that the reflective process utilised in the current study would give the sport psychologists the opportunity to ‘absorb’ their experiences and learn from them (Holly, 1997). It was important that the reflective diaries were not just a method of data collection, but would be of benefit to the sport psychologists in terms of their own development and learning in line with the contention that “the act of writing may lead to further reflecting on, and constructing of, experiences: reliving in our mind can deepen awareness, broaden perspective, and increase understanding of experience” (Holly, 1997, p. 12).

## **4.3 Method**

### *4.3.1 Participants*

A sample of three (1 male, 2 female) UK based practising sport psychologists gave their informed consent to take part in the research. One sport psychologist was employed full-time in their sport psychology role within professional football and therefore operated alongside many other staff. However, the support structure was determined by both the club and the manager, and therefore liable to change at any time, and their job descriptions and performance objectives were vague. The remaining two sport psychologists divided their time between academic positions and sport psychology practice. One of these sport psychologists was employed within a national sporting organisation across a variety of sports, within a structured multidisciplinary team, and with clear performance goals. The other sport psychologist was employed within the national organisation for one particular sport, again within a structured multidisciplinary team and with clear performance goals, but without a clear understanding of their personal role. They also engaged in private one-to-one work with clients from a variety of sports. The three sport psychologists therefore represented a diverse range of practice backgrounds, and further details regarding their individual working status and environments will be provided in each individual practitioner's discussion. The participants were all BPS and/or BASES accredited.

### *4.3.2 Instruments*

Data collection for this study took several forms; a life history interview, a reflective diary, and an exploration of each diary in greater detail through a semi-structured interview. Information regarding the benefits and theoretical background of life histories and reflective practice has been provided, and therefore the following information will detail how these methods were implemented within the approach. It was important that the research approach

and associated methodologies were sufficiently comprehensive to gather the data required. To get to know the sport psychologists as people, an interview alone would not have been enough to a) generate sufficient quantity of data or b) address the idiographic focus of the research. When devising the approach to study 2, and with regards to trustworthiness, it was important to utilise a number of methods, also referred to as ‘triangulation’, to address any issues with subjectivity. Morrow (2005) states that, within qualitative research, the variety of the evidence is more important than the sample size. Multiple sources of data and/or multiple points of data collection with one individual help to achieve richness and depth, and ultimately what Morrow terms ‘adequacy of data’.

#### *4.3.2.1 Life history interview*

At the beginning of the study, the sport psychologists completed a life history interview in order to provide an overview of their experiences to date, prior to becoming a sport psychologist, and both within and outside of their practice. The interview was based on topics and questions proposed by Atkinson (1998) that “cover the entire life course...presented in chronological order...within a thematic framework” (p. 42). This structure will aid a researcher in identifying which area(s) they may wish to focus on in greater depth, relative to the research question and participant group. For example, for the current research the ‘retirement’ topic was not included, as all of the sport psychologists were in full-time employment and mid-career in terms of their sport psychology practice. However, topics such as ‘education’ and ‘inner life’ were highly relevant to the sport psychologists’ development and personal qualities, and were therefore afforded greater attention within the interview schedule.

The questions were not centred on personal qualities, nor were they designed specifically to elicit discussion of personal qualities by the sport psychologists. Rather, the aim was to provide information about the practitioners’ lives to help contextualise the

proposed developmental nature of personal qualities, before exploring these specifically through the reflective diaries and interviews. Furthermore, and in accordance with an idiographic approach, the life history interviews served as a useful way to get to know the practitioners. Care was therefore taken to create an interview schedule that would generate meaningful, personal data whilst ensuring the questions were appropriate given that the researcher did not know the sport psychologists well, if at all, prior to the research. In this regard, a semi-structured interview was created with questions that were designed to be as non-intrusive as possible, whilst still allowing the researcher to understand the participant as a person. The semi-structured nature also allowed the sport psychologist to provide as much or as little personal detail as they felt comfortable with, with probing questions utilised where appropriate (Atkinson, 1998). The topics covered in the interview schedule were therefore Birth/family origin, Culture/tradition, Social factors, Education, Relationships, Career, Inner values, and Life themes (see Appendix 5). This interview schedule was used for each of the three sport psychologists.

#### *4.3.2.2 Reflective diary*

The three sport psychologists were engaged in the research for approximately 20 months, and were asked to keep reflective diaries throughout this time. The purpose of these reflective diaries was to allow the sport psychologists to articulate their applied practice in relation to their personal qualities. The participants were provided with written instructions (see Appendix 6) which detailed the proposed content of the reflections and a framework for reflection, although ultimately the sport psychologists were allowed to structure their reflections as they chose. It was envisaged that by allowing the sport psychologists to reflect in a way that they felt comfortable, which was guided by the researcher but developed by the practitioner, they would be better able to freely reflect on their practice in detail whilst remaining sympathetic to the fact that sometimes their time to reflect may be limited. This

flexible approach was made easier by the follow-up interviews that explored the reflections in greater depth and therefore provided the researcher with the opportunity to gather detail from the practitioners as required.

#### *4.3.2.3 Interview*

Each sport psychologist was asked to send their reflective diary entries to the researcher, who reviewed their content to determine the areas that required additional information or clarification. These diaries were examined and analysed by the researcher, and subsequently explored in greater depth through a semi-structured interview with each practitioner, tailored to their individual reflections. The interviews therefore differed for each participant. The questions were open-ended to allow the participants to fully express their thoughts and opinions, and ensure the responses were truly representative of their variations and experiences in practice. Probing questions were utilised where necessary to further explore the subjects' stories, encouraging them to elaborate on information pertinent to the research question (Berg, 2009). Each interview began with the sport psychologist providing a summary of their current situation i.e. the focus of their work and general feelings regarding this work, and also any brief reflections on their work, for a period dictated by the amount of time since the researcher had last met with the participant. The remainder of the interview schedule was broken down into sections based on the analysis of the reflective diaries (detailed in section 4.3.4), with each question referring back to a particular section of the individual sport psychologist's reflections. This aided the participant in recalling specific situations, and also allowed them to relate these experiences to other reflections if they had not done so in their written diary. For confidentiality purposes, the full interview schedules for this study are not included in the Appendix, rather the reader is provided with examples of the questions that each participant was asked (see Appendix 7).

### *4.3.3 Procedure*

Following ethical approval, the three sport psychologists were approached through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) of the contacts of the authors, with inclusion criteria being that they had sufficient experience of working within elite and/or professional sport to be able to provide a depth of information about their work and work environment. Purposive sampling was required to strategically select information-rich participants who were able to provide an in-depth understanding of the focus of the study and had the necessary unique insight. Due to the time commitment required from the participants, it was also necessary to consider which potential participants could fully commit to the study in terms of selection criteria. The three participants were selected because they were known to the research team to be highly experienced sport psychologists and were therefore able and willing to offer detailed insights into their experiences. The three sport psychologists engaged in data collection in person at a location suitable to them, either at work or a public setting of their choice. Each sport psychologist was provided with the life history interview schedule, and a participant information sheet in advance of their first meeting with the researcher, which detailed the interview questions and all procedures, and informed them that the data would be kept confidential and of their right to withdraw.

During the first meeting with the researcher, the sport psychologists completed the life history interview, with interviews typically lasting between 60-90 minutes. The sport psychologists were then provided with the aforementioned information regarding the reflective diaries and thus this meeting represented the start of the 20 month engagement with the practitioners. The researcher also discussed this reflective diary phase of the research with each participant at the end of their life history interview to ensure that they understood and were happy with what was required. The written instructions requested that the participants keep bi-monthly reflections as a minimum, and advised that the follow-up interviews would

(ideally) take place every six months. However it was made clear that this timescale was to be dictated by the sport psychologist and that the researcher would be flexible in terms of the frequency with which they collected reflections and conducted follow-up interviews.

The sport psychologists were required to email electronic copies of their reflective diaries to the researcher once completed, although the frequency of this was determined by the sport psychologist and any practical constraints they may have been experiencing. As a result of this flexibility, the data collection did not follow the same timescale for each sport psychologist, or indeed the timescale that was proposed. SPA was able to provide monthly reflections for a period of time, followed by period of inactivity, and then started the reflections again at a later date. They also had limited availability for the follow-up interviews, and the researcher therefore opted to conduct a single follow-up interview based on all reflections, within which SPA had the option of providing any further reflective accounts from the months they had missed. SPB found that given their demanding personal life, they were unable to complete reflective diaries on a consistent basis. The decision was therefore made to conduct a reflection interview whereby SPB recounted their work over the 20 month period, and the researcher therefore used this information to generate the follow-up interview schedule. Finally, SPC was the most consistent in their reflections, providing these on a near-monthly basis, and they were interviewed twice; once midway through and once at the end of the 20 months.

Once in receipt of these reflections, the researcher developed individual semi-structured interview schedules for each sport psychologist and contacted each participant to arrange the interviews. Sport psychologists A and B were interviewed once, at the end of the 20 month period. Sport psychologist C was interviewed twice throughout the process; once after approximately 12 months and once at the end of the 20 month period. Again, this was dictated by the availability of the sport psychologists.

#### *4.3.4 Data analysis*

Each life history interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, reviewed for grammatical accuracy, and re-read for familiarity by the first author. Transcripts yielded 75 pages of 1.5 spaced interview data. It has been stated that the main task in transcribing a life history interview is “to tell the person’s story in the words he or she has already used” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 55). It was therefore considered appropriate to represent each sport psychologist’s life history in the form of a detailed summary that included a chronological presentation of their experiences, including a description of their current role and how this relates to their life experiences.

The reflective diaries were not analysed in line with ‘traditional’ content analysis procedures as it was not necessary to identify final themes for discussion at this point. Rather, key areas of each individual sport psychologist’s practice were identified to aid the researcher in structuring the questions for the follow up interview. Firstly, the researcher reviewed and familiarised themselves with each participant’s reflections that were to inform the interview. The researcher noted any key experiences or situations that the sport psychologist had reflected on, as well as any phrases they had used to describe how they felt in those situations or that represented a reflection of their person. It was important to acknowledge both the context as well as the individual’s interpretation of ‘who they were’ in those situations given the focus of the research. In particular, the way in which the participants described themselves in practice was very personal, both in terms of the language used and the meaning, and therefore this meaning did not always translate clearly to the researcher. The researcher therefore utilised the follow-up interviews to fully understand what the individual participant had experienced.

Throughout this analysis of the reflective diaries, the researcher highlighted any data that alluded to the sport psychologist’s personal qualities and subsequently generated

questions for the follow-up interview schedule. These questions were used to clarify and extend the information the practitioners provided in their reflections; the sport psychologists' reflections tended to focus on descriptions of their experiences in which personal qualities were implied but not identified, or on qualities that were identified but not explained or discussed in great detail. After 'tagging' the key quotes within each reflection, these quotes were rearranged into categories based on the aspects of sport psychology practice they were deemed to be describing. The purpose of these categories was not the same as with traditional qualitative research, as they were not intended to represent data for discussion, but to frame the interview schedule. For SPA these key areas of practice were: Organisational Issues, Skills and Environment, and Personal Qualities and Values. For SPB the key areas of practice were: Professional Relationships, Philosophy/Self in Practice, Finding a Balance, and Personal Development. Finally, for SPC the key practice areas were: Staff Issues, Skills and Expertise, and Personal Qualities and Values.

Each interview that explored the sport psychologists' reflective diaries in greater detail was recorded and transcribed verbatim, reviewed for grammatical accuracy, and re-read for familiarity by the first author. Transcripts yielded 124 pages of 1.5 spaced interview data. Data was then analysed through the use of content analysis, defined by Patton (2002) as "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (p. 453). The researcher followed a similar data analysis procedure to the tagging and categorising as utilised in Study 1, based on recommendations by Côté et al. (1993). Each of the sport psychologist's interviews were analysed individually so as to preserve the idiographic nature of the data, and the content was ultimately categorised according to the personal quality which it was deemed to represent. Interview data was 'tagged' according to the applied practice it was describing; those quotes that represented the sport psychologist's role were presented at the beginning of the case

study. The remaining data was tagged relative to the features of their day-to-day work, be that via an overall description of the environment or by providing specific situations and examples. For example, SPC described the features of their sport psychologist role as akin to that of an organisational psychologist, and this was articulated in part at the start of their case study. However, SPC also highlighted the challenging nature of the football environment that resulted in the need for this organisational role, whilst discussing a specific example of managing a colleague who deliberately tried to undermine them. These accounts were then categorised under the personal quality that was implied in dealing with the situations or environment overall. Although more than one personal quality may be implicated for a given situation or feature of the environment, contextual discussion of the data was able to recur without repetition specific to each quality due to the volume and detail of data generated. Some of the personal qualities, for example humility, were mentioned by two or all of the sport psychologists, but discussed in very different ways in relation to the environments they work within.

#### **4.4 Results**

Each sport psychologist's data is presented as a case study. This begins with an account of their individual background based upon their personal life history interview, followed by an account of their practice as a whole. This account incorporates extracts from multiple sources, namely the reflective diary, the follow up interviews, and aspects of the sport psychologists' life histories that relate to their practice. The sport psychologists all highlighted personal qualities within their respective life history interviews and expanded on these, as well as other qualities, throughout their reflections and the follow up interviews. This allowed the researcher to initially uncover the sport psychologists' personal qualities through their life histories, in relation to their personal background and 'who they are'. The reflective diaries and follow up interviews then allowed the sport psychologists' to elaborate

upon these personal qualities whilst considering the nature of their role and the elite sport environments within which they work. Combined, this data provides a rich and detailed insight into the sport psychologists as people and their experiences as an applied practitioner. To best facilitate this insight, the nature of each sport psychologist's applied role is presented initially, to provide a contextual background of the work they carry out. Each sport psychologist's personal qualities are then considered in the context of key incidents or features of their individual experiences as a person and practitioner and relative to the roles previously described. Although there are similarities between the three sport psychologists in terms of the personal qualities and experiences they discuss, each sport psychologist is represented separately so as to do justice to their individual qualities, the nature of their sport psychology practice and their interpretation of their experiences. The similarities are synthesised and considered in a general discussion at the end of the chapter.

#### *4.4.1 Sport psychologist A*

##### *4.4.1.1 Life history*

Sport psychologist A (SPA) became an accredited practitioner in 2000 and as of 2005 spends 80% of their time in applied practice. The other 20% is spent in an academic position at a university in the UK. SPA is employed by a national organisation within the UK and works with a variety of team and individual Olympic and Paralympic sports. SPA studied psychology at undergraduate degree level, which “was very cognitive and very neuroscience based, so not much social or therapeutic based”. They also studied for an MSc in sport psychology and then focussed on gaining their accreditation as a sport psychologist, rather than pursue a career in academia. They cite mainstream psychologists as individuals who have influenced their professional development and continue to do so, but also stated that “my Mum's a nurse so I think that has had an impact in terms of being in a caring profession”.

SPA had an interesting upbringing; due to their father's job they lived in several different European countries until the age of 16, at which point they moved away to boarding school. As a result, SPA can speak several languages and was exposed to many cultures which, they believe, taught them the values of openness and tolerance, and this is reinforced by their parents who are "quite liberal and tolerant and open so I think that has been passed down". Moving countries, and therefore schools (of which there were 8 in total), required SPA to adapt and fit in quickly, which they did and as a result was able to make friends quickly, especially through their love of and participation in sport. On reflection they believe this experience of different cultures and love of sport to have had a significant impact upon their choice of career. This adaptation was particularly important at boarding school where rooms were shared and personal space was limited; getting on with people was essential! Whilst at boarding school SPA along with their fellow students was expected to engage in community service, instilling a notion that's there was "something bigger out there that you should be aiming to do".

SPA describes some of the sport environments that they work in as 'challenging' and 'quite hard to be in', and that how functional those environments can impact upon whether they have a good or bad day. SPA manages this by being proactive and setting realistic goals regarding what they want to and can reasonably achieve. This has been a theme throughout SPA's life from the age of about 16; they have always managed their expectations well and perceive this to have aided them in their current role as a sport psychologist. They recognise that the most important aspect of their role as a sport psychologist is trying to change the coaches' perceptions, and the culture of a sport, but that the most enjoyable is witnessing a sense of calm in people after a session with them, or that the session has given them a better understanding of and ability to manage themselves. Interestingly, SPA states that they "wouldn't want to date a psychologist because I don't think we're necessarily that much fun to

spend the evening with having been with people all day” and that “it's sometimes difficult being a psychologist because we probably want to talk things through more than other people maybe want to, and understand it more”. Despite these challenges, SPA would still want to work in a sport psychologist role even if, as per their own example, they were to win the lottery!

SPA spoke of the values they hold in life, as well as those values and qualities that they hold important in significant others. They regard their close friends as being bright, intelligent, and fun-loving, and in them values loyalty, honesty, and kindness. However they also believe that an individual is responsible for their own emotions and happiness, so although they ‘want and need’ to be around other people, they do not rely on them for happiness. In terms of their own values, SPA stated the need to always try and be kind to people, to be tolerant and not anti-social, and that if you say you're going to do something then follow through and make sure you do. As a person, SPA describes themselves as content, confident, outgoing but sometimes too direct, and as having a good understanding of self.

#### *4.4.1.2 Role*

SPA’s role as a sport psychologist is a varied one, working within a variety of sports and with a large number of different people. SPA initially offered a brief discussion of their philosophy and beliefs about behaviour change. Within their life history, SPA stated:

Some of my influence comes more strongly from mainstream psychology rather than sport psychology, in terms of how I’ve developed [my] approach... [I] actually trained in cognitive-behavioural therapy, [but] rather than say you’re doing cognitive behavioural therapy by doing goal-setting, it's actually much more formalised.

SPA has come from a mainstream rather than sport psychology background, and therefore adopts approaches to behaviour change in line with this. SPA also highlighted that they

“use mindfulness and acceptance and commitment therapy as a way to help people, it's dictated more by the athlete in terms of case formulation, what they present with, so it would be suitable for some but not for others”. According to Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda and Lillis (2006), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) was developed from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), as the latter was considered inadequate in providing an account of human cognition. ACT seeks to predict and influence events, whilst maintaining an appreciation of the whole. SPA therefore has a fairly structured method of working in line with ACT, but adapts this to meet the needs of the individual athlete. SPA also emphasises the importance of getting to the root of an athlete's problem and working to resolve it in the long term:

You're working on getting to the heart of the problem and really resolving it rather than putting a sticking plaster on it which you might do in other circumstances...it's going to fix it for the moment and that's okay but it's not going to sort it long term...sometimes that's just what you have to do right then and there.

Although SPA recognises that on occasion they may be required to provide a quick and temporary solution to an athlete's problem, their intentions are always to address and 'sort' the issue for the long term. Corlett (1996a) describes sophist and Socratic approaches to sport psychology practice, stating that the easiest route to take as a practitioner is to take the sophist approach of applying short-term and superficial solutions which Corlett believe represent mental skills approaches or indeed CBT. However, SPA has demonstrated the evolution of CBT to ACT in their approach through these accounts of their personal philosophy of practice with the aim of addressing and resolving issues in the long term. They also described their approach as 'refreshing' in resolving difficult situations and helping others find solutions:

[My] approach is also about resolving sticky issues, difficult situations, things which haven't been resolved before, so that's why it's refreshing, the other refreshing idea about it is that you start the session by not knowing what the problem is and not having any answers about how you might try, you go in very

clean, so you're not thinking you need to resolve anything, so you know the solution will emerge but it might not necessarily come from you.

SPA's comments suggest that they view their role as that of a 'problem solver', but that they do so through working with others to resolve situations and find answers. SPA also appreciates that their education and training as a psychologist lends itself to addressing other aspects of psychology within an organisation:

If you're going in there as the person who knows about how the brain works and how to change behaviour then that can be at all levels, fundamentally it's about knowing people and how you can help them, if it's about behaviour change it doesn't really matter if it's the individual or the organisation, I think we get involved a lot with helping the leaders and again that's about the same thing, it's about understanding people and behaviour, so I think that's why you've got the skills to do it, if you think about psychology being the study of human behaviour then that is the starting point, I think that's where it comes from, but yeah we're much more involved in organisational issues, but that depends on whether you're immersed in a sport or not.

SPA recognises that their expertise in psychology provides them with an understanding of behaviour change that can be applied to organisations as well as individuals. This expertise provides them with the ability to operate within an organisational psychology type role as well as that of a traditional sport psychologist, the likelihood of this having been previously described by Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) and Nesti (2010). SPA stated that "any sport [can have issues], some sports have got more personalities to deal with, different management structures, all those things go on", and went on to describe the varied work they do:

I think that's a lot of the work people end up doing, working on the organisational level, trying to resolve systems...there's a role for the organisational stuff, you do multidisciplinary work, you try and influence the coaches to change training, you do the one to one stuff, you have to go away to competitions as well...basically you're looking at the system as a whole and see how people are doing.

SPA's is therefore required to be the individual who assesses and addresses the needs of the organisation and its members. In particular, SPA has been required to address relationships within the workplace, stating that "the head of sport science and medicine was trying to make the workplace different so I was helping them to do that, so the relationships between people

were better, it was a lot more functional place to work". They also elaborated on why this was required, highlighting that "the physiotherapists, the doctors, the osteopaths have different philosophies, I think at the time that was a project that I was asked to be involved in by the head of sport science to help and try to facilitate relationships". Here SPA is discussing the differing philosophies and approaches to practice of members of a multidisciplinary support team, and the need to develop and manage relationships between these people for the effective functioning of the organisation. Reid et al. (2004) state that "the existence of the MSST as a living system that impacts on service planning and delivery must be considered for successful functioning" (p. 205) and highlights that these multidisciplinary sport science teams will often experience conflict and that they must therefore be well-managed to ensure effectiveness. Reid et al. therefore emphasise the important role that a sport psychologist can play in managing the individual expertise and facilitating effective practice within the group.

SPA further discussed the importance of working within a functional organisation:

You want to work in a functionally well-run sport to enable you to do your job, so I think you have to assess whether the sport is in a place where you can have the biggest influence or not, if you can't you need to figure out how to create success because it's going to be different, you've got to influence the right people to make changes.

SPA describes the need for a sport to be 'functionally well-run' to allow them to perform effectively in their role, suggesting that sometimes a sport will be 'dysfunctional' and therefore require them to affect organisational change and ultimately bring the organisation success. However, SPA states that organisational can be difficult to affect if it is not wanted by senior individuals within the organisation and if the issue is 'bigger' than what they are able to address:

Some of the stuff you can't resolve, it's much bigger than you, it's an issue for the whole team, and you're not necessarily brought in to resolve it...people at the top, it's got to be something that they want resolved because they might think it's not something that can be resolved at that moment in time.

Throughout SPA's reflections, they returned to this discussion of the importance of organisational change but the difficulties associated with doing so, and these will be discussed in greater detail under their personal qualities. SPA highlighted working to change a sport's culture, as well as the coaches in particular, as important, stating that "the most important [thing] is trying to change the culture of the sports...but it's not the most enjoyable, that's the most important, and try and get coaches to change is the most important thing". Therefore, although SPA recognises the importance of affecting organisational and cultural change, this is not the most enjoyable aspect of their job. This is in part due to the resistance they can experience but understand the need to persevere, stating "you're trying to take people through organisational change...and sometimes you're bashing your head against a brick wall, but it's important to do because you know the value of when they get it right".

In relation to their organisational work and facilitation of effective working relationships, SPA also acts in a leadership role to 'develop and line manage' other psychologists within the organisation. They outlined their feelings towards this developing role in their diary:

The leadership part of my role is a great challenge and something I'm really growing into. I seem with most of the staff I technically lead to have really positive conversations and be able to challenge and support them well.

In the follow-up interview, SPA went on to explain what this involves in terms of their knowledge and understanding of people:

The leadership role is managing the other psychologists...in terms of knowing enough about the sports they're working in and knowing the coaches and performance directors of the sports, being involved with the recruitment process with the sports so therefore being in a good place to understand what the needs of the sports are, and how I can help the practitioner deliver it.

SPA provides another example here of working beyond their theoretical background in sport psychology and utilising their knowledge of the applied environment to educate and develop other practitioners. They also allude to their involvement with additional aspects of

recruitment and the benefits of possessing knowledge about the specific demands of individual sports.

Finally, SPA describes their sport psychology role in relation to the performance focussed aims of the organisation, in particular in relation to competition:

When it comes close to the Games time it's thinking about who the relevant people are, it becomes a bit simpler in terms of who's likely to medal and how do you support them because that's how the sport is going to get judged...you don't know who's going to emerge, what's going to happen and as you get closer it becomes apparent who you need to support.

Although SPA will work to offer psychological supports to all athletes, a performance focus becomes increasingly apparent as sports move closer to major competitions, and SPA recognises that part of their role as a sport psychologist is to deliver specialist support to those athletes who are realistic medal contenders at an international level. In relation to this performance focus, SPA described how an athlete's below-par performance is often attributed to psychological deficiencies and their work in combating these misconceptions:

Often people may not have done the right training, and then when they don't perform it's labelled that they're mentally weak and that they've choked under pressure, but actually under no pressure they wouldn't have done much better 'cause their training hasn't been right, so it's actually ensuring it doesn't become sort of emotionally [attributed], and there's proper debriefing about what can this person actually do under no pressure, and then what we can expect of them under pressure.

Part of SPA's role, therefore, is to provide detailed information regarding an individual athlete's ability to perform both with and without competitive pressure. By doing so, the organisation can ensure that the athlete's training is suitably tailored to their specific needs, and therefore correctly identify reasons for under-performance. SPA also highlighted that working in sport was 'a unique experience' and a particular challenge of working in sport:

You don't finish work and switch off I think, that's the difference, so that's why you need breaks occasionally, especially in this environment, it's quite a difficult environment to work in, it's to do with the sport, in some ways things have

settled down in some ways they haven't because lots of changes are occurring, I think that's just the reality of working in sport.

Here, SPA is referring to the sport psychologist role being one that is not typically 'nine to five' and that upon leaving the sport environment they remain mentally 'switched on' to work, and that this is exacerbated by the changes that frequently occur within sport and the accompanying uncertainty.

In summary, SPA describes their approach to sport psychology practice as one driven by their education and training in mainstream psychology and in particular cognitive behavioural therapy. SPA also acknowledges the importance of working to affect to organisational change and describes their related role as that similar to an organisational psychologist alongside the performance demands of their work. SPA is therefore required to help facilitate functional working relationships between colleagues as well as acting to manage other sport psychologists as per the multidisciplinary support structure within which they work.

#### *4.4.1.3 Personal qualities*

SPA highlighted several personal qualities in relation to their practice, although spoke less freely with regards to the nature of the environment that they work within. SPA's discussions tended to discuss their personal qualities in relation to more 'typical' aspects of a sport psychologist's role such as confidentiality, preparation for competitions, and working within a multidisciplinary team.

#### Authenticity

One of the key aspects SPA discussed in relation to their practice environment was the need to 'be yourself', and that people will pick up on it if you are not. They suggested that 'being yourself' was made easier when the environment allowed this, stating that "you want to find a working environment where you can be yourself, so when you find one you've got to

really try and stay there". For SPA, one of these environments was a training camp, where they described the benefit of 'being themselves' in their reflections:

It seems that allowing my competitive self to come out at work (table tennis, swimming, running and even poker) was a positive thing both for myself personally and for integration and immersion in the sport. There seemed to be very little stigma attached to being a psychologist, maybe because they saw my sheer enjoyment of doing these events.

For SPA, being their naturally competitive selves allowed them to integrate into the team without prejudice based on their work. However, they also gave an example of how certain environments make it difficult to operate authentically when this openness was further explored in the interview:

[My openness has] always been relatively engrained...if you're in an environment where there's no trust between people and being a very open person that's quite challenging...they'll worry why you're being so open when they're being so guarded, it comes down to trust again so if they're very guarded you probably need to be a bit less open is the reality.

Openness as a personal quality of SPA will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, but this particular extract from SPA demonstrates the difficulty of 'being yourself' because of the nature of the environment. SPA states that they are naturally an open person and that they therefore act in an open manner when at work. However, a lack of trust between people within this environment can lead them to worry why another individual is so open, and as the individual in question, SPA has had to 'alter' themselves accordingly. If authenticity equates to acting in accordance with your true self (Harter, 2002) then SPA may appear inauthentic when working within certain environments, yet it is exactly these environments that are responsible for this alteration, and the challenge for SPA is managing themselves in this context. SPA also discussed the importance of authenticity in demonstrating that they are trustworthy:

[I feel others trust me] most of the time, and if you don't I think you need to recognise that you've got to do something about it, and then you just go in there and be consistent in yourself, you don't change...you've got to be aware that in a

lot of sports there's won't be a great deal of trust between coaches, different coaches and practitioners, and you've just got to be aware of that.

Here, SPC reiterates the lack of trust between individuals within professional sport environments and that being authentic can help to develop this trust with others. Trust is widely acknowledged as essential for sport psychologists in developing relationships with athletes and colleagues (Anderson et al., 2004; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006) and here SPA demonstrates the prerequisite of 'being yourself' in order to earn this trust. It therefore appears that SPC must strike a balance between being authentic and practising in line with their personal qualities and recognising when these qualities, such as openness, may harm their practice.

### Openness

As previously stated, SPC highlighted openness as one of their personal qualities and discussed this with regards to their experiences within their sport organisation. Openness has been described as an innate aspect of personality, and Costa and McCrae (1992) consider open individuals to be those who will "entertain novel ideas and unconventional values" (p. 15) and, compared to closed individuals, will more keenly experience both positive and negative emotions. SPA, however, described openness as a quality that they had developed throughout their childhood and one that was significantly impacted by their working environment. In their life history, SPA stated that their "parents are quite liberal and tolerant and open so I think that has been passed down" and they therefore believe this to influence their approach to their work. SPA believes openness is important in making sure that everyone within a multidisciplinary support team has sufficient information, stating that "most stuff should equally be shared...the coach needs to know what's going on, so you need to work on that balance, and most athletes are very open to sharing I think, it's not an issue". Although it is difficult within a large team for everyone to be equally open to sharing

information, SPA has highlighted the importance of coaches in particular being sufficiently informed to best help their athletes. SPA elaborated on this with regards to confidentiality and codes of conduct:

Within [the organisation] we're always working towards [buy-in confidentiality], so we're not the holders of secrets because coaches feel threatened by that, so obviously we've all got to abide by the BPS code of conduct, but trying to get more openness and more sharing...most stuff should be shared.

Such openness relates to what one physician from the first phase of the research discussed in terms of the importance of communicating with colleagues to ensure that everyone is aware of an athlete's situation. SPA provided support for and elaborated on this, stating not only do coaches need to be well-informed, but that they may feel threatened if information is not shared with them. However, SPA must also remain aware that some environments may misinterpret such openness:

If you're in a happy, trusting environment then I think you're very happy to share opinions, if it's an environment where there's not much trust then people are going to misread or misinterpret them so you need to be more careful.

Here SPA is suggesting that in an environment where there is a lack of trust between individuals, being open and sharing opinions may be misinterpreted in some way, and that it is therefore important to maintain 'a sense of neutrality':

At times due to the nature of the environment and due to my naturally open nature it is hard to maintain a sense of neutrality. Is it possible to be as neutral as Switzerland and also not be the keepers of all the knowledge?

It could be proposed, therefore, that by openly offering opinions SPA is potentially aligning themselves in some way, be that with an individual, intervention or otherwise. SPA also alludes to the worries that other staff may have if they witness 'open' conversations that they are not part of and their personal experiences of this:

[Working between many individuals is] always an on-going issue because when you're immersed in a sport people notice who you're spending more time with, and depending if the sport's functional or not, if it's not a functional sport then

people worry about who they see you talking to, so you've always got to manage that and it never changes.

There's a lack of trust between coaches, one coach doesn't like me talking to another coach, there's a lack of trust between some of the physiotherapists and the doctor, so all those issues impact upon how you're viewed...if it's in a sport where there's trust and openness then it isn't an issue, but if you're involved in a sport where there's those issues going on then that can make it difficult.

The perceptions of SPA's colleagues within the sport appear to be dictated by the nature of that particular sport's environment in that if a sport is 'functional', individuals will be less likely to worry about who is spending time with who and what it is they are discussing. In their reflections, SPA emphasised that although the wider organisation they worked within was 'functional' in its approach, the individual sport was not 'at the same stage'. These quotes highlight the intricacies of professional relationships between sport science support team members, and SPA recognises that these can be difficult to manage if there are inherent conflicts within the sport environment. As Cecil and Anderson (2006) observed when reviewing the reflections of sport psychologists who had worked at the 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens, "Inter-personal relationship strain appears to be a big issue amongst team members and the sport psychologist needs to be prepared to deal with these organisational behaviour issues" (p. 46).

### Neutrality

As previously highlighted, SPA discussed the importance of remaining neutral by not giving opinions and therefore being 'too open', and discussed how this can aid them in their work whilst acknowledging that this was difficult to do. This was a particular challenge for SPA considering their role on a project designed to facilitate better working relationships between members of staff:

Sometimes the doctors, the physiotherapists, the osteopaths have different philosophies...I was asked to be involved with [a project] by the Head of Sport Science to try and facilitate better relationships...sometimes the sport psych is the person to do that, sometimes not, it depends on their experience, their

relationships with other key members of staff, whether they've got the skills to do it...when there's lots of people with lots of different views it's hard to be viewed as neutral, 'cause people will think you're taking other people's sides.

Here SPA is reiterating the tendency for a sport psychologist to become involved in a wider role as aforementioned, and elaborated with this example of working to facilitate relationships whilst remaining neutral. In this regard, SPA had also previously discussed issues with the competing philosophies of support team members in their reflections:

When there are apparent different philosophies between support staff it is hard to help facilitate change and remain neutral. There is no right or wrong simply different perspectives and my role is to facilitate others to have those difficult conversations.

However, in discussing this further in the interview, SPA also described how their involvement in this relationship facilitation role aroused suspicion from their colleagues with regards to evaluation:

[Staff] thought I was involved in evaluating them so you have to manage that...suddenly you were maybe seen less as part of the team but maybe more evaluating the team...you just have to go to work and be consistent, you explain that that's part of your role and you've been asked to do it.

In taking on this advisory role, SPA was judged by their colleagues to be evaluating their performance and therefore as operating outside of that support team; in reality they were working to make the team and therefore environment more functional for success.

SPA also discussed their neutrality in terms of their degree of immersion in a sport and the related problems and benefits this can generate. To be more precise, SPA highlighted the difficulty in being removed from a situation and therefore being unable to have as much influence as they would like to. At the same time they recognised the benefit of being removed from the situation and therefore being more objective, stating "if you're too immersed in it you can't resolve it either because you're too close to the problem, you need that distance". SPA discussed this juxtaposition in more detail:

[As a sport psychologist] people will see you less often so therefore it's a bit harder to make those informal relationships as opposed to other therapists, and people will have natural barriers about going to see a psychologist...but then sometimes that distance is useful, so actually being objective and having some distance is what you want.

Here SPA is describing a common feature of the sport psychologist's role as being less immersed in a particular sport; SPA themselves described how they are in a different location working with a variety of sports from day to day and therefore operating from a more neutral position in the physical sense. This, combined with natural barriers to their work, can therefore make it more difficult for a sport psychologist to establish relationships with others within the sport, something that has long been described as essential for a sport psychologist's effectiveness (Petitpas, Giges & Danish, 1999). SPA elaborated:

There's always stigma, depending on how you come into the sport, whether people come to you...if people choose to come and see you privately or on their own basis that's a very different situation than when you're in a sport, immersed...so that's something to be aware of.

Based on this quote, it could be suggested that individuals will be more likely to approach a sport psychologist if they are somewhat removed from a sport because it is then of their own accord, rather than being confronted with the practitioner on a daily basis.

Maintaining this neutral, withdrawn approach can however be problematic, as it does not allow SPA to influence the environment as they wish on occasions. SPA gave an example:

It felt like [the sport was] going to go off track, it was quite hard to get involved in it...from a distance you could see that happening but there wasn't much you could do, you have to step back and make suggestions, people will either do them or they won't ...that's the reality of the sports in that you may not have a direct control over what's going on.

SPA recognises that by remaining neutral and metaphorically 'distant', they may be prevented from intervening when a sport 'starts to go off track'. SPA could see that this was the case and attempted to offer suggestions, yet recognised that ultimately it was down to individual

staff whether or not to take these suggestions on board. SPA offered a more detailed example of this:

[If] a group want to change how they behave then I can help them do that, it's their choice but their loss if they don't, I think that's the way to view it in terms of if they see value in it then we can help them...part of it is like meeting our customers' needs and if they don't see it as a need, you can show them that it's a need but they might not see it...you have to decide which battles to fight, and whether that's going to be a worthwhile battle or not.

SPA recognises that they may be limited in their ability to affect behaviour change if individuals or groups do not perceive that change to be necessary. SPA understands that it is their choice, and remaining neutral in this way suggests that SPA also possess a degree of humility in the knowledge that they cannot be the solution to every problem within the sport.

### Humility

The final quality that SPA is perceived as possessing is humility, based upon their comments regarding their valuing of others' expertise, and therefore knowing that they will not always have the (only) right answer. SPA stated:

[I've] a fundamental belief that there is no right or wrong way to do things...I can't judge that that's the right way to train somebody or not, there'll be lots of different ways so yeah it probably comes from that philosophy that there are lots of different ways to skin a cat.

Although talking about training athletes in particular, SPA highlights their underlying philosophy of there not being a right or wrong way to do things, which in practice translates to respecting each member of staffs' ideas and approaches. In this sense, coaches and physicians from the first phase of the research also highlighted humility as an important quality of an effective sport psychologist in integrating into a multidisciplinary team. This appreciation goes deeper for SPA, who stated in their life history that they value their colleagues as having a positive impact on their own ability to do their job, and described them as "a team going on a journey together". SPA's humility is illustrated by their acknowledgement and appreciation of their colleagues who enable them to perform

effectively within their role. Reid et al. (2004) have debated the relative merits of multidiscipline teams in offering sport science support, highlighting that members of such teams will have high levels of confidence in their own opinions and expertise which can make collaboration difficult. It would appear that in SPA's experience they have had the fortune of being part of a functional and supportive team.

SPA's humility is also represented by their appreciation of what they can learn from others and therefore not being the person with all the answers. In particular, SPA believes that sport psychologists can learn a lot from coaches, stating "I think the coaches get a bit forgotten in the story often and actually they've got a lot of knowledge and a lot of advice they could give people". SPA explained this opinion in more detail:

My one overall impression is probably to try and learn more from coaches, so rather than coming in as the expert all the time, actually asking for their help, asking for their advice, so I think that's probably something that I and actually other psychologists don't do that much, as opposed to just being the person who comes in and solves the problems or resolves stuff.

SPA recognises that they are not *the* expert even though they have a wealth of expertise within sport psychology, and suggests that although this expertise should be utilised to resolve issues, they are also aware of the advice and help that coaches can offer. Some of the coaches in phase 1 of the research discussed one of their personal barriers to utilising sport psychologists being unwillingness to consider the coach's role in the psychological development of the athlete. One coach elaborated and spoke of their annoyance with sport psychologists who act the expert and as though psychology is not something that coaches are capable of understanding or utilising themselves. However, SPA's humility is reflected in their recognition that coaches are an important part of their being effective in their own work, and also acknowledged that "there are a lot of basic mental skills, goal setting, imagery, that a coach can use as well".

#### *4.4.1.4 SPA summary*

SPA's reflections provided an interesting insight into their applied work and the reality of working within a national organisation and large multidisciplinary support team. The nature of this work meant that SPA was not as comfortable sharing information as freely as SPB and SPC. This does not mean to say that they value confidentiality any more or less than SPB and SPC, but rather that their discussions suggested that they were much more 'protective' of their position and integration within the multidisciplinary support team. Although SPA offered less information than SPB and SPC, it was in no way less detailed or insightful. Working as part of a larger and structured sport organisation meant they performed in a more traditional sport psychologist role as part of an established multidisciplinary team. To this end, SPA was able to work relatively freely in accordance with their philosophy and approach to practice, and reflected on more 'typical' aspects of a sport psychologist's role such as confidentiality, preparation for competitions, and working within a multidisciplinary team.

SPA's approach is very much driven by their education in psychology, utilising acceptance and commitment therapy to address behaviour change whilst taking into account the athlete as a whole. Although they are required to operate in a role akin to that of an organisational psychologist at times, for example in facilitating relationships between members of staff, this is driven by their core beliefs about behaviour change and that these can be applied to athletes, colleagues and/or the general organisational structure. SPA was required to work to facilitate relationships between staff in order to bring together the staffs' competing philosophies and create a more functional environment. The sport psychologist can play a central role in addressing communication barriers within multidisciplinary teams (Reid et al., 2004), and the efforts described by SPA are an example of why this is so important.

SPA also described their role as highly performance-focussed, highlighting the need to focus on stronger athletes as competition draws closer, and providing quick fixes if the situation necessitates. This aligns with what Corlett (1996a) described as a sophist approach to sport psychology practice, and SPA elaborates by providing insight into why it is required in the high performance environment that they operate within. SPA is also of the belief that they can only do as much as the organisation and its members will let them, in that they can work with people to provide suggestions but it is up to them to choose to work towards solutions. SPA did offer some insight into the culture of the sports in which they were working, in terms of their thoughts regarding organisational change, but did not offer detail with regards to their personal qualities in this sense. Their discussions suggested that regardless of organisational issues, they could focus on the 'basics' of doing their job well and judging their own success. When this was queried by the researcher in the interview, SPA discussed that sometimes these issues can be resolved, and sometimes they cannot, and that this was dependent on the sport. However, because these sports were operating under the wider, and more functional, national organisation it appeared that SPA was better informed and therefore able to judge what they were required to do.

SPA also discusses their view that there is no right or wrong answer, and these beliefs are indicative of SPA's approach to their work and their personal qualities, for example humility. Dorfman (1990) highlights the importance of creating independence in an athlete, and SPA's discussions, around allowing others to make their own decisions with regards to behaviour change, resonates with this. In addition, SPA also highlighted the importance of maintaining a sense of neutrality within their practice, in particular in balancing their openness, and desire to share opinions and suggestions, with the need to be withdrawn and gain an overall perspective on the organisation and the work that was required. SPA specifically highlighted that their openness and 'facilitation' role was sometimes met with

suspicion, particularly as other colleagues were concerned that SPA was involved in evaluating their performance. Reid et al. (2004) discuss the difficulties that sport psychologists may face as both members of a group and the facilitator of relationships within it, because other staff may question their impartiality. SPA acknowledges this, and described their personal qualities of authenticity and 'being themselves' as aiding them in addressing this situation through honest, open discussions.

SPA as a participant offered less information than SPB and SPC, but it was in no way less insightful. SPA offered some discussion around their personal qualities, but due to their strong affiliation with one national organisation felt unable to provide as much detail as the other participants. This was an interesting stance in itself and illustrates the sensitive issues that sport psychologists are required to address on a daily basis, and SPA's willingness and/or ability to share these. Working as part of a larger and structured sport organisation meant they performed in a more traditional sport psychologist role as part of an established multidisciplinary team.

#### *4.4.2 Sport psychologist B*

##### *4.4.2.1 Life history*

Sport psychologist B (SPB) became an accredited practitioner in 2005 and practised sport psychology full-time until 2008. Since 2008 they have been employed in an academic position in a UK university and between 2008 and 2010 divided their time equally between sport psychology practice and academia. Since 2010, they have spent 30% of their time in applied practice whilst starting a family. SPB is employed by a national organisation within the UK to work within one particular Olympic and Paralympic sport, as well as working with private clients from a range of sports. They studied for an undergraduate degree to become a P.E. teacher initially and then went on to take an MSc in sport psychology which, coupled

with their experience of competing as an athlete at national level when younger, provided the interest in and basis for their career.

SPB described their philosophy of sport psychology practice as humanistic. They believe that everyone has a lot to offer and that you should never be too quick to judge people; always give them the benefit of the doubt. They also state a key belief of theirs to be that “everybody, if they’re given the right circumstances and opportunities and upbringing...and if they want to, can do whatever they want... that would be one of my key core values”. In addition, they describe themselves as ‘not elitist’, which has been the case throughout their career, and quickly realised during their MSc placement that athletes are ‘normal people’. SPB has worked with many athletes from a variety of background, but recognises that all have issues and problems that they need to address, regardless of wealth, status, or upbringing, for example. This non-elitist view and approach to practice is summarised by SPB; “it doesn't really matter what you do it’s about core values and the person you are”.

SPB comes from a large family, which they describe as being very close and supportive of one another, and which has led to them inheriting strong family values. They also describe themselves and their siblings as all being ambitious and successful, and as affable people with good work ethics. SPB states that they didn’t make friends easily when they were younger, but that this was because they were more interested in their sport and very independent, particularly from the age of twelve. They also highlighted that they found school boring and unchallenging, so they always took the opportunity to do extra work, describing themselves as having ‘a high capacity for learning and doing’. When they were younger, SPB always wanted to be a professional athlete but was prevented from fulfilling this wish by injury. Nevertheless they believe that they would have eventually ended up in a career in sport psychology even if they had competed as an athlete first, because “even when

I was competing I was always very good mentally” and they perceive themselves to be very observant and good at reading people. SPB also states that they do not need to work full-time for financial reasons, but needs to work for their own interest, however with a young family to support this is difficult.

SPB’s current family situation means that their focus is divided between supporting their family and their work, with little time left for socialising. Although this has never bothered them in the past, now that they have a family it is something that SPB would like to focus on, and take a bit more time out to relax and readdress their work-life balance. However they also discuss that their applied sport psychology practice has become ‘static’ yet simultaneously feeling as though they need a career break. These practical challenges arising from a busy career and supporting a young family have seen SPB evolve their practice to become more ‘solution-focussed’ and efficient. This is a theme that will be addressed in more detail at a later point. Ultimately SPB sees themselves as a strong person and very sure of themselves and as someone who works hard and does not shirk their responsibilities.

#### *4.4.2.2 Role*

SPB discussed many aspects of their applied work in terms of both their private practice and, in particular within the national sporting organisation previously highlighted. SPB described themselves as humanistic in their philosophy of sport psychology practice, and enjoy their role supporting athletes on a one-to-one basis.

I’m quite humanistic in my perspective or philosophy in that I think everybody’s got so much to offer and you shouldn’t ever make decisions about people...I think people are too quick to read into what other people are saying and not give them the benefit of the doubt...in practice as well ‘cause I very much think that the client is the expert on themselves and they’re doing things for a reason, I don’t care if I want to tweak it or they ask questions but essentially, especially as I work at the elite end, they’ve got to be doing something right.

I’m doing the job for the athlete but I’m also doing it for myself, but it’s not an ego thing, it’s a process thing, when I actually sit down with an athlete I love

doing one-to-one sessions and I love the challenge of it, not so they can walk out going wow that was fantastic but because I've really taken the time to listen to what they're saying and I think of a way to help them.

Here SPB is describing their humanistic 'core beliefs' and how they relate to their practice. In particular, SPB highlights their enjoyment of the process of working and fully engaging with an athlete in a one to one session to help them, and that they are not driven to do this work because they need recognition or self-affirmation of their expertise. This resonates with Dorfman (1990) who stated that sport psychologists "must have limited ego needs and be self-effacing rather than self-serving" and that the practitioner "should be interested in developing a sense of responsibility, confidence, and independence in the athlete" (p. 344). Within their reflections, SPB also describes their approach in terms of the environments they work within and the relative demands of each:

I probably would have arrived at [a solution focussed approach] anyway because I think I need to have a bit more impact in the world class setting, in my private work perhaps not as much, I think the [world class] environment demands me to be a bit more solution-focussed...I'm a bit more efficient but that's the whole vibe of the development scheme; we've got money we need to push on, we push on so fast with the athletes whereas with the athlete I saw last night there's no reason to push on, they dictate the pace, and so that lends itself to humanism.

Here SPB is highlighting the differences between their private and organisation-based practice and their need to adapt their approach to meet the demands of each. The organisation requires SPB to demonstrate impact in their work due to financial and developmental demands, which in turn has required them to develop a more 'solution-focussed' approach. Conversely within their private work, SPB is able to work at a pace dictated by the athlete without any wider organisational demands, and this enables them to practice within the humanistic philosophy they are driven by. SPB reflected on the contention between their humanistic philosophy of practice and the demands of the organisation:

I need to trust my instinct a little bit more in that environment, it's push and pull, the push is they want impact and tangible evidence and the pull is my philosophy as a practitioner and the way I know I operate best and can best

serve, my philosophy is about the quality of the relationship and that's it, because if the quality of the relationship isn't there there's a limitation, [but] I am more solution-focussed now so I will bear in mind what's been said by the coaches and administrators.

SPB recognises the importance of developing a solution focussed approach in response to the requirements of the organisation to provide a quicker and more tangible outcome. SPB suggests that this outcome-focussed nature of the organisation is at odds with their own best (humanistic) practice and threatens their efforts to establish a quality relationship with their clients as per their philosophical beliefs. In more recent years, 'performance versus caring' approaches to sport psychology practice have been debated amongst researchers and practitioners (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Brady & Maynard, 2010). It is important to note at this point that the difficulties SPB experiences in balancing their 'caring' approach with the 'performance' demands of the environment resonate with those described by Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) who associate the 'caring' approach with humanistic philosophy. Gilbourne and Richardson accept that a performance agenda may be what leads an organisation (a football club in their article) to utilise a sport psychologist's services, however they believe that it is the psychologist's capacity to care that will drive successful practice. This notion is reflected in SPB's desire to practice in accordance with their (humanistic) philosophical beliefs coupled with their awareness of the organisation's 'performance agenda', and their account highlights their acknowledgement that this 'tension' is, in their experience, inevitable. Nesti (2004; 2010) describes such tension from an existential perspective, and highlights the need to make difficult choices despite being unsure of their outcome. SPB, therefore, is required to make difficult choices in addressing the client's needs whilst remaining cogent of the environment, and simultaneously endeavouring to practice in congruence with their personal philosophy. Such tensions also provide a strong basis for SPB's account of authenticity, to be discussed later in the chapter. However within

their reflection interview, SPB did recognise that their approach can benefit from the performance-focussed demands of the organisation:

Environmental factors impact upon my philosophy with the <organisation>, in sometimes quite a positive way, we're trying to push these people along, that's the whole point of it and if I'm dilly dallying, the Europeans are coming up, the Olympics are coming up, you have to push on.

SPB describes 'pushing' athletes to improve, particularly before major competitions, but that their humanistic approach is not necessarily the most time-efficient. This push to improve therefore encourages SPB to adapt their approach and work in line with the organisation's requirements.

In line with this humanistic approach, SPB also describes the scope of their role, including providing support to athletes outside of their usual working hours:

I had someone this weekend call me saying they didn't want to [compete anymore]...I spoke to them for a good hour and a half and I didn't need that, I was knackered...but that's part and parcel of the job, and that's hard to take...I could have said sorry I can't help you I haven't got time...but it would have been the wrong thing to do, you've got to give yourself as a sport psychologist.

SPB recognises that although they were tired and could have opted not to talk to the athlete on this occasion, their desire to do the right thing by giving their time to the athlete prevailed. It has been well documented that sport psychologists will often be required to work in an ad-hoc fashion, providing psychological support outside of a traditional office space and working hours (Nesti, 2004; Katz & Hemmings, 2009). SPB's experience of providing such support is one that they perceive as not only part of the job, but as representative of their willingness to 'give yourself' as they perceive is necessary for their role.

Within their reflections, SPB also discusses their philosophy of and approach to practice in terms of the wider organisational psychology-type role that is often required within the sport organisation:

[The other sport psych] takes what they're saying and maps it onto this model, which is an expert model...and comes up with a solution that the model tells them, so it's like a type of logarithm type thing, whereas I'm a lot more instinctive, but that gives them a bit more authority, they can actually say this is what's happening to you, whereas I'll say what is happening to you and they'll tell me all about it and we'll jumble through and we come up with something eventually...my approach doesn't lend itself to sorting out conflict I've found, whereas theirs does because they're like 'I'm the authority here'.

It should first be highlighted that SPB does not mean to say that either approach is more effective, or that by being 'the authority' the other sport psychologist working within the organisation give orders as opposed to advice. However, the point that SPB appears to be making is that by working to facilitate rather than direct the athletes in exploring and addressing any issues, they portray a less authoritative image. In doing so, they subsequently may lack the authority to address wider conflict within the organisation, and perceives the more structured and decisive approach of the other sport psychologist to be better suited to this.

SPB went on to describe such a role in greater detail, often in relation to their own philosophy in terms of others' taking responsibility for working through their own issues:

People will approach me if they think they can get something out of it, but I hope that 'something out of it' is to help them organise their thoughts and help them to sort whatever it is that they need to sort out, rather than sort something out for them.

If they have that expectation that I can sort it for them, they're going to be disappointed, if they have the expectation that I will listen to them, I won't judge, I might have helpful suggestions as an outsider and they're only suggestions and then I will pass it over to them to affect it, they're adults, and then maybe it'll be quite successful.

SPB had previously described their belief that an individual should take responsibility for their own development, without the sport psychologist acting as the 'authority' in the relationship. This philosophy also encompasses their work when approached by athletes or colleagues and asked to 'sort' organisational issues, and believes their role to be to provide

suggestions and operate as a 'helpful outsider'. SPB reflected on the importance of remaining on the 'outside':

You've got to be on the periphery because you've got to have a balanced view...you've got to really take a step back...have a look at the bigger picture and think okay what are the issues here, what's the solution, and just be constantly aware of what people are saying to you.

Not only does practising in the way described encourage others' to take responsibility for finding their own solutions, but allows SPB to maintain a withdrawn role and a balanced perspective on emerging organisational issues and their potential solutions. However, this perspective must be adopted by those they are helping and utilised to resolve conflict themselves, rather than SPB resolving it on their behalf. Previous literature has highlighted the importance of a sport psychologist remaining 'in the background' (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010) and being helpful without becoming a central figure (Balague, 1999) with regards to their work with athletes, and the current study extends these discussions to demonstrate the importance of this whilst also addressing wider organisational issues.

SPB also believes it difficult for a sport psychologist to address organisational issues, and that doing so can be "to the detriment of the relationship with the person because the expectation of that person when they approach you is that you can do so much more than you can actually do". SPB is therefore aware that being unable to help to resolve an organisational problem may result in the breakdown of the relationship between them and the individual who has asked them for help. SPB states that these organisational issues are "the culmination of lots of different issues that have gathered and then when they reach the breaking point [colleagues] approach you". However, even if this is the role of the sport psychologist, SPB does not feel they have adequate resources to deal with these organisational issues, stating "I've not been given enough time or finances or anything to actually do that role properly, you need to spend quality time sorting things like that out". SPB elaborates further:

My coping and my resources are at a max when I'm doing that [organisation] job because of all the other stuff...for me to then deal with some argument or me say this isn't good enough, this is what I need...I didn't feel I had the resources to do it so I just let it go...I've got forty-seven [athletes], twenty staff and I do two days a month, four days, eight days depending...and that's a crap way to work but it is the reality.

Highlighted here are the additional resources required for a sport psychologist to operate within an organisational psychology role, which SPB did not feel they were given. This is made more difficult by the number of people they are required to support within the organisation and therefore being unable to address every issue that arises. In summarising their approach to dealing with organisational issues, SPB emphasises the energy required and the lack of objectivity from those involved, within their reflections:

I've actually realised myself that I'm not as effective in terms of manipulating a situation and in fact I don't particularly want to, because that person comes to you with such a personal agenda, and often it's not a very balanced view, and it actually takes a lot of time and energy and effort and emotional energy to get to the bottom of it...the reason why they've approached you is 'cause they're really pissed off about something and they feel it's really unfair and once they start having those emotions, it's quite likely that they're not going to have a very strong perspective on it.

Rather than expend energy trying to address organisational issues, SPB states that their "priority is actually the athlete and the one-to-one sessions so I'm going to get my head down and do that rather than being everything to everybody". This appears to be especially important given SPB's following comment: "I'm not sure of my role at the [organisation] at all and that's why I've created my own role of just delivering one to one sport psych...I've no role clarity". Role ambiguity has loosely been defined as a lack of information relating to one's role (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964, as cited in Beauchamp, Bray, Eys & Carron, 2002, p. 229), but there is little research that focuses on this within sports teams and that which does, tends to focus on role ambiguity in coaches or athletes. Eys and Carron (2001) describe four manifestations of role ambiguity within sports teams; 1) the scope of one's responsibilities, 2) the behaviours associated with one's role, 3) how one's role

performance is evaluated, and 4) the consequences of failing to fulfil one's role responsibilities. Although these are discussed in relation to athletes, it is clear that SPB has described each of these manifestations to some degree within their experiences as a sport psychologist. It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that sport psychologists are often required to ensure that staff have up-to-date and accurate job descriptions (Nesti, 2010) despite the potential for uncertainty surrounding their own role.

SPB highlights that it is worth trying to address some of the organisational problems that occur within their current role because of their enjoyment of and love for the sport. However, while the one-to-one sport psychology support role that SPB describes is one that they most enjoy, it is not one that they would continue to do in another organisation should funds for their current sport be withdrawn:

The job is for me, I really love working with elite athletes and I really love working within my sport because that's where my heart is...if sport psych was dropped after London [Olympics] I don't think I'd go and look for another job...I love the one to one sessions but I can't be bothered with the shit, but it's worth it for my sport, I want to be in that environment.

In summary, SPB describes their role as that of a traditional sport psychologist in that they often deliver one-to-one psychological support both within the organisation and in their private practice. This is a role that they enjoy and that allows them to operate in congruence with their humanistic philosophy, but is also one they have 'driven' themselves due to a lack of role clarity from the organisation. At times, the demands of the organisation require SPB to work within an organisational psychology type role. Although they understand why this may be part of a sport psychologist's role, they personally do not feel as though they should or can do this to the extent required, because of their personal philosophy and the resources available to them. When reflecting on their philosophy of practice and their neutrality, they recognise that this is probably why they have survived for so long in the organisation:

with it, they do things for their own reasons, and sometimes if they ask my advice I might try and give it from an outsiders point of view based on what they're saying, but essentially I try not to get in there too much.

With regards to such a role, SPB's life history and reflections are presented in greater detail in relation to their personal qualities and their applied work as a sport psychology practitioner.

#### *4.4.2.3 Personal qualities*

SPB highlighted several personal qualities in relation to their practice, and they were very open in discussing their thoughts and experiences relating to all aspects of their practice. SPB offered some particularly interesting discussions of these personal qualities in relation to their philosophy of practice and the difficulties of balancing their professional and personal lives.

#### Resilience

A main focus of SPB's reflections was how they balanced their personal and professional lives and their discussions suggested that a high level of resilience is required to continue managing these. By their own admission, SPB stated that they had "not quite nailed how to run the family, and the house, and the other half, and this [academic] job, and the applied work, and socialise...it's the responsibility that tires me out". They also highlighted, in relation to their practice and the organisational demands of their role, the need to consider their own welfare for the sake of their own good practice:

You can't be everything to everybody, you've got to protect yourself, I think I've become better at protecting myself as a person because I've learned the hard way that I've needed to, if I can't function as a person, I can't function as a practitioner

SPB highlighted the above during their reflections, and have learned over time that they need to look after themselves before they are able to provide quality psychological support. Cecil

and Anderson (2006), when commenting on the reflections of a number of sport psychologists who provided support at the 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens, noted the need for practitioners to create some 'personal time-out' to cope with the demands of the role. Rodgers (2006) in particular described these strategies as essential for 'survival' and in helping them to clear their mind and problem solve. However, these sport psychologists were describing their 'personal survival strategies' specific to their experiences at a single competition; SPB highlighted the importance of these in maintaining resilience within their life and practice as a whole. This also resonates with the concept that the sport psychologist will bring their person to their practice (Orlick & Partington, 1987; Tod & Andersen, 2005), and highlights that this person must be functioning optimally to best support their athletes.

SPB also described in greater detail how their personal and professional lives interact and how their resilience contributes to maintaining both. One difficulty SPB describes is related to their 'boss' lack of appreciation for sport psychology as a discipline which in turn affects SPB's potential for impact:

The new boss...they basically have no time for sport psychology, they don't understand it, they don't believe in it...they're a real suck it up, get on with it type, which has merit in itself...so I've reasoned...I can't really affect what they do at the top level, and no matter how hard I try, I don't think I'll come out with getting what I want...the decisions they've made, they've not been unreasonable, they've just been to do with budget and also the fact that sport psych isn't prioritised.

Although SPB understands why some decisions have been made in relation to sport psychology provision (the detail of these decisions to follow), they have reasoned that their position does not allow them to challenge these decisions and bring about the outcomes they want. This 'position' has been further weakened by their personal situation, stating:

[The opposition to children] filtered down as well, like this person that I consider to be my closest ally, not that I do that but we work really well together and have that mutual respect, when I told them I was pregnant they said well you can't bring the baby to squad sessions.

At the time as well I felt I didn't have a leg to stand on because I was either pregnant or had a baby or two tiny babies and that doesn't lend itself to getting in there and sorting stuff out emotionally or practically.

SPB has previously described the difficulty of balancing the demands of their professional role and their personal life, and reiterates this here. SPB's description of this situation suggests they felt that their personal situation had affected their professional status, and that therefore their opinions and efforts would not be appreciated. Despite the resistance to their work and the opposition to their personal circumstances, SPB highlighted in their reflections that they have persevered to stay in their role and make sure they do good one-to-one work:

Even if I might be a little bit pissed off about something, the minute I sit down with an athlete it completely disappears...I'm just very accepting of it and I think maybe I've been too accepting like I've said, but I also said I don't feel I've got the resources to challenge it, so I've had to be accepting of it...I've just got my head down and made sure the quality of the one-to-one sessions where I've got the control is good.

Although SPB feels they have been somewhat forced to accept that they do not have the professional status to challenge some organisational decisions, they know that they are able to perform effectively in their sport psychology role nonetheless. They went on to describe being more resilient than in the past in their follow-up interview, especially when confronted with an opposition to sport psychology that has resulted in this provision being the first to suffer if funding were to be cut:

I got an email off the boss, this is typical, basically saying you and [sport psychologist] better not meet up anymore, we don't want to spend any money on you because if we don't perform in London...the funding will be cut, one of the first things to go will be sport psych so therefore that meeting you've got arranged next week, that costs us for you to meet, is not going ahead... [you feel] a little bit vulnerable when you get a message like that and quite rightly... [but] I'm quite happy that they think I do a good job [otherwise] they wouldn't have employed me for ten years.

SPB is confident in the work that they do and knows that despite the challenges and opposition to their support, their continued employment speaks for itself. Resilience can be understood as the occurrence of "good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or

development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228) and although a fairly broad definition, it can be applied to SPB. The developmental aspect of this definition refers to an individual’s personal progression, but could be understood in terms of SPB’s professional development within the sport organisation. This progression has been ‘threatened’ by their personal situation and their position within the support team, yet SPB has persevered to create ‘good outcomes’ for themselves and their clients. SPB also describes how they have developed an understanding that threats to their practice in the form of professional opposition is not necessarily personal:

[When the meeting was cancelled the other sport psychologist] was taking it really personally, what have we done, and I said probably nothing it’s just [the boss] is in an arsey mood...the invoice has come in, they’ve seen that I’ve done three days of meetings, even though they were probably their idea it didn’t occur to them I’d charge for it...I’m not doing it for free, and they’ve gone bloody hell, right, executive decision, no more meetings, send an email...I used to be very worried [it was personal], now I’m not so worried.

Such resilience in knowing within themselves that they are producing good quality outcomes in their work, despite others’ attitudes to sport psychology, is a quality that SPB has developed over the years. They recognise the importance of sharing their knowledge of this quality with the trainee sport psychologists they supervise, stating that “as a sport psych they need to be gutsy and they need to have coping skills and they need to make decisions”. SPB also acknowledges that although balancing their personal and professional lives is difficult, this has allowed them to become more robust:

I’m more robust because I’ve got more eggs in my basket, and before, my work was the be all and end all and I was fairly obsessed with it to be honest...but that drive, that’s given me all the experience and knowledge that I’ve got now, so without that I probably wouldn’t be as good a practitioner.

SPB acknowledges that they now have a ‘healthier’ perspective with regards to not being solely focussed on their work, but whilst recognising that their prior ‘obsession’ and drive to do sport psychology has improved their effectiveness as a practitioner. This resilience has also increased their belief that no matter the challenges within their personal life, SPB will be able

to provide quality sport psychology support to athletes, as illustrated in the following extract from their reflections:

It was really chaotic and really stressful...I had to sit there with a client and I could hear the baby screaming...but actually it was probably one of the best sessions I've done...and that for me indicates that no matter what goes on beforehand, I know when I sit down and start it's going to be okay.

When this situation was explored in the follow-up interview, SPB also commented "I'm experienced and I know I'm a good practitioner, and there are plenty of reasons to think that" and that "even if everything's going wrong, I know when I sit down talking to a client or I'm doing a consultation it's fine because I know I can do a good job, I know it". SPB does, however, acknowledge that this assuredness has been tested by the organisational environment and the demands of their role. For example, SPB discusses how their 'confidence' has suffered by knowing they were not as emotionally available to their clients as they should be:

I've always been really confident as a person, even as a child...not in a super-confident way I just always felt good about myself...I know I can deal with this I just have to use my resources, I've never put myself up above other people...but my confidence has been battered a little bit with this idea that I wasn't available emotionally because I was so battered from the environmental stuff, and to do with fatigue more than confidence.

It could be argued that SPB's resilience and belief in their ability to overcome challenges is why they are still present in their role today despite the fact that their confidence has suffered as a result of the organisational demands. SPB also highlighted that their "confidence in the [organisation]...it's not as strong because I know that ultimately the person who runs it doesn't give a shit about sport psychology, so I'm not confident I'm always going to have a job". It is clear to see here that no matter the qualities a sport psychologist may bring into their work, certain aspects of the sport or their environment cannot be changed, which will subsequently impact upon the practitioner. Ultimately, however, SPB is assured in the knowledge that they are effective in their practice:

[I was asked] how can you be effective as a sport psychologist when you're on your tenth person of the day and my answer to that was...I promise you if you came and watched me for an entire day, you would be satisfied with the quality of the tenth session...I've been doing it for seven years like that.

### Humility

Humility was a quality that SPB alluded to as important for their humanistic approach to sport psychology practice and their associated beliefs about how they, as a practitioner, can help people. For example, when reflecting SPB stated:

I'm very humanistic and I truly believe that even if the person doesn't know it, they're an expert on themselves and I always have that ultimate respect for someone...I am an expert in what I do or I know a lot about it but I'm not an expert in other people, what they're thinking and what they know about themselves.

Although SPB acknowledges that they know a lot about their field of sport psychology, they are aware that this does not translate to being an expert on other people. SPB describes this belief and their 'ultimate respect' for others in relation to their humanistic approach, which also resonates with their non-elitist view as described in their life history case study. In relation to humility, Friesen and Orlick (2010) state that "consultants must be knowledgeable of how to guide the athlete in learning from their own experiences. This does not however, impede the consultant from drawing on their own expertise" (p. 241), which encapsulates SPB's approach to practice. The physicians and coaches from study 1 also highlighted their appreciation of humble sport psychologists who do not act as the 'expert' and who work 'behind the scenes' without the need for praise. SPB also **reflected on** their desire to do good work by attempting to address organisational issues and offer quality support to individuals, but not in order to impress them:

[People] just pass things on sometimes to the sport psych because they don't want to deal with it, and I think in my situation I used to try and deal with stuff that I wasn't really that equipped to deal with...I wanted to, not impress, not that at all, but I wanted to do a good job, and I wanted to try for them and try and sort it out, there hasn't been any ego involved, that's not me at all.

SPB has previously discussed their indecision as to whether addressing organisational issues is the sport psychologist's responsibility, but that if they did work in this capacity it would involve them working to provide suggestions to allow the individual to find their own solution. Their drive to work in this way is not through need of recognition or praise but to know within themselves that they were doing a good job.

When asked about their philosophy of practice during the follow-up interview, SPB also described how the organisation they work within may (unrealistically) perceive them as being able to make life-changing interventions, however in reality this is not the case:

There is an expectation sometimes that you're there to change an athlete's life...it's unrealistic and it comes from the top and then you're accused of not having impact or being that effective but...you can't and you shouldn't try and change someone's life.

In relation to the personal quality of humility, SPB recognises that a sport psychologist (or indeed any other individual), does not possess any 'special' ability to 'change an athlete's life', and that they should not try to. They describe the difficulty, however, in needing to demonstrate effectiveness within the organisation and the sense that to do so would require delivering such life-changing interventions. They elaborate on this within their reflections with regards to their philosophy of practice:

I'll always go for the underdog, and I think sometimes that doesn't help in terms of impact because I'm trying to work under the impact radar a little bit and try and build someone's confidence if I can and keep encouraging them.

I do a good job that I'm happy with, not particularly to impress other people...an example would be making sure the new person on the squad is feeling okay and trying to get them to integrate a bit, and not many people actually notice that...I think it's important...but with the change in leadership [in the organisation] because they didn't believe in sport psych I needed to prove myself a bit more.

What SPB is describing here is their tendency to work with those athletes who may not be considered a priority by other members of the support team, but that this subsequently may appear as though they are having less impact. Nonetheless, SPB reiterates that they do not

work to impress others; rather they describe themselves as actively working ‘under the radar’ and to do good work that they are personally happy with. SPB’s humility, driven by their humanistic philosophy of practice is perhaps best encapsulated by Gilbourne and Richardson’s (2006) views regarding a caring approach to practice. They stated:

Those in possession of caring skills often ‘live’ for others through their work. That may sound rather grand and I do not intend to pedestal these practitioners (they would not thank me for it), neither do I wish to imply that they lack personal ambition. They would (like most people) appreciate promotion and due praise and so on. What I do sense though, overwhelmingly, is that when they are at work only other people matter. They are essentially other rather than self-focused (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006, p. 334).

### Integrity

SPB highlighted the importance of integrity and how this is impacted by their work within the organisation. SPB offered their personal understanding of integrity and explained their feelings when this is challenged:

Integrity is about saying you're going to do something and then doing it, and I've always been ‘if you say you're going to do it, bloody well do it’...when I've said I'll do something and I don't, I feel really shit about it, I feel awful, ‘cause I think its lacking in character.

Although a basic definition of integrity, SPB offers an insight into the importance of ‘sticking to their word’ and how they feel when they are unable to do so, stating that an individual who does not do something they said they would suggests they lack in character. This resonates with Jones (2007) who highlighted the importance of developing practitioners of good character, and in particular the quality of integrity, as well as courage, humility and good judgement.

SPB offered detailed insight into their practice with regards to the experiences that challenged their integrity. For example, within their reflections SPB discussed their experience of working with two coaches who did not get on and the impact of their resulting competitiveness:

The two [coaches] that I'm talking about...they really, really hate each other, wouldn't even say hello to each other, but they're both at the top of their field and both have a lot to give in terms of their coaching, so they will take any opportunity to point score...it's all a bit tiresome, there's groups of people and I'm just friends with everybody and I think that is the sport psychologist's role, not to take sides but it's very easy to slip into that, I've never been like that but it's quite easy to slip into that [and] align yourself with someone.

Here, SPB is discussing the tendency for members of organisations to take sides when staff are in conflict as described. The coaches in question are both highly qualified and respected in their profession, and SPB appears to suggest that the competition between them leads them to 'point score' and strengthen their position further by getting other staff 'on side'. SPB, however, makes a conscious effort to remain impartial and to avoid aligning themselves with either coach, which they see as part of a sport psychologist's role. This approach resonates with Nesti's (2010) definition of integrity as "the capacity to stay true to one's values despite pressures and temptations to abandon these" (p. 150). SPB goes on to describe the coaches as 'manipulative and strong voiced', and their own efforts to remain an appropriate level of professional distance:

I am on good terms with [the coaches] ...but I will not be a satellite to them...I think you pander to them and you become over-friendly with them and they get you to do all the dirty work...you can see people in the squad who are like satellites to them and they're genuine enough, but they certainly have their own agenda, there's no doubt about that, and they do cause trouble...so perhaps I'm not as popular...my popularity doesn't go up and down, it tends to stay level if you know what I mean, so I just try and be fair and I will not take part in games.

SPB has described the tendency for coaches to use their position to manipulate others into forming close working alliances and doing jobs that they themselves may not want to do. In addition, these 'satellites' will also have their own agenda in forming these alliances, which in itself can cause conflict. SPB, however, avoids taking part in such organisational 'games' by remaining fair and maintaining equal relationships with all members of staff. SPB therefore maintains their professional integrity through remaining neutral in many senses; they do not form any special working relationships or align themselves with certain colleagues, rather

they work to make fair judgements and maintain an impartial demeanour. SPB elaborated on the importance of not aligning oneself and the benefit of remaining neutral:

If you do align yourself with someone, you start to lose a perspective and you start to favour someone and that distorts your thinking...the other side of it is then you don't truly become integrated but I actually think that that's a good thing.

SPB had previously spoken of their role and their desire to work 'under the radar' and that they are able to do so by not becoming fully integrated into others' experiences and therefore maintain a neutral perspective on the 'goings on' within the organisation. SPB also views this neutrality and therefore their integrity as important from an ethical perspective when being asked to address organisational issues:

It does test the ethical boundaries because sometimes I think you know what, I could try and speak to someone...occasionally I pursue it but I am always mindful that it is just their perspective and that's it, that's quite difficult really, because if I start and go and ask the person that they're accusing of whatever it is, then firstly the confidentiality aspect is gone, but also I'm starting to get myself mixed up in something and then ethically I'm not available to the other people and I'm getting myself dug in deep.

What SPB appears to be describing here is that should they offer to help with issues based upon professional relationships between athletes or support staff, they would be risking their being viewed as 'available' to everyone. SPB is aware that everyone will have different perspectives on a potential issue and that this is difficult to address without breaking confidentiality or becoming overly involved in the problem itself.

SPB's integrity in doing what is best for the athlete can also be challenged by the performance demands of the organisation, as highlighted briefly earlier when discussing SPB's role. They highlighted a referral case as an example:

I referred [an athlete], they didn't want to talk about it, they wanted to sort it post-2012 'cause they had a chance to get on the team, they didn't get anywhere near it in the end, probably mostly because of this, I said it needs tackling...theoretically in good practice you should go and do it in your own time but you're on a performance pathway, there are a lot of things at stake, you need to tackle it now, and I'm not sure that's ethically that sound but we went ahead

with it anyway, the upshot is that it did help quite a bit but I don't think they were quite ready and they did tell me that but I had no choice but to try and make an impact...they were going to lose a hell of a lot of funding and I know it's not about money but actually that's really important to them because it's a really expensive sport, not only funding but all the really amazing support...if I didn't try and do something they would be kicked off and I told them that...so in a way it didn't sit easy with me but I pursued it.

Here SPB was discussing an athlete who required help that they themselves were not qualified to provide and therefore needed a referral, but that the athlete was not ready to receive this additional support. However, because of the demands of the environment SPB was required to demonstrate a degree of impact by addressing these issues sooner rather than later. SPB elaborated on the situation and their feelings towards it:

I was really unhappy with the way that I'd dealt with an athlete because I'd be cracking on with all these performance issues and they were trying to tell me something...they broke down in tears and just sat and cried for an hour, and I was really pissed off with myself because they were offering me little bits and trying to talk about it but because I'd been asked to talk about certain things to do with performance issues...I was determined to try and solve it but it wasn't relevant because what they told me was massive, in fact I referred them to a clinical psychologist, the team doctor did because it was out of my realm, and I missed it and I was annoyed.

Although SPB's actions were for the good of the athlete in ensuring they did not lose valuable funding and support, this approach did not 'sit' well with SPB and thus challenged their integrity. This situation requires us to revisit the debate around the difficulties in balancing one's philosophy and the athlete's welfare with the demands of the organisation, which will be considered in greater detail within the general discussion.

After reflecting on the difficulty of coaches with conflicting views, SPB was asked about their professional relationships and the associated organisational challenges in the follow-up interview. SPB discussed their perceived agreeableness in relation to integrity, initially in terms of how these qualities interact and impact upon their ability and willingness to address organisational issues fairly, without taking sides:

When the sport psychologist [is] asked to sort out conflict and stuff like that...when someone tells me a story I might think oh my god they've shat on you but then I always reason that I haven't heard the other person's side of the story...when people come to me and want me to be on their side...I'll say it's happened, what do you think is your next move, and that's quite an agreeable way to work...[in the past] I would have a go but now I just say no, they're wanting me to do their dirty work.

Here, SPB describes being agreeable in terms of fairness in that if a colleague comes to them with an issue with another member of staff they do not automatically side with that individual, rather they work with them to explore the issue. In the past, SPB states that they would have helped this person and resolved the issue on their behalf. If integrity can be understood by SPB's own definition of sticking to their beliefs and/or words, SPB is maintaining their integrity through working in an agreeable manner and doing what is right. SPB's view of this quality in this context is that they are fair and agreeable in a wider and more objective sense.

However, SPB also describes occasions when their agreeable nature has prevented them from challenging something that they perceived to be unfair:

There are lots of things in my life that are quite difficult to be agreeable about so what I'm doing is working harder on it, so that feels like I'm less agreeable but I'm not, I'm actually more agreeable...the politics [of the organisation] I'm agreeable with it and then I just get on and do the session...and then afterwards, even if someone's done something that's not very fair I've just let it lie.

Although agreeable by nature, SPB describes themselves as having to work on this agreeableness because of the challenges they have described in balancing their personal and professional lives. Even if someone does something that they perceive to be unfair, SPB is inclined to be agreeable by not challenging that person and instead they focus on their sport psychology practice. They cite this as due to the politics of the organisation, which they have previously described as not having the emotional energy to deal with, but that they feel they could have been more authoritative in addressing. This could be perceived as lacking integrity, as Killinger (2007) argues that to possess integrity "we must be willing to resist the

temptation to focus selectively only on information or aspects that fit our own experience, self-serving needs, or narrowly held views” (p. 12). Based upon such a definition, it SPB could be deemed to be focussing on select information because they lack the emotional energy to focus on and address anything else. It is important to note that integrity is still a quality of SPB, and it’s importance in relation to professional sport environments has been demonstrated through examples of where this quality has both benefitted SPB and been threatened by the environment.

### Authenticity

SPB also described how a sport psychologist must be approachable, and that this is something that must be genuine, or authentic. Initially, SPB discussed the importance of remaining approachable whilst maintaining their own good practice and welfare but describe this as particularly difficult in balancing these qualities with the demands of the organisation. For example, SPB reflected on these qualities in relation to their previous discussions around remaining neutral:

You've got to be fit to practice, if I go along and I just literally try and sort out all the shit that's going on I will never be able to do my job, it's physically and mentally and emotionally impossible to do it, so again it's protecting my performance, I always say to [the athletes], protect your performance, create a shield around you, and in a way I've taken that on myself and I do put a protective shield around myself, and that means I am at distance from people but hopefully it's not too big a distance. That's the difficulty, how distant are you, and how neutral are you without people thinking actually they're hopeless, they've got no impact, still being approachable.

Here SPB is describing how they protect their own performance by avoiding taking on wider organisational responsibilities and therefore leaving themselves with the required physical, mental and emotional energy for their more traditional sport psychology role. Through doing so, SPB describes how they create a ‘protective shield’ around themselves and therefore metaphorically distance themselves from others. SPB had previously described the benefit of

maintaining a degree of professional distance and neutrality in their work, however they also recognise the difficulties this can pose in remaining approachable and available to others.

Being approachable was a quality that SPB considered could not be falsely created, stating in their interview that “you've obviously got to be approachable in the first place and I think that's a way of being, you can't think ‘oh I must be approachable’, you can't create that falsely”. This is supported by their reflections and how being authentic relates to their approach to practice and the authority they can command as previously described:

I just think you've got to be genuine and approachable and genuinely like that, not switch it on...have a very uniform approach to everything, you can't be like I am in a session and then suddenly be like ‘right, you do this’ and really affect change by telling people you need to do this and you need to do that.

SPB had highlighted that their humanistic approach to practice did not lend itself to having the authority to address organisational issues, and reiterated here the importance of maintaining one approach. SPB suggested that a sport psychologist must be genuinely approachable by remaining consistent, and they appeared to suggest that their non-authoritative approach better lends itself to this. Nesti (2004) has described the authentic individual as accepting of the need to make choices and decisions despite the inevitable accompanying anxiety due to the uncertainty of their outcome. SPB has previously described the difficulty in affecting change within the organisation because of their lack of authority, and discussed their resilience in being able to maintain their practice despite this. SPB therefore appears to be endeavouring to remain authentic by making the decision to practice in accordance with their humanistic, caring philosophy, rather than adopt a more performance driven approach as required by the organisation and the challenges they have therefore experienced.

As aforementioned, SPB's ‘struggle’ in remaining authentic in their practice was also demonstrated through their first-hand experience of the ‘care versus performance debate’.

SPB discussed how their humanistic philosophy and what was considered ‘right’ for an athlete in the long-term (caring), conflicted with the athlete’s short-term needs and the demands of the organisation (performance). This was not a situation that could be changed, but rather one whereby SPB was required to make a judgement; according to the existential perspective, SPB would have recognised that a judgement was required without their having knowledge of the likely outcome(s) of this decision. According to Nesti (2010), confronting this need for decision-making will allow an individual to more authentically operate in accordance with their values and beliefs, in SPB’s case caring for and doing what was ‘right’ for the athlete.

SPB also believes that their colleagues and athletes perceive them as genuine because of their willingness to take on any job within their work, driven by their love for this particular sport:

They know that I’m really genuine ‘cause I’ve been in [the sport] ten years now, they know I’ll always be the one to do the unsexy job...if someone’s crying in the corner I’ll go sort it out...whereas some of the other staff, and again there’s nothing wrong with this, will go and sit on the popular table and join in with the banter and build stronger relationships with the stronger people in the squad that perhaps are more medal contenders.

Harter (2002) describes authenticity as an expression of one’s true feelings, and in this respect SPB is acting in accordance with their true love for the sport by displaying a genuine willingness to perform within any role as required.

#### *4.4.2.4 SPB summary*

SPB offers a very personal account of themselves and their practice, and the two remain intertwined throughout their reflections. The main focus of SPB’s reflections and discussions was their family situation and how this has impacted upon their ability to do their job, and they therefore highlighted several personal qualities in relation to this.

SPB's work is driven by their humanistic philosophy of practice and this was frequently reflected in their discussions. In fact, SPB was the only one of the three sport psychologists in this study who spent a large amount of time discussing their philosophy of practice, as well as their personal life. SPB describes practising at their best and most effective when allowed to operate in line with their humanistic philosophy of spending time understanding the athlete and doing what they can to help any issues they may have within or outside of their sport. Lindsay et al. (2007) have discussed the importance of a sport psychologist practising in congruence with their personal core beliefs and values, and that by doing so it is likely that they will be more effective. The first author arrived at this understanding of their own philosophy after reflecting on their approach of 'directing' athletes towards a solution proved ineffective, but which did not align with their beliefs about behaviour change. Rather, the author felt they were practising in congruence with their beliefs and values once they focussed on the person behind the athlete and allowed them to formulate their own solutions. SPB highlights their belief that the athlete is the expert on themselves and emphasises the importance of developing a quality relationship the athlete, and acknowledges that they work best when allowed the freedom to practice congruently.

A humanistic approach to sport psychology practice can be characterised by a person-centred approach that utilises skills grounded in counselling (Holt & Streat, 2001) and a focus on encouraging athletes to adopt a balance between their sporting and personal lives (Hill, 2001). More recently, Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) have discussed a humanistic approach to sport psychology practice as adopting a 'caring agenda', stating that applied practice is a 'human activity' and that it is "as much (if not more) about being spontaneous and genuine in a skilled and consistent way as it is about having a theoretical answer to a practical problem" (p. 332). Corlett (1996a) also described a humanistic philosophy in terms of Socratic counselling, which would see the sport psychologist and

athlete work together to arrive at an honest appraisal of the athlete's problem. SPB described their beliefs in relation to their humanistic philosophy in a similar way. They believe that the athlete is the expert on themselves and holds that 'ultimate respect' for someone. SPB also highlights the importance of the relationship that they establish with the athlete, and that if the quality of the relationship isn't there then their work will be limited. However, SPB also discussed the difficulty of maintaining this humanistic philosophy within their practice environment. Building quality relationships with athletes takes time, yet time was something SPB was not afforded by the organisation, whose demands for actions and results required shorter-term solutions and interventions.

The personal qualities that emerged from SPB's reflections relate strongly to their humanistic philosophy. These qualities were challenged by the environment, but also helped them in surviving these challenges. For example, SPB highlighted that their humanistic approach did not allow them to command authority in addressing organisational issues, suggesting that this philosophy and role are mutually exclusive. This created a challenge for SPB, as lacking this authority meant that they were unable to challenge some decisions, which would have been the 'right thing to do'. SPB's quality of authenticity is represented by their practising in congruence with their humanistic, agreeable approach rather than 'changing' to work in an organisational role. This quality therefore also cemented SPB's knowledge that practising congruently allowed them to be most effective in supporting athletes, despite the environment at times demanding something else. Their discussions with regards to the culture of the organisation therefore related to the demands it placed on themselves as a sport psychologist, as opposed to the work they actually carried out. In itself, this provided some valuable information regarding how to manage one's practice in light of the organisational challenges, even if these were not what their work addressed.

SPB's reflections offer an in depth and highly personal account of their practice, with a great deal of their discussions focussed on their personal beliefs and the impact of their family situation on their practice. They openly described their family and the 'emotional exhaustion' of supporting them as well as operating in the wider organisational role that is sometimes required within their sport. SPB has therefore 'survived' by practising congruently within their humanistic philosophy and personal qualities, ensuring that they maintain their effectiveness through their one-to-one work with athletes.

#### *4.4.3 Sport psychologist C*

##### *4.4.3.1 Life history*

Sport psychologist C (SPC) became an accredited practitioner in 2006 and has practised full-time in various consultancy roles since then. After studying for an undergraduate degree in sport science, a masters in sport psychology, and completing a PhD in sport psychology, they are currently employed within an elite professional football club within the UK.

SPC comes from a small family and describes their childhood as a happy one, surrounded by 'good people and living in a small, safe village where they could play football after dark. They describe their immediate family as helping, caring and hard-working and they were also brought up to be very independent. This independence has extended to adulthood, with SPC describing themselves as someone who likes to be in control and get things done quickly, who often and happily does things on their own, and who is socially confident. As a child, SPC's family did not have a lot of money and they were therefore taught that if they wanted something they would need to go and work for it. Nevertheless they were always fully supported in making their own choices and decisions and given a lot of autonomy in doing so, and in learning from any mistakes they made. They believe they

also learned key values from their family such as honesty, a good work ethic, independence, and being positive, supportive, and caring.

SPC is a person who likes to get things done quickly and logically which they believe relates to their impatience as a child, and is very self-aware and realistic regarding their strengths and how to manage their weaknesses. SPC always wanted to work in football and they are happy in their current role, yet they are also the type of person who will always look to progress and cites a 'massive desire' to keep working and learning. SPC also discusses the fact that they are unsure whether they are naturally suited to psychology; they do not see themselves as a 'typical' psychologist and believes that there are probably more empathic psychologists in practice. However within their role as a sport psychologist they particularly enjoy having a real impact on people's lives; they appreciate being able to work with people and engage in conversations with them, and use what they term 'softer skills'. They also appreciate that there is a lot of work to be done for psychology to be accepted within sport and within the football environment in particular, but they enjoy that challenge. Tellingly, they would also want to do this job even if they did not need the money and still be as ambitious, but would rather change their personal circumstances (at the time of interview, SPC commuted to their job and remained away from home Monday to Friday).

Within their work, SPC is guided by their values, beliefs and personal qualities. They perceive themselves as being ambitious in making an impact 'on things and people and life' but not by stitching people up for their own personal gain and therefore states that there is 'an ethical way of doing things'. This impact must be brought about in the 'right way' and stems from an overarching belief that both parties in any given situation can win whilst still achieving what you want to achieve personally. SPC feels quite confident in themselves in most situations, and that they are good at coping with challenges and in their ability to 'bounce back' and learn from mistakes. They perceive themselves to possess an inner

strength, which is often challenged in their work environment and they therefore have to be resilient and strong to survive. They state that they wouldn't compromise their honesty and integrity and that their values could only be tested to a certain degree before they would walk away from their job. Therefore, although SPC does not feel any sort of pressure from their family, they do experience cultural and social pressures as a result of working in elite sport and football in particular, with most of these pressures resulting from other people's insecurities and the associated conflict. Ultimately, SPC describes themselves as being driven by the values of respect for others, being able to trust people, a desire to learn and improve, a good work ethic and that nothing should be given to you, conducting oneself in the right way, giving opportunities to others that they themselves have been afforded, and integrity and trust.

#### *4.4.3.2 Role*

Sport psychologist C discussed aspects of their role within the professional football club. Within their reflective diary, SPC described the evolution of their role:

My role has evolved slightly this year. Last year it was under the radar and very much academy and education based. This year it is more working with the manager and first team staff and is much more performance based.

They described this new role as akin to that of an organisational psychologist, more so than a 'traditional' sport psychologist, and in the follow-up interview highlight how they have been able to use their sport psychology-related skills and knowledge to have an impact in a wider role:

Sport psychology is quite a narrow field and actually you can have a big impact using psychological skills and theory in all sorts of ways, so that's kind of what I do now...a less traditional sport psych role, more of a performance director type role.

I think counselling is a very specific set of skills, a lot to do with empathy and listening and so on, and the organisational stuff is probably more what I'm interested in, putting things in place, all psychology-related and impact the mentality and behaviours of people...the counselling skills, I don't really do

enough of it, I don't read around it, I don't enjoy it as much as I enjoy some of the other stuff, so I do it, but I don't do much of it.

Here, SPC alludes to the perceived differences between a traditional sport psychologist role (which they liken to that of a counsellor's) and an organisational type role. Nesti (2010) has discussed this tendency for sport psychologists to adopt such a role as a response to the demands of operating within socially and organisationally complex elite sport environments. SPC spends a relatively small amount of their time operating in a counselling, one-to-one sport psychology role in response to the demands of the organisation, but also because they do not perceive this to be where their expertise or personal enjoyment lies. SPC discussed their preference for an 'organisational, environmental role' in greater detail:

I think there are clearly defined roles you can take as a sport psych in football, so you can take an organisational, environment role if you like which is what I enjoy, you can take an academy, development, education role, or you can take a counselling, one-to-one role...the one I'm interested in is the performance director type role, and with that comes a sort of full-time role, high risk, high reward opportunities, and anyone could fill each of those, I think they're different types of people and they're different interests and expertise.

Here, SPC discusses the role of the sport psychologist and is of the opinion that there are several separate and distinct roles one can adopt. SPC implies that operating in any of these given roles within professional football requires a certain type of person and thus implicates a sport psychologist's personal qualities in aiding their work. Specifically, the organisational-type role that SPC has adopted is one they describe as 'high risk, high reward' which suggests the role to be one that demands its holder to be highly responsible and accountable, with commensurate rewards.

SPC's overriding belief is that if the organisation is functioning well then so too will its members, yet this is often not the case in professional football and therefore results in SPC's need to adopt the wider organisational role they describe. Nesti (2010) has stated that the sport psychologist will often be the person called upon to perform in this organisational

role, and they can play a key part in creating and facilitating an effective and functional multidisciplinary team (Reid et al., 2004). Based upon SPC's experiences, this appears necessary more so in football than other sports because of the nature of the environment.

Kwiatkowski and Winter (2006) state the following:

The role of occupational psychologists is essentially to apply their psychological science to solve practical problems in the organizational world. The role and context may differ from those of the educational or clinical practitioner in terms of the often highly commercial focus, the lack of a structured and legally recognized profession to validate roles, the myriad organizational forms and the complexity of political and power relationships among multiple clients and stakeholders (p. 165).

There are clear similarities between this description of an organisation and the features of a football club that are highlighted by Nesti (2010) and SPC. SPC's descriptions of their work environment and role encapsulate when a sport psychologist is required to operate in an organisational role within professional football; an environment and role which are very similar to those described by Kwiatkowski and Winter (2006). In particular, Kwiatkowski and Winter highlight 'the complexity of political and power relationships', which SPC could be argued to have experienced in the form of staff conflict and individuals striving for personal gain. SPC used the term 'political animals' to describe football clubs, suggesting that the mechanisms of power and influence within the organisation are wild, unpredictable, and driven by survival instincts.

SPC offers more specific examples from their experience of working in an organisational role with regards to the specific demands of professional football:

I kind of look at an umbrella, everything, so I understand his job and I understand everyone's jobs...I suppose it's a personal thing that I've tried to understand it, I've tried to understand how that fits with the organisation, how it fits with the academy, 'cause I know I'm interested in the sort of management side of it.

I still do one to one stuff with the players but it's quite few and far between, I still do a lot of profiling work, do a lot of the organisational stuff around the team, work with staff, work on player induction...and now looking at

recruitment, so selection, development, which again is occupational psychology, that's really where my interesting areas are at the moment.

SPC appears to place significant importance on developing their personal understanding of how the organisation operates and the responsibilities each individual member of staff, and on becoming involved in projects outside of their traditional sport psychology remit. However upon reflection, SPC recognises that this is not always a matter of choice, and stated "I get involved with a lot of things and I pick up a lot of projects from my line manager...I get put in all sorts of positions and places to do things that I probably shouldn't really be doing". Highlighted here is the SPC's recognition that their expertise does not lie in organisational psychology despite this being what is required of them within this particular organisation, yet they have previously described this as a role that they enjoy and operate effectively in. Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) have questioned whether sport psychologists should be performing within such an organisational role given their lack of formal qualifications in the area, yet acknowledge that they have great potential to affect positive organisational change.

Nesti (2010) also considers why sport psychologists end up delivering non-sport psychology services within their role rather than the organisation employing an individual with previous experience of delivering such support. Nesti believes this to be due to the lack of awareness from those within a football club that such work is required until the sport psychologist is already 'in post'. In SPC's experience it was clear that this work was essential to creating a functional working environment at their club, as was the expectation from staff that they would be the person to adopt this previously unidentified role. SPC recognises that their colleagues' perceptions of their role as a sport psychologist impacts on the need for them to take on a wider organisational role that involves addressing problems within the organisation, and provides an example:

Your role as the psychology person lends yourself to people thinking oh they're the one I should go talk to...I've been here three years now, this is my fourth season, and you just build relationships with people that lend you to having those discussions, it is an element of me knowing people are unhappy and saying...its instigating a conversation, there's elements of people just coming to me and sitting down and having a whinge and a moan about whatever the situation was.

This quote suggests that a key aspect of SPC's wider role involves helping staff because they naturally gravitate towards 'the psychology person' as someone who can help resolve any problems. Nesti (2010) discusses how the work a sport psychologist carries out to support and mentor staff in this manner is often akin to that which is offered to players, which to some degree explains why staff were inclined to seek support from SPC.

SPC also discussed other responsibilities as part of their role as a sport psychologist operating within a wider organisational role. For example, SPC discusses their role in supporting players who go out on loan:

I initiated the fact that we need to look after these [loan] players better...as a sport psych I could do it on a one to one level and go and chat to him, but I've just gone actually we need to put a system in place where me, the physio, the player care and the fitness guy we all keep in touch with him and we make sure he's got all the services he needs.

You should get involved with those sort of projects...when a company recruits a new member of staff how they integrate into an organisation, that's player care's job for footballers and their families...that's psychology as well, it's just not traditional sport psychology, so all the things I'm doing are psychology-related.

It appears in this instance that the sport psychologist has gone beyond what would be expected of them in their traditional sport psychologist role, to ensure that loan players specifically are fully supported through a team-wide support system that SPC has put in place. The 'player care' role is one that SPC describes as involving the induction of new players and their families into the organisation, and is therefore similar to that described by Nesti (2010) as a 'liaison officer' whose role is to "assist players with a range of non-football related concerns" (p. 123). Despite the existence of a 'player care' position within their

football club, SPC has adopted similar responsibilities within their own role, which is perhaps unsurprising given the perceived similarities between the two roles (Nesti, 2010).

SPC discussed their additional responsibilities, which ultimately appeared to aid them in their overall work:

I reluctantly got thrown in to an acting tour manager type role, which is not really what I should be doing at all but it's a classic example...I'm not a physio so I'm not strapping people, I'm not a fitness coach so I'm not on the grass, but we want to take you on the tour so make yourself busy and I just got given the task of managing the week and planning the schedule...but it gave me the insight of actually more people came to speak to me doing that, so I built up more relationships with players and staff by doing the everyday jobs...by doing this stuff I've built a great relationship with [the manager], he now thinks I'm alright, he never used to speak to me...from a players perspective I built up some good trust with the players because I seemed to be helping them out with things that they needed help with and that then allows you to get into conversations casually over coffee or whatever it was which I wouldn't have had the opportunity [to before].

Although acting in a tour manager role was not of great interest to SPC, or part of their job description, it allowed them to build respect, trust, and rapport with the manager, staff and players which they later described as 'invaluable' in a role that requires them to "try and get on with everyone, try and support everybody". However, SPC did discuss the challenges they faced with regards to their wider role beyond that of a traditional sport psychologist:

Everybody knows a lot less than you about what your expertise is, so you can't assume they understand what your role's going to be and how you're going to do it, you have to keep educating them and then do your role.

I kind of get away with it a bit and I do both [roles], but in reality I probably shouldn't, I don't do either of them well enough, I try to keep everyone happy because the club want a bit of this but some of that.

SPC highlights their colleagues' lack of understanding of their role and therefore the need to educate these colleagues about the work they do and for what reasons. This lack of clarity can often lead to colleagues questioning why SPC takes on certain projects or addresses certain issues. SPC recognises that taking on the dual role of both a traditional and an organisational

sport psychologist can also prevent them from doing either role to the best of their ability, but that this is somewhat unavoidable based upon what is required by the club.

In summary, SPC describes their role as akin to that of an organisational (sport) psychologist more so than a traditional one. This is a role that they are comfortable operating within and one that they enjoy, but it is also one that exists as a result of the demands of the organisation and environment. There are both advantages and disadvantages to taking on such a role as a sport psychologist; SPC describes being able to build relationships and trust with other members of staff and players, but also highlights the lack of role clarity and confusion that this can cause amongst these individuals. With regards to such a role, SPC's life history and reflections are presented in greater detail in relation to two key features of their work, and with specific reference to their personal qualities.

#### *4.4.3.3 Personal qualities*

Throughout their reflections, SPC described many of the challenges that they face as a sport psychologist operating within a professional football club. In doing so they offer greater insight into why taking on an organisational-type role as previously described is of benefit to such an environment. SPC stated:

My view is that if you change the organisational level, a lot of the individual stuff that they have to moan about and want to get off their chest doesn't exist, so then they can focus solely on the understanding of themselves and their performance.

SPC believes that if an organisation is functioning well then so too will its employees, who as a result are able to focus on optimising their own performance. It would appear in SPC's experience that the majority of problems staff have in the workplace are related to and in many cases created by the environment and culture. This is supported by comments made in their life history, where they stated that the pressures felt are cultural and social in nature and result from the insecurities of other members of staff. These insecurities result in a number of

challenges for SPC, which they describe as occurring at ‘the organisational level’, and provide a clear rationale for why some of the work they carry out is required.

SPC highlighted several personal qualities that enabled them to perform successfully within this organisational type role and manage the challenges and conflict that they experience on a daily basis.

### Resilience

Professional football is an industry that demands immediate results and maintains a short-term focus (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). Within UK football, in particular the Premier League, the environment has been acknowledged as fast-paced, ruthless and ‘win at all costs’, and as “a highly volatile, performance-focussed and pressured environment, which places special demands on everyone who works in this milieu” (Nesti, 2010, p. 5). SPC’s reflections provide an in-depth and illuminating account of their personal experience of professional football in support of the literature. This environment is one that they describe as competitive, selfish and cut-throat, where its members are driven by a short-term, results-focussed mentality and often work for personal gain rather than for the good of the organisation. SPC’s insights therefore supported and extended Nesti’s (2004; 2010) contention that in such a difficult environment, sport psychologists require courage and resilience to survive. According to the website of the American Psychological Association (APA) resilience is “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences” (APA, 2011). The APA also highlight several factors as associated with resilience in individuals, including the ability to make and carry out realistic plans, possessing communication and problem solving skills, and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses. Rutter (2000) also highlights resilience as not only representative of an

individual's character, but as influenced by the social context that an individual operates within, or the professional sport environment in SPC's case.

SPC discussed their experiences of, and the challenges associated with, a new manager coming into the football club, in terms of the impact on both them and the organisation. This scenario is one that occurs frequently within football clubs, and as Audas, Dobson and Goddard (1997) highlight, "one of the most widely remarked characteristics of the manager's job is its chronic insecurity" (p. 30). SPC initially described their feelings with regards to their experience of a change in manager:

This last season, year, without doubt [has been] the hardest year of employment I've had...when a manager leaves it throws up so many unanswerable questions for everybody and nobody knows what's going on, football's still an industry where the manager has the say on everything and he's the main guy, the be all and end all I suppose from a staff perspective, it just throws up questions of 'I wonder what's going to happen to me, who's he going to bring in', and you can't not have those feelings and thoughts.

SPC, as a more permanent member of staff, is able to identify the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety of those who remain at the club when a manager changes; an example of the workplace stressors highlighted in the APA's definition of resilience. It is therefore understandable that SPC's colleagues were left feeling uncertain and fearful for their jobs when the new manager came into the club; feelings that were compounded by their lack of leadership. SPC displays their resilience, however, in being the member of staff who adapted well to this situation in the ways detailed below.

At the end of the 2010/11 season, SPC stated within their reflections that the team finished the season strongly, highlighted the positive discussions they personally had with the previous manager, and described the staff as 'harmonious'. It was therefore a 'complete shock' when the manager resigned, and it was this emerging situation that led to SPC acting in a support role to other staff during the following months. In their reflective diary, SPC

highlights that this was particularly difficult as they harboured the same concerns as their colleagues, yet had to endeavour to offer help and advice without giving opinions.

It is important to experience things like [the manager resigning] because work colleagues in sport science, medical, analysis, coaching all experience this and I was often the go to person to speak to about their concerns. When you have the same ones yourself it is very difficult to sit and listen without expressing your own viewpoint.

In their diary they described how they “tried to remain calm, positive and listen more than talk” and that “it taught me that sometimes it is best not to have an opinion on certain topics”. SPC also stated within their diary that “the new manager does not have a desire to work with a big backroom team and therefore has not tried to integrate the staff into his programme. This has caused upset amongst staff that enjoyed the previous manager”. Specifically, SPC observed that a change in manager uncovered insecurities in staff that relate to identity as described, and highlighted staff as lacking purpose, being unsure of their place in the team, and feeling undervalued.

[There were] periods in time when we were having some challenges in integrating the new coaches with the existing performance staff, there was a lack of direction, ‘the manager doesn't know who I am’, a loss of identity for a lot of the staff which is very difficult and I myself was the same at one point, low morale, didn't have an identity, didn't have any purpose to what I was doing it was just pointless...the majority of staff went through that last year, just while our jobs were being defined and communication lines were happening...it just lends itself to that situation that you a) experience it yourself so you can empathise with them and b) you then try do something about it.

As part of their wider organisational role, SPC will spend time working alongside other staff to understand and address given situations, and provides an example of this as addressing the challenges that arise when a new manager came into the football club. According to SPC's diary, “a key reason for this was poor role clarity amongst staff, a disagreement in approaches and a lack of common goal”, which resonates with Eys and Carron (2001) descriptions of role ambiguity in relation to an individual's responsibilities and the consequences when these responsibilities are not fulfilled. Role clarity is important within multidisciplinary teams

whereby individual's roles are connected and interdependent (Kyndt & Rowell, 2012), particularly given that a lack of clarity can be a major source of organisational stress (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). SPC describes staff experiences, including their own, of a loss of identity and a lack of direction as resulting from the uncertainty that surrounds a change in manager and their associated staff, and the lack of direction they subsequently provided. Despite experiencing the same challenges as the rest of the staff as described above, and in line with the APA's definition, SPC displayed resilience in managing the uncertainty surrounding their own employment and role within the club by encouraging communication between staff and formulating realistic methods to address the situation.

SPC further describes their personal experience as a result of the managerial change and how their role developed over time and as a function of managerial changes:

My role went from being quite peripheral to being quite a key part of what was going on, and having quite an impact on the staff and the players in general, and then the manager resigns, which was a complete shock, from nowhere...new manager, new coaching staff, unsure of my boss's role which meant unsure of my role which meant unsure of what was going on so a lot of kind of insecurities around...where do I fit in, what's my role going to be.

This quote encapsulates the uncertainty that SPC experienced personally regarding their role within the club due to the changes in personnel; a role which changed and resulted in them "quietly working behind the scenes". This is in contrast to the relative certainty of their integrated and visibly active role prior to this change, which allowed them to have a greater impact on the staff and players. SPC went on to discuss their experience in the aftermath of the change in manager in greater detail:

The manager left, my boss cleared his desk, it looked like he was basically about to resign so I wasn't sure what was happening, so I started looking for another job...I came back after my holiday and my boss had got promoted to be director, so he'd got a lot more control at the club, which is great 'cause I get on well with him, I'm like his right hand man...but I wanted to meet the new manager and he was saying no you've got to wait and be patient, I was like I don't want to be patient, I want to crack on and get things moving again and he sort of said to me, how did he put it... 'you can go and see the manager this week and do what

you want but I won't support you, or you can wait and I'll introduce you at the right time and I'll support you', so it was a case of go over my head, you're on your own so that's your risk, so I opted not to take that risk.

In relation to resilience, SPC had to adhere to their boss' wishes by not going to see the new manager despite this being their desire, thus managing their impulses and feelings. In their reflective diary, SPC described this as "a classic example of someone looking after themselves before others. He wanted to make sure he had a strong relationship with the manager before anyone else developed one". They elaborated on this situation and explained the importance of managing that desire in their interview:

It was basically a position of or you can go out there on your own and you're on your own, your choice, and obviously had I chosen to go on my own that relationship then breaks down and then I'm with the manager, if the manager turns around and says I'm not interested then I'm out the door...I can understand why he was doing what he was doing from his perspective, but obviously very frustrating from my perspective...I've agreed to sort of tow the party line on that occasion...a first-hand experience of a pretty blatant 'this is how it works, I've employed you, I'm your line manager I'll tell you when you can go to the manager', instead of doing it yourself and building a relationship, he allows you to have relationships with the hierarchy but only if he controls them, so he gives you a certain amount of freedom but only if he has an input basically.

At the time it was very frustrating and very disappointing but that's the way it works, it's a learning experience...but when you see that ruthless streak in someone...there's never been that sort of cutthroat [approach] before...so you've got to be careful where you think you are versus where you are, and that was just a bit of an 'alright, fair point', but at the time it's frustrating.

In these examples, SPC discusses their desire to acquaint themselves with the new manager but being unable to do so at their line manager's request. SPC describes this incident as their first experience of witnessing a 'ruthless' streak in this person and of the 'cut-throat' approach that they adopted, and their resilience allowed them to deal with this stressor by assessing the situation and managing their feelings whilst ultimately 'towing the party line' to protect their professional position. At the time, SPC was frustrated and disappointed by the 'conditions' that this advice was offered with, but on reflection they recognise that this approach was in their best interests. Such resilience was also described by SPC with regards

to the conflict they experience, and they discuss how they have adapted to this challenging aspect of the football environment:

Trying to live in this environment you get quite a few knocks and some days you have a really good day and other days someone's an arsehole to you for no reason and you think what's going on here and that's often more about them than you, so you have to be quite resilient and strong to operate in this environment.

I probably took [the conflict] a little bit personally, because I was new, I was in quite a new role, so no one really knows what I was doing or why I was doing it and the rest of it so at that point I was a bit more sensitive to it, now...I'm a bit more thick-skinned about it 'cause I know I'm more established in my role, and I've got the key, I suppose, power stakeholders behind me so I feel a bit more confident to not worry about things like that.

Resilience is not only important for SPC to manage common occurrences within football environments such as changing managers, therefore, but also in surviving others' ' nastiness' and the unpredictable nature of when such negativity may occur. This appears to interact with the degree of job security that SPC has experienced and that has fluctuated over time.

### Courage

SPC also described their personal quality of courage and was quite specific in highlighting how this has helped them to survive within a professional football club. Corlett highlights that courage is a virtue, and references Aquinas' definition of a virtue as "a disposition to act, desire and feel that involves the exercise of judgment, leads to a recognizable human excellence, and involves choosing virtue for itself and in light of some justifiable life plan" (Yearley, 1990, p. 53, as cited in Corlett, 1996b, p. 47). Corlett goes on to state that "courageous people carefully consider what is to be legitimately feared, while also taking into account their grounds for confidence. They recognize that states of both fear and confidence can be illegitimate and rely on practical wisdom to inform them of appropriate and inappropriate emotional states that influence action" and that "true courage always involves a focus on an actor's internal goals to achieve real goods and never on external goals that lead only to illusory goods" (1996b, p. 48). Nesti (2010) adds that it is the

authentic individual who will be prepared to say and do things they believe in, rather than keep their heads down to survive, and that they'll be courageous enough to offer guidance and ideas to those who welcome it, as well as those less receptive. This was represented by SPC's approach to the staff away day as detailed in their reflective diary: "I organised and delivered along with the manager an off-site day with the players...it was a high risk strategy but the team wasn't doing well so we had nothing to lose".

In relation to this, SPC discussed the difficulty of introducing new and innovative ideas within a traditional football environment in their interview, and highlighted how their courage aids them in this work:

If you're trying to do innovative, new things it takes a while to get going and get acceptance and buy-in, and then when it gets going and you get acceptance and buy-in and everyone goes oh that's really good...and then the people that didn't want to join you then moan at you...unfortunately that's the [reality of the] football world.

Being proactive, seeking best practice and being innovative in what you're doing, having the courage and determination to do it anyway, even though people say I'm not sure about it or you get obstacles in your way, you've just got to do it, get on with it and push it through.

SPC here describes having the courage to seek best practice and ensure that the work they want to do continues despite opposition from others, thus focussing on their internal goals of doing good work in the right way. Nesti (2010) has described how sport psychologists will often be the individual who attempts to provide solutions to problems, which must be 'creative' in order to "bring form to something that looks like chaos, or give shape and meaning to assist the achievement of genuine progress" (p. 166). Nesti goes on to describe how creative behaviour involves an individual accepting the discomfort of anxiety about the unknown whilst being courageous enough to see it through; for SPC, this creativity is required in moving the club forwards despite the uncertainty of how this will be received.

Related to this need for courage are SPC's discussions of the egos that exist within professional football clubs and how they can impact upon staff conflict. SPC initially reflected upon this in their diary:

Personal relationships with two staff members meant that it was tough to get ideas implemented. I do not have a positive relationship with them and they were very unhelpful and tried to block my work at times. This was very frustrating but I had to keep going and believing in the work.

When discussing this in more detail in the interview, SPC explained why the football environment was one that could breed such conflict:

In football clubs, there are a lot of strong egos and strong wills and when you're trying to innovate, which is what I think my works been; it's quite innovative in terms of traditional mentality versus the new scientific innovative mentality, I sit on that side of the fence and you get the traditional 'we've always done it this way' people, and they're the kind of guys that often put obstacles and barriers in the way...it's not a psychology-related thing, it was more a clash of personalities between certain people.

The people I get on with are like-minded and they're...young dynamic staff who want to innovate and do good practice, they're the sort of people I get on with...and the people I don't get on with are the more traditional football people who will probably be a lot older, a lot more experienced, but they don't really have much to do with me, so they don't really know me that well, I don't really know them that well, our few interactions haven't gone well.

What SPC is discussing here is a commonly cited issue of 'new, innovative science' driven by a sport psychologist, clashing with the traditional views of those who have 'lived' in football their whole careers. Gilmore and Gilson (2007) have highlighted that "[football] is notorious for being suspicious to ideas generated outside its own experience base" (p. 419), and Kelly and Harris (2010) support this notion in highlighting the mutual distrust and suspicion of 'outsiders' in football clubs. In relation to this, Kelly (2008) believes the core values in professional football of masculinity, aggression and physical emphasis, as identified by Critcher (1979), are reflected in work-place behaviour and that "they downgrade the value of formal education as a marker of success in the game" (p. 415). SPC emphasises their innovative approach to practice, and it could be argued that their courage is displayed in

having the confidence to do this work rather than be fearful of the conflict that exists and in spite of opposition from those with a 'traditional mentality'.

Related to the need to drive new, innovative work, and the opposing views of other staff, were SPC's reflections on the need to identify and motivate staff towards achieving a common goal within an organisation. In SPC's experience it is difficult within football to persuade staff to commit to long-term development, regardless of the team's successes or failures:

When things are going badly, people spend a lot of time reflecting on what they aren't doing, we need to do more of this or we're not doing this or we could do this, and then you get a result...the confidence and the excitement from that gets you to the next result, you win that game, and then all of a sudden you gain momentum, but the fundamental things that weren't in place like clear roles and responsibilities, a clear understanding of what we're trying to achieve, people having an identity in the staff and feeling like they can input on things, they were all still not happening...results then mask the development areas, whereas when you're losing, people go looking for development areas...you've got to try and stop that and just review what you've actually done, in that particular situation we didn't review what needed to be done, we just got some results and then went on a run but the fundamental things that weren't right hadn't changed.

What SPC is describing here is the tendency for staff to perceive positive results as evidence that the organisation is operating effectively. Whilst this may be the case in some circumstances, SPC identifies that 'fundamental things' were not in place within their club and that these are only addressed following a negative result. Positive results therefore mask the areas that need addressing, and emphasises short term focus of football clubs, as well as the win-lose culture that exists. SPC highlights why it is difficult to change this mentality:

It's hard to get football people to start at A, and go this is what we want to achieve and [create] a structure of A, B, C down to Z... [it's] very much 'well I want to do this, and we won't give ourselves targets 'cause then we're accountable to it and we can't give ourselves a target of this many number of points because if we lose our first game it's harder'...it's just quite hard to get that planning and structured pathway...certainly most coaches still don't want to do that.

SPC is of the opinion that the competitive win-lose culture that exists in professional football leaves staff with a 'fear' of setting themselves targets that they then become accountable for reaching. Again, this highlights the lack of structure and long-term planning within professional football, and particularly the reluctance of coaches to commit in this manner. SPC has described their desire to 'do the right thing' which relates to Aquinas' (as summarised by Corlett) belief that courageous individuals will find it easy to 'do good work and do it well'. According to Putnam (1997), courage is represented by the ability of an individual to act despite fear and potentially adverse consequences. When considering SPC's experience, they can be seen to be acting courageously in striving to do create a clear and structured plan for what the organisation should be trying to achieve and in not fearing accountability in such a results-driven environment.

Corlett (1996b) also stated that Aquinas' definition of courage is as having a clear awareness of one's intended and valued outcomes, and an understanding of potential threats to one's confidence. This notion of courage relates to SPC's ability to address and manage challenges within their work and their ability to remain secure in themselves and in the work that they do:

You have to be secure with who you are as yourself, you have to be secure in what you want to do, and then you have to be secure with people who are going to prevent you from doing what you want to do.

Previously, one of the sport physicians interviewed for the research talked about a sport psychologist possessing a security of self as essential when working within elite sport and in maintaining confidence in their skills and abilities required effectiveness in their role. Likewise, these aspects are reflected in SPC's discussions, who highlighted the need to be secure with themselves as a person as well as what they want to achieve in their professional role.

### Integrity

Integrity was a quality that SPC discussed, specifically in relation to their ability to deal with the cultural pressures associated with professional football. Integrity has been defined as “an internal state of being that guides us towards making morally wise choices” (Killinger, 2007, p. 3) and by Nesti (2010) as “the capacity to stay true to one’s values despite pressures and temptations to abandon these” (p. 150). SPC stated “[I] work hard, try to do things the right way, try and build relationships with people... [I have] certain values and what I believe in, so like integrity and trust, [but] they’re quite hard to find in football clubs”. SPC describes how their integrity and trustworthiness aid them in developing relationships and making sure they do things ‘the right way’, but that these are not common qualities within individuals who work in a football environment. This lack of integrity and trust results in an environment that SPC describes as ‘cut-throat’ and in turn this can create insecurities in staff which in their experience has resulted in selfish and/or negative actions. In their reflective diary, SPC discussed how their approach to conflict of this nature was to “deal with the comments and not let them bother you provided you are adding value to the organisation”. They also provided an example of this and their integrity in keeping the organisation’s interests at the fore:

I have had one experience (2 weeks into becoming full-time) where someone tried to stitch me up with the CEO. This opened my eyes to the real cut-throat nature of professional football. Luckily for me I have done everything by the book and it actually made the other person look bad but it wasn’t an enjoyable experience. I tried to engage all the key stakeholders and keep everyone happy but you can’t always do that therefore I did what was right for the team.

Again, these are not the actions SPC chooses in their work:

[I’m] ambitious in making an impact on things and people and life but also doing it the right way, I don’t agree with people stitching someone else up for personal gain, I think you can both win and still achieve what you need to achieve...everyone wants to push on and do well in their own career but I think you do it in the right way and do it through doing good work as opposed to pushing someone down in order to climb up, I don’t think that’s the right way to do things, so an ethical side to what you do.

SPC appears to have established a balance for themselves between their personal and professional ambitions and desire to achieve, and their being an ethical side to their practice that relates back to 'doing the right thing'. This integrity is reflected and summarised in SPC's contention that "if [the club] wanted me to do something I didn't believe in I wouldn't do it, not a chance I'd do it".

SPC spoke of their experiences of staff conflict within their football and how their integrity was challenged as a result. This conflict occurred both between themselves and other staff members, and as a direct consequence of the environment, and in their reflective diary SPC described this in relation to the change in manager:

With the new manager coming in I have been able to push myself forward and progress my role. This has caused some conflict and tension with other members of staff whose role is more marginalised than under the previous manager.

SPC was asked to elaborate on this experience within the interview, and they described the culture of professional football, and how this can impact upon the behaviour of staff:

In the football environment you get a huge amount of cultural, social pressures...obviously [that] can make life quite difficult but that's the culture that is elite level sport...probably one of the biggest pressures is due to people's own insecurities and the cut-throat nature of living in this environment...it's lots of people trying to climb the ladder as quick as possible to get the most power or financial gain...in terms of manoeuvring and surviving this environment that's a pressure, particularly if you want to do things in the right way, people get in your way in terms of stopping you doing it, but that's just part of the job.

Here SPC is describing the uncertainty and insecurities that staff experience as a result of the pressures exerted on them by the elite sport environment. SPC discusses the insecurities of staff within the football club, highlighting that they result from the overall competitive and cutthroat environment and be subsequently exacerbated by specific events such as a change in manager. SPC describes staff uncertainty in their jobs and the selfish and ruthless behaviour that they display in order to try and 'survive' in an unpredictable, results-driven environment. Staff are motivated by extrinsic, tangible rewards such as power or financial

gain in order to 'survive', yet SPC describes such actions of others as preventing them from 'doing the right thing', which was earlier highlighted as one of their values. SPC's integrity is thus challenged by an environment that encourages people to do the 'wrong' thing by focussing on personal, materialistic gain. SPC elaborated on why this environment is one that lends itself to creating conflict:

A lot of people don't like conflict despite the fact it's an environment full of conflict a lot of the time, in sports teams people don't like face to face conflict so there's a lot of agreeing with each other and trying to get on but then behind the scenes things don't happen that were supposed to happen.

[Within] the whole [football] industry, not many people tell the honest truth, it's a male, macho, testosterone fuelled environment and that's staff and players I think, so you have to filter a lot and that's how you get to the real crux of what's going on...people will tell you what they think you want to hear, what they think is their version of what's going on, it's a very selfish environment, a lot of people want to climb the ladder, a lot of people, players, want lots of money, a lot of people deceive themselves a lot, normally you can break that down a little bit with one to ones with people...but the environment doesn't lend itself to having good open discussions, 'cause everyone's competing with each other, they don't want to show a sign of weakness, it's all male bravado all the time, particularly around insecurities.

SPC describes the football environment as a selfish one, where players and staff alike are competing amongst themselves to maintain a 'strong', masculine exterior, which in turn makes it difficult to uncover what SPC describes as the 'honest truth'. SPC had previously emphasised this within their reflective diary, stating that "people tell you what they think you want to hear and sometimes this isn't the truth. I learned there are very few people you can trust and sometimes you have to play the game". This is further complicated by the desire of people within sports teams to avoid conflict and therefore appearing to get on well, but in reality this is often a facade that itself can be the cause of conflict. SPC appears to value 'good, open discussions' as key to effective work as a sport psychologist, yet finds these discussions difficult to initiate as other staff and players equate engaging in them to showing weakness. Killinger (2007) argues that to possess integrity "we must be willing to resist the temptation to focus selectively only on information or aspects that fit our own experience,

self-serving needs, or narrowly held views” (p. 12) and must make morally wise choices. Based upon such a definition, it is clear that as per SPC’s assessment, integrity is not prevalent within a football environment.

As a sport psychologist, SPC appears better able or more inclined to empathise with the other staff and endeavour to support them through the challenges they describe. However SPC describes the difficulty in doing so, especially as they must work to resolve these challenges whilst remaining neutral and resist the temptation to abandon their values (Nesti, 2010) and get ‘sucked in’ to unproductive conversations:

No one wants to work in a place where everyone’s whinging and moaning, so you've just got to take your whinging and moaning home or keep it to yourself and then while you're [at work] you just try and promote what's right. So a lot of what I tell myself and other people is if I want to be good at my job, then I want to try and be the best that I can be at my job, so if I do that that'll help things, if everybody does that that'll help, whereas what happens in I suppose most teams but particularly in football is people just get together and they all slag off the establishment or whatever it might be and it doesn't get anyone anywhere...they're having conversations around well he's this, it's playground stuff, whilst it's very hard not to get sucked into it you've got to try and stay away from it, if you do get sucked into those conversations you've got to be able to say look it's tough, I appreciate that, but how can we get better at what we're doing, how can we give a better service to the players, how can we improve our way of working, it's certainly not easy when you've got no identity with the hierarchy and you don't feel valued, you don't feel recognised, peoples' energy is gone, people are outwardly looking for new opportunities, getting fed up, time to move on sort of mentality, yeah it's challenging...I don't know if I got sucked into that because I'm a psychology person or because I was also in that camp of feeling low morale or whether I got myself into those conversations to try and help people, I couldn't tell you to be honest, probably a bit of everything.

In SPC’s experience, staff will discuss and highlight their problems with the organisation, and will feel detached from the organisation and react negatively by ‘whinging and moaning’. SPC, however, is of the opinion that the best way to help the organisation is to focus on performing in their own role to the best of their ability. This is the approach they take and is one that they advise colleagues to take also, in an effort to make sure that all staff are proactively and positively attempting to resolve the issue. Killinger (2007) has highlighted

the importance of focussing on needs greater than their own, in SPC's case the organisations', and SPC recognises that although it would be easy to engage in those conversations themselves, they have opted to instead focus on how the situation can be improved and how they can best serve the organisation and the players. Although SPC views such conversation as unproductive and therefore tries not to become involved, they recognise that sometimes this is unavoidable, and most likely due to a combination of their sport psychologist role, their ability to empathise with their colleagues, and their desire to support those who need it. Here SPC can be considered to be 'other directed' and understanding rather than judgemental, as per Killinger's (2007) notion of integrity.

### Authenticity

SPC introduces the concept of authenticity when using the phrase 'stay true to what you want to do' with regards to maintaining the work they are passionate about. As previously highlighted when discussing coach and physician perceptions of effective sport psychologists, authenticity has been described as owning one's personal experiences and acting in accordance with the true self (Harter, 2002). Nesti (2004) has described authenticity as being accepting of the need to make choices and decisions despite the inevitable accompanying anxiety due to the uncertainty of their outcome. SPC's challenge in remaining authentic is reflected by acting in accordance with their true self and what they want to achieve whilst being prepared to make difficult decisions despite a lack of support and that may upset people. SPC provides an example of this when discussing their approach to dealing with the politics of the organisation and the variety of conflicts that arise:

I try to handle [conflict] in the right way in terms of being open and inclusive to all the staff...give people the opportunity to buy into what we do and then if they choose not to, they don't, it taught me that you've got to do things by the book in organisations, you've just got to be aware of the politics, what you think is a genuinely right idea or trying to do the right thing by someone, is often misconstrued and there's a lot of back-stabbing and back-biting, and if you do

something that's perceived to be good and someone wasn't part of the idea, they'll then either think the idea is shit or they'll try to derail it.

Other people's agendas and relationships with other people can't affect what you're trying to do, you've just got to be sensitive to it and try and manage it as strategically and as honestly as you can.

What SPC appears to be describing here is that no matter the type of conflict that arises and the challenges they face, they will remain open, honest and inclusive in their work, and therefore authentic in line with their beliefs about 'doing the right thing'. Such qualities are markedly different from those that SPC has experienced in other staff, and they have spoken previously of individuals not speaking the 'honest truth' and being closed to psychology within the football club. Openness is particularly difficult to maintain in an environment where everyone is competing for power and financial gain. In addition, SPC highlights here that if staff are not part of an idea then they will either rubbish it or actively oppose it, yet simultaneously the environment necessitates that these ideas are created and implemented to move the organisation forward, and it is this type of scenario that epitomises the challenges of working in professional football. SPC describes the challenges they have faced in practising in congruence with their beliefs and values within the difficult environment of professional football, and therefore highlights their personal struggle for authenticity.

SPC also described the quality of authenticity in enabling them to be innovative in their work. They further elaborated on the difficulties associated with being the individual who strives to develop new and innovative work within the club and the opposition that they face:

You've got to be passionate about things you're doing, you've got to want to do the things you do because often you've got to be the driver and the force and the innovator behind it because it's quite new and not a lot of people understand it and support it so you've got to really keep driving it...you've got to be prepared to stick your head out a little bit and get cut off, be prepared to upset a few people to get change...and stay true to what you want to do, so if you go in and you're not really sure what you want to do I think you'll get eaten alive.

This is a good example of authenticity as described by Nesti (2004), in that SPC has accepted that they must make tough choices and ‘stick their neck out’ despite the fact that this may upset people, but in doing so are able to ‘stay true’ to themselves. However they also enjoyed the challenge of being the person to develop new initiatives, and suggested throughout their life history that this was something that they were well-suited to:

A lot of people have said they’re so driven by their particular area they forget to look up and see the wood through the trees, so I think being that person who’s not head down all the time and be able to look around and help develop things is quite an exciting challenge.

Operating within a somewhat withdrawn role allows SPC to assess the ‘goings on’ within the football club by taking time to step back and look at the bigger picture. This is not a view that most individuals within an organisation will adopt, and represents SPC’s authenticity as they are able to practice in congruence with their background and desire to good work:

Researching what's out there and looking outside of football and finding out what best practice is, that gives you a good indication of what things you should be doing, and that allows you the innovation to then do it...I’m not a football person, I haven't lived in football my whole life, I haven't grown up in the player coach manager thing, I’ve grown up in academia, business...I think it's quite different, so that uniqueness I try and bring to the table.

SPC has discussed the difficulties of being an ‘outsider’ with respect to their discipline and colleagues’ reluctance to utilise psychology, yet this position is one that they value because it allows them to utilise their unique background and skills for the benefit of their work and the organisation. Morgan-Roberts, Cha, Hewlin and Settles (2009) have described authenticity as an alignment between an individual’s internal experiences and their external expressions; SPC can be seen as operating innovatively in alignment with their beliefs about best practice and their ‘unique’ background compared to their colleagues.

SPC offered detailed discussion of their own personal experiences of conflict within their work in addition to professional conflict:

[The conflict] started off professional, as a coach they didn't value psychology, they don't believe in it, don't see the need for it, doesn't see what I do or why I'm here and if they were manager wouldn't have one anywhere near the club...we've had a few incidences where we just don't get on.

Here SPC is describing their own experiences of conflict with members of the coaching staff, and one coach in particular. The conflict began as a 'professional objection' to the presence of a psychologist within the club and developed to the point where the coach was actively trying to undermine SPC and negatively impact on their work and the environment:

I was building my relationship with the manager...there was a bit of politics going on in the organisation; I was aligned with the coaching staff and the manager, and there's a few coaches and a few people who were pushed out of his group...and one tried to stitch me up with the chief exec...so that's just an example of some of the issues that go on when you're trying to build a cohesive group, the team, the staff, and everybody's got different agendas... I try to handle it in the right way in terms of being open and inclusive.

Pre-season we agreed all the outline and content [of the away day] with the manager, so one of the coaches didn't get consulted and that was because the manager didn't speak to them, so we organised this event, which I led and facilitated... [the coach] turned up late, and they turned up with the worst attitude I've ever seen from any member of staff at any meeting I've ever attended in my life, they were very rude towards me, very rude towards the manager, generally rude towards everybody...it was like a big white elephant in the room, they made a point of 'I don't agree with this, I'm not happy with this', and there was a point when we would walk down the corridor and they would turn away, they wouldn't even look at me, just immature behaviour really...they were very rude, very childish...a real energy sapper.

In describing their experience at the away day, SPC highlights one particular situation which culminated in the complete breakdown of the professional relationship between themselves and the coach in question. SPC reflects upon these experiences in a way that suggests such conflict is inevitable when members of staff have different ideas or aims, or who are reacting to a situation that they are unhappy with. Ultimately, however, SPC recognises that despite the inevitability of this conflict, they are able to survive because of the credibility they have gained by remaining true to their values of 'doing the right thing'. When discussing these values, SPC also stated that "if you have a positive impact and you do things well, your

profile and respect and credibility will come anyway”, and it therefore appears that remaining authentic and genuine in their work has allowed them to establish this credibility.

Finally, SPC also described authenticity in terms of developing and working towards an organisation’s aims and the role of leadership in achieving this. SPC recognised the importance of such leadership in their reflective diary:

Staff politics was very challenging as everyone appeared to have their own agenda for doing things. There was no common goal that aligned everyone and no real leadership from the top to direct people who felt lost. I learned that it was very difficult to put this common goal in place half way through the season as it would not be authentic.

They elaborated on this in their interview:

To me, when a leader comes into an organisation at the start of the journey you want to go on, you want to take people with you, you want to say this is where we are, this is what we want to achieve, this is how we’re going to get there, it’s exciting, it’s stimulating, and people want to get on board and try and get there. Unfortunately for the manager, when he came in last year he didn’t do any of that, and his communication was not that clear which meant no one really knew what was going on, no one really had a relationship with him, he struggled to communicate with us, communication with him wasn’t great, and everyone was like what’s going on? After four or five months of not going alignment-wise in the same direction, to then say this is what we want to achieve, this is where we want to get to...to me you set it up at the start of a season...the implementing this mid-season just doesn’t feel right, why are we doing this now, why has this suddenly been brought in, and to bring it in when you’re not actually doing very well seems a reaction to ‘well we’ve not won for a couple of weeks so we’re going to react and have a meeting’, so you could have a meeting planned anyway but people think we’re panicking because we’ve lost a few games, there was a bit of that going on last year ‘cause we started slowly.

SPC describes a manager as someone who should be a leader, and communicate their intentions for the organisation clearly from the beginning. SPC describes how the new manager failed to address their vision for the club and what they want to achieve and that in doing so left staff with little direction or purpose. Within their reflective diary, SPC highlighted that this also impacted on the players, stating that “The team was performing fairly poorly and more importantly the players didn’t appear to know what they were doing. The manager was struggling to get his message across to the players and they hadn’t taken to

his training methods". Such situations test the manager's leadership skills and whether they are able to inspire their staff and athletes (Nesti, 2010) and it could be argued that initially the manager did not operate effectively as a leader. Weinberg and McDermott (2002) compared business and sport leaders' perceptions of what makes a successful organisation. Both sport and business leaders agreed that leadership was extremely important for organisational success and highlighted qualities of effective leaders such as decisiveness and organisation, and as possessing good interpersonal skills. Leadership appears to be essential in motivating and directing staff towards a common goal that results in well-planned and implemented strategies to achieve this goal, as opposed to reactive strategies that SPC described as 'inauthentic'. By using the term 'inauthentic', it seems that SPC is endeavouring to describe the reactive implemented strategies as 'at odds' with what the organisation and its members need or want, and recognises their need to be proactive in being the one to drive this alignment as part of their role.

### Humility

Humility was a key quality in allowing SPC to recognise how privileged they are to be working in professional football, and therefore in ensuring they work hard to benefit the organisation. This is especially important in an environment where competition amongst staff is high and individuals are constantly vying for recognition and reward. SPC is not an individual who needs to be given credit for the work they do, as long as they are doing the right thing by the club, and discussed this in relation to their role within the club:

My personal values are you treat people as you want to be treated, you do the right things by people, the club...a lot of the things I'm doing I want to do but they're also the right thing for the club, I wouldn't do something wrong because it's right for me...so I think there's a little bit of humility, there's a big drive to make sure I do good things and do the right things...I focus on the process rather than the outcome I suppose, but in a sort of life perspective.

SPC's desire to do what is right for the club and not just themselves is born out of what they describe as a 'life perspective' of focussing on the process rather than the outcome and highlights SPC's humility in their recognition that they are a small part of a big organisation, the importance of which has also been highlighted by other sport psychologists (Fifer et al., 2008). In other words, they are concerned with the journey towards a given outcome rather than the outcome itself, and with making sure they go about this journey in the right way. SPC has described their experience of colleagues within their football club who seek to avoid being accountable for poor results by not setting targets, and who are ultimately looking out for themselves. SPC, on the other hand, highlights that their focus is on doing what is best for the club and not just themselves, and describes this in a way which suggests that they view themselves as a small part of a bigger and more important team journey.

This humility is a quality of SPC that is implied throughout their reflections, for example in their descriptions of their work to implement new ideas and programs within the club:

Go set up a program, go set up a curriculum, then get some staff in place to run it and manage it... 'cause I haven't got time so that's the way I've gone about things, so I'm really relaxed on other people taking all the credit for it, I encourage that, 'cause the people that matter know who's involved in it anyway, it's not an ego thing.

I think there's a lot of big egos and a lot of people want to take credit for things but my approach is, I make sure the people that matter know that I'm driving it but then if someone else wants to go see them and say it's their idea and they've done it then I let them get on with it...it doesn't have to have my name on the top of the programme.

In this example, SPC describes that although they may have carried out the work, they do not necessarily require recognition for it, which relates to Richards' (1988) concept of humility, who stated that "it's possible just not to want [recognition], while fully recognizing that one deserves [it]" (p.256). Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) spoke of a sport psychologist who had worked with and helped a football player but saw no reason to 'tell' the club's manager

what they had done. Likewise, SPC saw no need to make their involvement in successful projects known; their desire to ‘do the right thing’ and being secure enough so as not to require recognition is sufficient ‘reward’ for their work, and is representative of their humility.

SPC’s discussions also suggest that humility plays a part in their perception of their role within a professional football club:

I was told at a previous club I worked at that every time you walk through the front gate you’re entering quite a privileged environment that most people in the world want to work in and not many people get the opportunity to work in...you should never take it for granted, so that's pretty much how I feel every day, obviously you have days when you’re tired, and things and people piss you off and you get stressed about [them] but generally that's the way I try and look at it.

SPC appears humbled by how fortunate they are to be employed by a professional football club, despite the challenges of working in this environment. Coulehan (2010) states that within medical practice, humility “manifests itself as unflinching self-awareness; empathic openness to others; and a keen appreciation of, and gratitude for, the privilege of caring for sick persons” (p. 200). It is certainly conceivable therefore that despite the differing context and ‘patient’ group, the same goes for sport psychology practice and that what SPC has described is an appreciation and gratitude for their work. The consultants in Simons and Andersen’s (1995) study have emphasised the importance of a sport psychologist enjoying what they do, with Bob Nideffer in particular highlighting that ‘nothing is above them or beneath them’. In relation to this are SPC’s descriptions of their work ethic, having stated that “I don't think anything’s ever given to you, and it shouldn’t be given to you so you’ve got to work for it”. This desire to work hard is encapsulated by SPC’s approach to their work, prior to establishing a relationship with the new manager:

We had a couple of staff last year who just slipped into ‘I won’t make too much of a fuss, I won’t really contribute much but I’m not actually doing anything, but I’m still getting paid and I’m still here’...I just thought well I don’t want to do that, I’m not just going to sit around here...I probably could have survived six

months, probably the whole of last season and not really done anything before people started to think ‘what are they actually doing’, so that’s the stuff that you don’t want to fall into...you shouldn’t be leaving here at two o’clock every afternoon but certain people will just leave early...had I just wasted that time and downed tools and put my feet up then I’d have harmed myself and I would have harmed the club.

As previously highlighted, and at their line manager’s will, SPC was not immediately introduced to the new manager when they came in to the club and was therefore unsure of their job role and identity within the club for a period of time. SPC could, in these circumstances, have chosen to spend this time receiving their salary without working to contribute to the organisation, which SPC perceived some members of staff chose to do. However, SPC’s work ethic and appreciation for the organisation drove them to continue working on projects that they deemed of importance and benefit to themselves and the club.

SPC’s humility relative to their work ethic is also reflected in their proactive approach to their work, which they describe as stemming from childhood:

I think a lot of how I am now as an adult is [because] I didn't mind being on my own [as a child], I like to be in control of what I’m doing and be quite independent in how I do things...I like to get things done quite quickly.

They also discussed the importance of being proactive in relation to surviving within the high level sport environment and stated that “being proactive, that’s just the nature of working in sport, you don’t survive very long if you’re not proactive”. This relates to SPC’s work ethic and reflects humility in their desire to do right by the organisation, not just themselves. Although by previous admission SPC could have survived the period immediately following the new manager’s arrival even if they had chosen to ‘rest on their laurels’, this would not be conducive with ‘doing the right thing’ or to their long-term survival. Being proactive is also important in driving the organisation as a whole forward, and SPC reflected that “you've got to be passionate about things you're doing, because often you've got to be the driver and the force and the innovator behind them”.

## Flexibility

Flexibility was a key quality implicated in SPC's ability to manage their innovative work against the challenging backdrop of an environment where staff are reluctant to adopt a long-term structure for development. Being flexible has been previously highlighted as important for sport psychologists in meeting the practical needs to the athletes they work with (Fifer et al., 2008), but SPC's discussion extended this understanding with regards to the environmental constraints they experience. Being flexible about the process of developing interventions ultimately allowed SPC to still reach their intended outcome, whilst remaining considerate of others' reluctance or ideas:

Make some concessions...I'm not afraid of changing things to fit the purpose...a lot of the stuff I've done is quite new so you try and just get quick easy wins all the time, as you get more and more of them it allows you more freedom to do what you really wanted to do in the first place...that's the sort of thing I talk about in terms of the subtle skills, and you can't be so black and white that it's this or nothing, you just have to be prepared to go in the grey area a bit but knowing you still want to end up in this place but it's going to take you longer to get there.

The approach that SPC describes appears to align with SPC their 'life perspective' of focussing on the process rather than the outcome. SPC describes making 'quick wins' by adapting an idea to suit other members of staff and thus gradually making the process of implementing new ideas easier. A sport psychologist needs to be comfortable with this flexibility to bring about the long-term changes that they are aiming for:

The approach that I've learned in terms of being flexible is you might go for ten out of ten in everything you do, but if you just settle for a six or a seven, then you'll get eight, nine, ten eventually, as you get more buy-in...don't ram it down peoples' throats about its psychology and don't be too precious about it if it changes and just be more open to sharing it with other people's ideas.

A sport psychologist should be aware that within football there will often be opposition to psychology and therefore they that must be flexible in implementing psychological initiatives. Part of this flexibility is being open to sharing ideas with others and being subtle

about the psychological nature of an idea. SPC's flexibility in this respect is illustrated by one situation:

Two coaches run the development squad...and they basically said we don't value psychology, we don't want it in our group...so what we agreed on was a life skills programme which didn't have psychology as a module or a topic, but the whole programme was based on psychology, but it was rebranded as a professional development programme with life skills as the tag.

This is a perfect example of what SPC has highlighted as flexibility within their work, and is a quality that has allowed them to maintain professional relationships with coaches whilst implementing the program that they set out to. In particular, it highlights the resistance to psychology which has been documented within the sport psychology literature (Wrisberg, Lind-Withycombe, Simpson, Loberg & Reed, 2012). SPC has described this as, in essence, being flexible whilst ensuring that they are still 'doing the right thing', the importance of which for SPC has been previously discussed. This is encapsulated within the following quote: "there's an element of being flexible and agreeable with what people want, but there's an element of arguing and saying this is why we've made this decision". SPC will be flexible, but will stand up, and provide a clear rationale, for a decision that they believe in.

#### *4.4.3.4 SPC summary*

SPC offered an extensive and illuminating insight into the realities of operating as a sport psychologist within a professional football club in the UK. Not only did SPC highlight and discuss several personal qualities that aided them in their work, as per the overall aims of the research, and also provided detailed information regarding the nature of professional football, their role within this environment, and the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis.

Although employed as a sport psychologist, SPC's role is very varied and includes a large amount of work akin to that carried out by an organisational psychologist. SPC also

took on additional responsibilities as dictated by either the requirements of the environment, or their desire to do the right thing. SPC's overriding belief is that if the organisation is functioning well then so too will its members, yet this is often not the case in professional football and therefore results in SPC's need to adopt the wider organisational role they describe. Nesti (2010) has stated that the sport psychologist will often be the person called upon to perform in this organisational role, and they can play a key part in creating and facilitating an effective and functional multidisciplinary team (Reid et al., 2004). Based upon SPC's experiences, this appears necessary more so in football than other sports because of the nature of the environment. Kwiatkowski and Winter (2006) state the following:

The role of occupational psychologists is essentially to apply their psychological science to solve practical problems in the organizational world. The role and context may differ from those of the educational or clinical practitioner in terms of the often highly commercial focus, the lack of a structured and legally recognized profession to validate roles, the myriad organizational forms and the complexity of political and power relationships among multiple clients and stakeholders (p. 165).

There are clear similarities between this description of an organisation and the features of a football club that are highlighted by Nesti (2010) and SPC. SPC's descriptions of their work environment and role encapsulate when a sport psychologist is required to operate in an organisational role within professional football; an environment and role which are very similar to those described by Kwiatkowski and Winter (2006). In particular, Kwiatkowski and Winter highlight 'the complexity of political and power relationships', which SPC could be argued to have experienced in the form of staff conflict and individuals striving for personal gain. SPC used the term 'political animals' to describe football clubs, suggesting that the mechanisms of power and influence within the organisation are wild, unpredictable, and driven by survival instincts.

SPC's reflections provide an in-depth and illuminating account of professional football. This environment is one that they describe as competitive, selfish and cutthroat,

whereby its members are driven by a short-term, results-focussed mentality and often work for personal gain rather than for the good of the organisation. Professional football is an industry that demands immediate results and maintains a short-term focus (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). Football is the most successful and wealthiest sport in the world (Nesti, 2010), but with that status comes an emphasis on success and an intolerance to failure. In essence, professional football within the UK, and English Premier League in particular, is characterised by “a highly volatile, performance-focussed and pressured environment, which places special demands on everyone who works in this milieu” (Nesti, 2010, p. 5).

SPC elaborated on how the environment they describe necessitated the role they adopted. SPC discusses the insecurities of staff within the football club, highlighting that they result from the overall competitive and cutthroat environment and are subsequently exacerbated by specific events such as a change in manager. SPC describes staff uncertainty in their jobs and the selfish and ruthless behaviour that they display in order to try and ‘survive’ in an unpredictable, results-driven environment. Reid et al. (2004) have previously highlighted that within high pressure environments such as elite professional sport, the competitive win-loss culture that exists can filter down through staff and make collaboration between them difficult. SPC has experienced both professional and personal conflict within the organisation overall and direct opposition to their work on an individual level also. On an individual level, this conflict has been directed towards SPC as a person and as an academic who has brought in ‘new’ ideas. SPC acknowledges that although they try and be open and inclusive towards everyone and involve them in their work, some will not want to ‘buy in’ to it and the conflict that occurs as a result was a common focus of reflection for SPC. Gilmore and Gilson (2007) have highlighted that “[football] is notorious for being suspicious to ideas generated outside its own experience base” (p. 419), and Kelly and Harris (2010) support this

notion in highlighting a continued resistance within football to the idea of formal qualifications and distrust of those who hold them.

SPC's reflections offer a thorough understanding of the reality of working with professional football within the UK; of the nature of the environment and the role they are required to carry out. SPC was very open in sharing information, making their descriptions rich in detail and providing the reader with an in-depth insight into how their personal qualities have enabled them to negotiate the challenges they have faced and overcome. Based on the experiences SPC describes, it is clear that Nesti (2004) was highly accurate in his assessment of professional sport environments as volatile and arduous, and that a sport psychologist's personal qualities will enable them to survive.

#### **4.5 General Discussion**

The discussions of each sport psychologist provide 3 very different accounts of 3 very different people and practitioners. Although the sport psychologists displayed some similar qualities and operated in similar roles to each other at times, these manifested themselves in practice in very different ways and were discussed relative to their personal experiences in their specific work environments. SPC in particular recognised the varied roles that sport psychologists may take on depending on their practice environment:

Compared to what the Olympic guys are doing I suppose our roles are quite different, and the opportunities that present themselves are probably quite different as well, so I imagine they're in a clearly defined space whereas in football you kind of have to be more fluid and the opportunities are different, things emerge and you're there so you get involved in it...I think it poses a few questions around what does a sport psych need to succeed in football.

This was certainly reflected in each sport psychologist's account of themselves and their practice. SPA provided a very factual, structured, and indeed 'clearly defined' account of their roles and responsibilities as a sport psychologist. SPB's was a very personal account with a focus on their family and in depth consideration of their philosophy of practice. SPC's

discussion was driven by their experiences operating within a wider organisational psychologist type role, within the unique and organisationally complex environment of professional football. Despite their varied backgrounds and experiences, the sport psychologists did present some overlap in the roles and personal qualities they discussed. For example, integrity was cited as important by SPB and SPC, who discussed how this was challenged as a result of their practice environments. Similarly, all practitioners discussed humility as a personal quality in doing the right thing by others rather than themselves and I knowing that they are not the 'expert'. Again, this quality interacted with each sport psychologists' individual experience of the environment they work within, yet can be seen as highly important for effective sport psychology practice based on the combined perceptions of these practitioners and the physicians and coaches from phase 1.

In describing these personal qualities, all 3 sport psychologists emphasised that they were representative of them as a person as well as a practitioner. It appears that understanding their own qualities is essential in the sport psychologists being able to 'perform' in the context of their work and manage the conflicts and tensions identified. Nesti (2010) has described the need for a sport psychologist to embody and be personally convincing in their vocation, and therefore believes that values and professional ethics are part of the person, not just the practitioner. He goes on to discuss his experience as a sport psychologist and operating as 'an outsider on the inside', whereby a practitioner must be able to enter an athlete's day to day world whilst remaining sufficiently 'distanced' to be able to gain the athlete's trust. Nigel Mitchell, a nutritionist, also advocates that all practitioners working in elite sport should be 'invisible' yet physically present (Mitchell, 2012). The sport psychologists in the current study also alluded to this notion of being 'an outsider on the inside', with SPB highlighting the difficulty of balancing this distance with remaining approachable. SPA discussed this 'distance' as beneficial in remaining objective in their

work, but also recognised that by doing so it can be difficult to form relationships with people. Finally, SPC discussed the difficulties of being an ‘outsider’ with respect to their colleagues’ personal barriers to psychology, but that this position allows them to bring new and unique expertise to the organisation. It therefore appears necessary for a sport psychologist to consider their personal qualities in the context of this ‘balanced’ role; being content to remain the outsider whilst still exerting an influence within the organisation.

Another common theme throughout the sport psychologists’ reflections related to the current ‘care versus performance’ debate within the literature. Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) and Brady and Maynard (2010) have contributed to emerging discussions surrounding the practice of sport psychology as driven by either performance enhancement or a sense of caring. In particular, Brady and Maynard offer a debate regarding the focus of a sport psychologist’s practice being focussed on performance excellence or the growth and welfare of the athlete. In this study, SPA made brief references to the performance pressures of the environment they work within and the need for them to be the ‘voice of reason’ in terms of balancing this with the ‘right’ approach, for example, debriefing athletes after failing to perform. SPB and SPC in particular discussed their experiences and thoughts that can be considered representative of this debate in practice; SPB highlighted a situation with one performer, and their inner conflict in choosing whether to do what was right for the person (care) and what was right for them as an athlete (performance). While ‘performance’ and ‘care’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive, SPB offers a real life example of how their drive to care for the athlete was compromised by the need for them to demonstrate impact and help secure the athlete’s funding. SPC also spoke extensively of their desire to ‘do the right thing (caring) versus the demands of the environment (performance), a conflict that arose within their work on a day-to-day basis.

These viewpoints resonate with the developing focus in the literature on the contention between sport psychology as a caring profession and its practice within a performance focussed environment. Brady and Maynard (2010) debate whether or not the role of the sport psychologist is purely performance enhancement, with Maynard arguing that because those involved in sport 'live and die' by 'performance', sport psychologists should adopt the same approach. Brady, on the other hand, argues that successful performance is made more likely by the athlete also having an established sense of personal well-being and that sport psychologists should and do use appropriate processes to support them in this manner. The authors acknowledge that in all likelihood, a sport psychologist will be required to adopt a performance agenda driven by a caring approach to practice. Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) discuss a sport psychologist needing to 'hide' their caring approach within a tough football environment in order to gain entry and 'fit in', but that they are still ultimately driven by the desire to care for the players' overall well-being. Existential psychology suggests that sport psychologists must therefore accept this 'tension', despite the anxiety it can create, and work to practice in congruence with their beliefs and values, which also resonates with the concept of authenticity as previously described (Nesti, 2004). In essence sport psychology practice is about performance *and* care.

All three of the sport psychologists involved in this study also discussed, to varying degrees, aspects of their roll akin to that of an organisational psychologist, and this was also something picked up on by the physicians and coaches. The coaches and physicians interviewed in study one initially highlighted the likelihood and importance of a sport psychologist adopting such a role in ensuring the functional operation of an organisation. For example, one of the physicians discussed how a practitioner they had worked with had a wider remit than that of a sport psychologist and that they worked in more of what they described as a human resources capacity. The physician described part of this role as making

sure things were 'ticking along' within the whole sport science department and acknowledged that they were doing so within a difficult environment. Likewise, one coach emphasised the importance of a sport psychologist 'helping team processes', referring to the wider organisation as the team in this instance. The sport psychologists in this study added detailed, first-hand insight into these roles; what they involve, why they are required, and the associated challenges. SPA and SPB both alluded to the need for a sport psychologist to adopt an organisational psychology-type role and described the varying degree to which they personally engaged with this. SPC's experience was different; they perceived this to be their main role within their organisation (football club). SPC discussed personal qualities in light of the challenges they experienced as a result of taking on this organisational psychology role, whilst acknowledging that they were never fully prepared for such work by their education and training. Nesti (2010) and Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) have also highlighted the inadequate education and training provision on organisational psychology for sport psychologists, and based upon the findings of the research such a focus should be considered essential.

This chapter has shown how a sport psychologist's personal qualities can interact with their unique experiences in practice and provided valuable insight into the often challenging situations a sport psychologist can find themselves in. It was the intention of this chapter to preserve and represent each sport psychologist's individual account of themselves and their practice, but it is now important to generalise and understand the implications and application of these findings to the development and practice of the sport psychology profession. The following chapter will therefore bring together the findings from phases 1 (physicians and coaches) and 2 (sport psychologists) of the research and explore the impact of personal qualities within the professional sport environment on the development of sport psychology

practice, as well as the implications of the findings for the development of sport psychology education and professional training.

## **Chapter 5: Synthesis and critique**

The intention for Chapter 5 is to bring together the findings from the two previous chapters and consider the implications of these. The researcher felt it important to use their skills to illuminate, articulate, and explore the data provided by those working within high level sport as coaches, physicians, and (most importantly) sport psychologists. It was particularly important to consider the ‘impact’ of the research in terms of how the experiences of the practitioners within the research could help inform the future practice of sport psychologists. In recent years, considerable attention has been directed to the routes to becoming a sport psychologist, and the qualifications and training required to achieve accreditation. It is the researcher’s belief that this work can play an important part in the continuing development of these routes, in terms of theoretical knowledge, self-awareness, and the supervisory process. This chapter will therefore present more than just the conceptual and theoretical developments resulting from the research, and the implications of these. It will also endeavour to provide the stimulus and direction for change regarding the education, training and professional practice of sport psychologists.

### **5.1 Revisiting the research aims**

In this chapter, the findings from the coaches, physicians and sport psychologists will be drawn together and considered with regards to the original aims of the research and how they have developed understanding of sport psychology practice and education and training of sport psychologists.

The original aims of the research were as follows:

- 1) Explore the underlying personal qualities exhibited by sport psychology practitioners
- 2) Investigate the impact of personal qualities on sport psychologists’ professional practice in high level sport environments

- 3) Consider the implications of the research findings for sport psychology practice and the education and training of future sport psychologists.

Aims 1 and 2 were addressed through study 1 and 2 by interviewing coaches and sport physicians with extensive experience in their profession as well as of working with sport psychologists. These aims were also explored through long term engagement with 3 UK based sport psychologists which allowed the researcher to gain detailed insight into their personal qualities and how these relate to their professional lives. The third and final aim will be addressed in this current chapter, in light of the findings from chapters 3 and 4. Recommendations will be made for the development of the sport psychology profession with regards to future research and the education and training of future practitioners.

## **5.2 A couple of key points**

The sport psychologists involved in this study were not ‘tested’ for effectiveness. This a) was not the aim of the study, and b) would be incredibly difficult to determine! Rather, all of the practitioners were chosen because they were considered effective based upon the duration of their experience working as sport psychologists and the ‘level’ they had reached within their work. For example, SPC had only been practising for approximately 6 years at the time of data collection, but had been employed full-time at the football club for 3 years and was therefore immersed in that environment on a daily basis. It is also worth noting at this point that each of the sport psychologists should be and were considered as individuals; each is driven by their own philosophy and beliefs about people and practice. Although they may have displayed similar personal qualities, these qualities manifested in different ways within the different environments that each practitioner experienced. To this end, the focus of this research was never about conclusively determining which personal qualities sport psychologists must have to be effective. Rather, the intention was to discover the personal qualities that aided sport psychologists in their work and why, relative to their unique

experiences of their practice contexts and the impact that these qualities can therefore have within their work. Initially coaches and physicians offered in-depth accounts of their perceptions of sport psychologists' effectiveness, but it was then important to work with sport psychology practitioners themselves who were deemed to possess the requisite experience and success. The subsequent focus of the research was therefore to explore the practitioners' personal experiences and reflections and to determine the interaction between personal qualities and practice.

### **5.3 What are personal qualities?**

Personal qualities have been hard to define; no definition existed prior to the commencement of the research and the term itself was not widely used within sport psychology literature. The previous research that has explored what makes sport psychologists effective in their practice describes, in relatively simple terms, the practitioner skills that characterise their work. For example, Anderson et al. (2004) interviewed athletes on their perceptions of sport psychologists, with value being placed on those who were good communicators and who exhibited professional skills. A skill can be considered a particular ability, or "an aptitude that you have put into practice and improved" (Masters & Wallace, 2011, p.374), and can be broken down further into transferable (generic) or technical (specific) skills (Masters & Wallace, 2011). It is argued that previous research has therefore focussed on skill-based effectiveness, rather than personal indicators of effective sport psychologists.

Similarly, it is contended that 'personal qualities' do not represent that which is innate within a sport psychologist, and as such should not be considered personality traits. More appropriate to this definitional debate is the literature on 'virtue', 'qualities' and 'morals', where such terms have been used interchangeably to describe an individual's character. Carr (1998) refers to virtues as 'qualities of character' and, furthermore, qualities such as honesty

and courage have been described as virtues by McNamee (1998) and as aspects of moral character by Jones (2007). There appears to be a strong link between all of these person-oriented constructs and being a 'good' professional. This resonates with the physician from study 1 who described the sport psychologist they knew as possessing 'good human qualities'. As highlighted throughout this research, the field of counselling psychology has long utilised the term 'personal qualities' to describe effective counsellors. The BACP's Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy (2010) includes a section on 'personal moral qualities', which they describe as being of upmost importance to clients and as having an ethical or moral component. According to the BACP, such 'personal moral qualities' include empathy, sincerity, integrity, resilience, humility and courage, and it is clear to see the similarities between these and the findings from this research.

The key aspect within the BACP's publication is their statement that therapists should 'aspire' to these qualities, suggesting that they are neither an innate trait but nor can they be simply 'learned' as a skill. Similarly, the American Psychological Association (2011) states that "resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone" ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)). Furthermore, Killinger (2007) highlights that individuals are not born with integrity, but rather its maintenance depends on the strength of that individual's values and moral choices. The researcher therefore proposes the definition of a personal quality to be an attribute that represents a person's *core self*, and which can relate to a person's morals, values, virtues and beliefs. In applied practice, a personal quality represents a tangible embodiment of a practitioner's core self.

#### **5.4 Important personal qualities for sport psychology practice**

Coaches and physicians highlighted many personal qualities that they perceived effective sport psychologists to possess, which were elaborated upon by the sport

psychologists. All participants also spoke at length about the nature of professional sport environments and how a sport psychologist's personal qualities can interact with these. The personal qualities frequently discussed by the coaches, physicians and psychologists are highlighted and summarised below.

- Humility: Coaches and physicians discussed the quality of humility as essential for the sport psychologist in remaining professional within their practice, and considered this quality to manifest itself in a sport psychologist who did not act the expert and who was therefore able to relate to those around them. The humble sport psychologist does not require praise or even acknowledgement of their good work (SPC), worked for the benefit of the athlete and not because of their ego or to 'get ahead' in their work (SPB), and accepted that theirs was not necessarily the right way to do things (SPA).
- Resilience: Coaches and physicians highlighted the importance of a sport psychologist being secure in themselves, and in the fact that they play a small part in someone else's success. Part of this involved not working to create dependence from the athlete and was considered particularly important considering the 'malevolent' and 'high-pressured' environments that sport psychologists work within. This security of self is related to the resilience described by the sport psychologists, who all believed they possessed a degree of 'inner strength' when questioned in their life history. Again, SPB and SPC in particular spoke extensively of their resilience with regards to their confidence in their knowledge that they do good work, despite the challenges of the professional sport environment in the form of those who actively opposed this work. Resilience is considered to be a product of the social interaction and coping efforts that an individual will make in order to turn potential disasters into opportunities (Maddi, 2004). These efforts are necessary when confronted with a stressful situation,

and relate to the concept of hardiness which Maddi defines as “a set of attitudes that motivate one to respond to stressful circumstances” (2004, p. 280).

- Integrity: One of the physicians spoke of the importance of a sport psychologist being ‘open and honest and decent and fair’, describing these as ‘good human traits’. Based on the definitions of integrity provided earlier in the research, and the BACP’s (2010) definition as “[the] commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence” (p. 4) it would appear that this physician in particular understood the importance of integrity. SPB and SPC both spoke of the importance of integrity in maintaining their good work and ‘doing the right thing’ despite pressures from the environment that challenged this. For example, SPC highlighted the difficulty of doing the right thing and thus maintaining their integrity, when others within the football environment are working for personal gain and actively stopping them from doing their job.
- Authenticity: Coaches and physicians made reference to the concept of authenticity, a quality which could be considered similar to the BACP’s (2010) definition of sincerity; “a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done” (p. 4). Coaches and physicians discussed this quality in relation to staying true to one’s beliefs and ‘sticking to their guns’ which again is difficult within professional sport environments. SPA provided an example of the importance of authenticity and ‘being consistently yourself’ in order to gain others’ trust, and also spoke of the challenges of maintaining this self when, for example, they are a very open individual but that this openness can sometimes cause suspicion.

The sport psychologists also elaborated on their personal qualities relative to their specific working environments. These discussions centred on both the qualities highlighted above as well as some that were additional and/or specific to that individual. When the same personal

quality was mentioned by more than one of the sport psychologists, their discussions reflected the fact that these are 3 very different people operating as sport psychologists within very different environments. How these qualities were developed, who or what they were/are influenced by, and perceptions of what these qualities mean in practice varied significantly between each practitioner. The environment that the sport psychologist worked within had a significant impact on how their personal qualities manifested in practice; this was the case for all 3 practitioners, regardless of the nature of the sport. Each sport psychologist was required to perform within their role whilst balancing the demands of the organisation, particularly in relation to managing other people. Nesti (2010) highlights that there are often a large number of staff in Olympic and national teams, as well as in professional football, each of which environments were represented by SPA, SPB and SPC respectively. Such teams will often appoint performance directors to manage the organisational requirements of the specific environment, but most individuals appointed to these roles do not come from a Human Resources background. This is due to the idiosyncratic nature of the environment, issues surrounding access, and a lack of appreciation of the need for such roles. A sport psychologist will, therefore, often be the individual formally or informally tasked with this role, which may be either embraced or resisted as demonstrated within this research.

## **5.5 Implications for sport psychology practice**

### *5.5.1 Personal qualities*

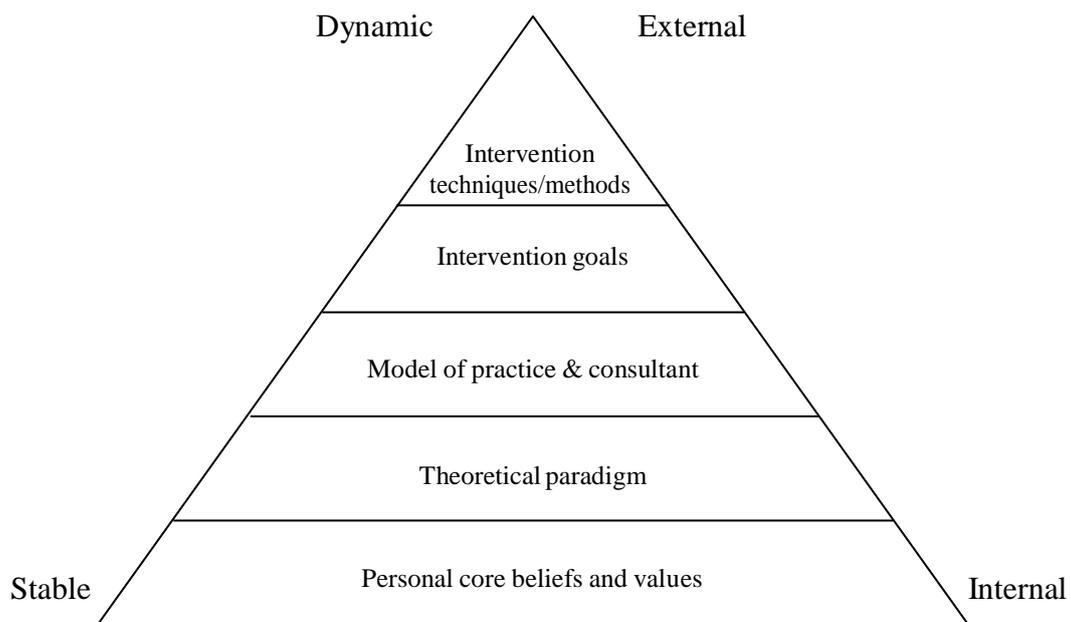
What appears to be a key element of these sport psychologists' reflections and their effectiveness in their work is their level of self-awareness. As aforementioned, the focus of this research was not to determine which personal qualities sport psychologists must have to be effective, but rather those that contributed to a sport psychologist's effectiveness and how they interact with the environment. For example, SPB and SPC both discussed the importance of resilience in maintaining their effectiveness despite the challenges they faced

within their respective roles, supporting the work of Nesti (2004) who stated resilience was required to survive the volatile and arduous environment of professional sport. SPB and SPC articulated this resilience, either explicitly or in their own words, and an awareness of how important this quality was in maintaining their effectiveness under difficult circumstances. This is one example of many; the point that should be emphasised is that by understanding themselves and their personal qualities, the sport psychologists are able to negotiate their way through potential challenges and uncertainties whilst maintaining effectiveness.

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of ‘knowing thyself’ through vigorous self-examination in line with Socratic ideals (Corlett, 1996a). The first author of Lindsay et al. (2007) describes developing a greater awareness of their own beliefs that drove their practice as a sport psychologist and how this enabled them to practice in congruence with these beliefs. Lindsay engaged in a process of self-reflection (and indeed rigorous self-examination) and as a result highlights the importance of a sport psychologist reflecting upon their philosophy of practice and the beliefs and values that drive this. Upon reflection, Lindsay was able to identify where he was ‘going wrong’; Lindsay failed to treat the athlete as a person, initially remaining preoccupied with finding a mental skill to ‘fit’ the athlete’s ‘problem’. One of Lindsay’s beliefs, however, is that athletes’ have rich and varied lives outside of sport, and upon becoming more self-aware of this, he was able to shift his actions when initiating relationships with athletes and thus practice more congruently. This congruence subsequently developed Lindsay’s effectiveness, and this relationship between congruence and effectiveness is also reflected in the examples provided by the sport psychologists in the current study. In knowing themselves and their qualities, the sport psychologists in the current research were able to identify when they were at their most effective, but also when this effectiveness was compromised. Kyndt and Rowell (2012) state that self-awareness is not about changing, but about understanding oneself and adapting

behaviour to remain congruent with beliefs and values and, as per the beliefs of the researcher, personal qualities. Therefore, by enhancing self-awareness of their personal qualities, the sport psychologist may be better placed to respond to given situations within their practice.

This congruence will almost certainly be challenged by the environment, and sport psychologists must therefore understand the nature of professional sport environments and potentially be able to ‘predict’ how they as a person and a practitioner will ‘fit in’. This requires us to revisit the Poczwadowski et al. (2004) hierarchical model of professional philosophy and consider how this could be explored to further understand personal qualities in sport psychology practice (see figure 1 below). Poczwadowski and colleagues’ model is an excellent representation of how a practitioner’s core philosophical beliefs are developed and implemented into their practice. It posits that the lower and more stable layers of the model will in turn influence the layers above, with each layer becoming more dynamic and fluid. Based on the findings of this research, an adaptation to the model has been proposed that includes personal qualities and the sport environment.



**Figure 1. Hierarchical structure of professional philosophy (Poczwadowski et al., 2004)**

Poczwardowski et al. (2004) stated within their article that additional examination that delves deeper into these philosophical issues is necessary to advance the standards of sport psychology education and training and, eventually, guide practice within the profession. Considering the findings of the research, and the development of a definition and understanding of personal qualities, it is conceivable that the above model could be expanded to incorporate the notion of personal qualities and begin to address the recommendations made by Poczwardowski et al. Personal qualities would sit within the bottom layer as internal (representative of the person) and relatively stable (developmental but enduring) aspects of a sport psychology practitioner. SPB provides the best example of how this could be conceptualised in practice given their detailed discussions around their own philosophy of practice relative to their personal qualities. SPB's sport psychology practice is driven by a humanistic philosophy and they place great importance on the quality of the relationship they have with athletes. One of SPB's personal qualities reflected in their philosophical beliefs is humility, as they believe everybody has a lot to offer and that an athlete is the expert on themselves. Here we can see how SPB's quality of humility can be incorporated into the bottom layer of the model, and how it influences the next layer of 'theoretical paradigm'. SPB went on to discuss their role and methods of working with athletes in relation to the upper layers of the model, but also (as did all participants) spoke of the challenges of operating within professional sport. The environment and organisational context of the sport is represented by the circle, which interacts with each layer of the model.

According to the model by Poczwardowski et al., the implementation of a sport psychologist's core philosophical beliefs into practice through goals and interventions is represented by the more dynamic and external components. In SPB's case, their personal quality of humility drives their humanistic philosophy, which in turn sees SPB create a quality relationship with the athlete. Their goals and methods are reflected by their work in a

one to one role with the athlete, and facilitate the athlete's development by helping them to come to their own solution in line with their belief that the athlete is the expert on themselves. However, SPB also discussed the difficulty of practising in congruence with these humanistic beliefs and being able to take the time to develop quality relationships with athletes because of the performance demands of the organisation. So, in accordance with the model, a sport psychologist may have clearly defined personal and philosophical beliefs, and be aware of how their personal qualities relate to these, but in addition one must consider that the practitioner's work can be impacted by the environment they are in. As previously stated, Poczwardowski and colleagues' model is an excellent representation of professional philosophy, but what also needs to be taken into consideration is the significant impact of the context within which the sport psychologist is working, which can often pose a challenge to the philosophy being adopted and thus affect the other layers of the model. For example, SPC spoke of the difficulty of maintaining their integrity and practising in congruence with their beliefs about doing the right thing, and the researcher would argue that whilst no sport psychologist could predict every situation that they are likely to experience in practice, it is reasonable to suggest that these situations can be prepared for.

### *5.5.2 Organisational psychology*

Based on the findings of this research, it is important that sport psychologists are not only highly self-aware of their personal qualities and how they relate to their practice in professional sport environments; they must also understand exactly what these environments are like and be aware that they may be required to operate in a role more akin to that of an organisational psychologist. In some instances, as was SPC's experience, this may evolve into their predominant role and sport psychologists must understand how to operate successfully within it. Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) suggest that it is in the interest of sport psychologists to develop their knowledge in this manner as they have great potential to

influence organisational change. It is also important to consider that in the professional football environment central to SPC's work, the need for the sport psychologists to develop knowledge in other areas, such as organisational psychology, is important if they are to address the range of organisational issues and environmental demands that arise, often on a frequent basis (Nesti, 2010). The importance of organisational psychology is therefore significant for all sport psychology practitioners, yet also highly dependent on the respective environment. Because of their immersion within this environment and the impact this had on their role and everyday practice, SPC's case study centred mostly on the culture of the football environment, which they described as reactive, closed to change, and 'every man for themselves'. SPA and SPB did discuss the organisational structure of the sports they worked within, and features of their work such as managing relationships with colleagues, but not in a way that focussed on the specific culture of these environments. This may be because the organisational culture had less of an impact on their day to day work, or that the organisations were far more functional environments and SPA and SPB were therefore able to focus on other aspects of their practice.

As a sport psychologist who was been required to perform in an organisational psychology-type role within football, SPC is one example of a practitioner who has embraced this requirement. They describe their organisational role as developing over time due to their personal interests and strengths, as well as in response to the demands of the environment. However, this was not a role that they had been prepared for. Rather, SPC found themselves learning as they went, and it would likely have been of benefit to them to have been provided with insight into how to operate in an organisational role prior to their employment. SPC in particular also spoke of the difficulties of managing conflict within professional sport and that a lot of the organisational psychology-type work that they are required to carry out is as a result of this. Football as a sport culture is characterised by a short-term focus on achieving

immediate results (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007), and as a performance-focussed and highly pressured environment (Nesti, 2010). Such pressure breeds conflict, and SPC was required to operate within an organisational role to manage staff relationships and endeavour to direct staff towards a common goal for organisational success.

It is also worth noting that although all three practitioners described the merits and likelihood of operating within an organisational psychology-type role, SPB did not want to perform in this role or feel capable of doing so. SPB described the culture of the environment they worked within as being performance-focussed, which conflicted with their own caring, humanistic approach at times. It was for this reason that they resisted the organisational role, choosing instead to focus on their one-to-one work rather than colleagues' and athletes' requests for them to 'sort out' their individual problems. However, these problems did not occur as frequently for SPB as for SPC, and were less likely to be driven by a fundamental problem with the culture of the organisation. SPB described a number of reasons why they chose not to address such organisational problems, including the need to maintain a balanced view of the organisation and an unbiased attitude towards colleagues and athletes. They also believed that the expectations of the individual who came to them with the problem were beyond their actual capabilities to deal with the situation and that this could therefore cause a breakdown in their working relationship, which SPB held as particularly important to their humanistic practice. Kwiatkowski and Winter (2006) state the following:

Occupational psychologists always have to start, perhaps in a quasi-humanistic way, with an understanding of the client sitting in front of them. This is very reminiscent of Rogers' work in the counselling arena. However, one must also recognize that there is not one but a number of clients within an organizational setting (managers and employees at its simplest, but also owners, investors, shareholders, lenders, regulators, pressure groups) with whom a 'licence to operate' must be sought (p. 165)

This is particularly representative of SPB's experiences, who by their own admission operates within a humanistic framework of sport psychology practice but also has to work

alongside a myriad of 'senior' individuals within their sport, all with competing ideas. SPB therefore recognised that their effectiveness lies in one-to-one consultations with athletes rather than working to address organisational issues, which relates back to the importance of self-awareness of one's personal qualities and practising in line with one's beliefs.

SPA was happy to adopt an organisational psychology role when required, but was very pragmatic in recognising that sometimes the features of the environment that demanded such a role would be the very reason that prevented them from effecting change. SPA alluded to the cultures of the environments they worked within when discussing the organisational changes proposed by the wider national organisation. Such changes were therefore requested by this organisation to be filtered down into individual sports, yet the culture of the individual sport had the potential to make implementing these changes difficult for SPA. They cited the need to consistently perform under pressures from this organisation and to address issues with the extended support team, but if the sport resisted this work they were happy to take a step back. They were therefore happy to perform their traditional sport psychologist role and to work in an organisational capacity, as well as in other roles, as and when required and as dictated by the receptivity of the sport.

The message therefore is that sport psychologists are frequently required to adopt an organisational psychology-type role based on the demands and culture of the sport that they are working within. Whether a sport psychologist embraces such a role is dependent on their own perceived expertise and interest; SPC embraced the need for organisational psychology, and SPB resisted it, but ultimately both are effective in their work. It is also dependent on what is required by the organisation and whether or not the psychologist can 'survive' in the environment based upon their willingness to engage. For example, it is arguable that SPB would not survive in SPC's environment of professional football because they are not comfortable within an organisational role and therefore would not wish to address the issues

arising from the culture within the football club. Although SPC could have chosen not to take on this role, the likelihood is that the football club could and would have found somebody else to do so. Such organisational psychology-type roles also need to be understood relative to the culture that sport psychologists work within, and each practitioner described their individual engagement with these roles. This is captured well within Kwiatkowski and Winter's (2006) statement that "occupational psychologists' implicit understanding of the world has, of necessity, always been a complex one. Much of the organizational world is relative; what is 'sound practice' in one context may be manifestly 'bad practice' in another" (p. 162). The researcher therefore believes that the responsibility should lie with education and training providers in ensuring that future sport psychologists understand what to expect with regards to the culture and demands of professional sport environments and how to survive within an organisational role.

Based on the findings of this research, and the previous discussions, the researcher therefore believes there to be two fundamental issues that need to be addressed with regards to the education and training of applied practitioners:

- **Deepening** - no matter what a sport psychologist's individual personal qualities are, they must be aware of them and how they impact upon their practice. Neophyte sport psychologists must be provided with the opportunity and support to develop this awareness. The importance of self-awareness and self-knowledge has been previously highlighted with regards to professional philosophy (Lindsay et al., 2007; Poczwardowski et al., 2004). Cropley et al. (2007) has clarified these terms by describing the need to possess an awareness of self-knowledge for effective practice, thus suggesting that sport psychologists must firstly understand who they are and then subsequently remain cogent of this in practice. This awareness of self-knowledge must now be extended to include personal qualities.

- **Broadening** – sport psychologists require a thorough understanding of their potential roles, and therefore the realities of professional sport environments and the relevance of organisational psychology. It has been acknowledged that sport psychologists may not possess the competencies or authority to address organisational issues (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2010), so how can we best prepare sport psychologists for an organisational psychologist type role in a difficult working environment?

## **5.6 Implications for education and training**

### *5.6.1 Personal qualities*

Current education and training routes for sport psychologists in the UK were detailed in chapter 2. The majority of sport psychologists will undertake a relevant 3 year undergraduate degree, followed by a postgraduate programme in sport psychology and a period of supervised practice. In theory, this process provides plenty of opportunity to incorporate content that could facilitate the development of future sport psychologists' self-awareness of their personal qualities and their exploration of these in relation to applied practice. Lindsay et al. (2007) have stated their belief that “during a practitioner’s development, reflecting on their own personal beliefs and values is vital and should, therefore, form a fundamental part of any training program, along with any certification or accreditation scheme” (p. 349). In addition, Jones (2007) highlights that “a programme of [sport psychology] education more broadly conceived is required which moves beyond the teaching and practice of ‘the tools of the trade’...to the development of practitioners of good character” (p. 42). Finally, and although this research was not concerned with humanistic philosophies of sport psychology practice specifically, such approaches do resonate with the notion of the ‘practitioner as a person’. The first author in Gilbourne and Richardson’s (2006) article reflects on their experiences as a sport psychology practitioner, and states that

“humanistic thinking offers holistic perspectives on the human condition and provides comment on how people strive and survive in a challenging world. I increasingly wonder if aspiring sport psychologists suffer (in their applied experiences) when their professional knowledge is dominated by a curriculum with little room (or sympathy) for literature of this nature”. The current researcher concurs with these statements, and that such recommended programmes should incorporate said reflection and promote self-awareness of one’s personal qualities.

Tod (2007) believes that the field of sport psychology could learn a lot from that of counselling psychology with regards to the development of its own practitioners, particularly in terms of the stages of practitioner development. Although this may certainly be of relevance, the focus in this research is how these personal qualities can be developed through education and training overall. The BACP’s (2010) Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy details several values, principles and personal qualities that a practitioner should aspire to. The framework states that “values inform principles. They represent an important way of expressing a general ethical commitment that becomes more precisely defined and action-orientated when expressed as a principle” (p. 2). As stated in the framework, a practitioner should value enhancing the quality of relationships between people which could be expressed as the principle of beneficence, which the BACP describes as “a commitment to promoting the client’s well-being” (p. 3). It has long been considered that the efficacy of the therapeutic relationship is dependent on the quality of the relationship between practitioner and client, and that the practitioner’s personal qualities are of great significance in developing this relationship (Corey, 2009). The BACP state that many of these personal qualities have an ethical or moral component, and based upon the findings of this research, the researcher would argue that these personal qualities play an important part in informing

the expression of values and principles in practice, akin to the experiences described by the sport psychologists.

In terms of the development of these personal qualities, the BACP state that “it is inappropriate to prescribe that all practitioners possess these qualities, since it is fundamental that these personal qualities are deeply rooted in the person concerned and developed out of personal commitment rather than the requirement of an external authority” (p. 4). Rather, practitioners are encouraged to ‘aspire’ to these qualities, and it is this notion in part that informed the definition of personal qualities that was developed. Interestingly, many of the personal qualities highlighted by the BACP were identical or similar to those discussed by the coaches, physicians and psychologists in this study, for example sincerity, integrity, resilience, humility and courage. Encouragingly, Jones (2007) has recognised the importance of academic and practising sport psychologists understanding the role of moral character and the virtues of trust, integrity and courage. This requires a broader understanding of professionals, their roles and the moral implications of their roles, including duties and obligations, but also a genuine consideration of the character education of professionals within training.

This deeper understanding is beginning to develop, although there is still some way to go with regards to both sport psychology literature and practice. According to Nesti (2010), one factor that has contributed to the ‘wait’ for this type of content to emerge within the literature is that sport psychology has previously been conceptualised only as a natural science, rather than a human one. Giorgi (1970) as cited in Nesti (2010) believes that psychology is a human science, as it focusses on the perceptions and subjective meaning that individuals attach to events and situations. Strict cause-and-effect relationships do not exist in human activities, particularly in sport, and this critical perspective adopted in sport can be perceived as more authentically academic than that adopted by some researchers in

universities (Nesti, 2010). As outlined at the outset of this thesis, the researcher describes the importance of conducting research that acknowledges the complexity and idiosyncratic nature of sport and the psychology practitioners that work in this environment, and that work of this type gets published to develop the applied literature base.

The medical profession has also gone some way in exploring how specific personal qualities can be developed in its practitioners, which is of relevance considering the similarities between this and the sport psychology profession discussed in chapter 3. For example, Anderson-Juarez, Marvel, Brezinski, Garner, Towbin, and Lawton (2006) explored the development of cultural humility in physicians, an approach which “cultivates self-awareness by encouraging physicians to acknowledge the belief systems and cultural values they bring to patient encounters” (p. 98). This was achieved through, for example, improving the physicians’ relationship-centred interviewing skills and engaging them in guided discussions on book chapters related to the quality being developed. They were also encouraged to make home visits to patients, and to talk about the patient’s personal life which was non-medical in focus and therefore allowed the patient to be the ‘expert’. This resonates with findings from the current research regarding humility as a quality of an effective sport psychologist and how it relates to respecting the athlete as the expert on themselves. Novack, Epstein, and Paulsen (1999) also discuss the notion that “healing draws on physicians’ ‘humanistic’ qualities of integrity, respect, and compassion” and that “a number of medical schools are currently reforming their curricula to adopt a more integrative, humanistic approach to education” (p. 516). Akin to Tod and Andersen’s (2005) statement that the sport psychologist is the ‘tool’ in their interventions, Novack et al. state that “healing involves physicians using themselves as diagnostic and therapeutic instruments, and self-awareness facilitates this process by making available to the physician ‘tacit knowledge’ tapped from personal emotions, experience, and perceptions” (p. 517). They believe it important for a

physician to possess a high level of self-knowledge and therefore the ability to articulate their beliefs and philosophical views about life, as well as in relation to their goals in practice. Novack et al. go on to highlight one university programme of medical study that includes exercises to help students reflect on how their families and cultures have influenced their attitudes and motivations.

The current research has addressed this in an exploratory capacity, in that it has encouraged sport psychology practitioners to reflect upon their own experiences, beliefs, and qualities, and articulate these in relation to their applied practice. The life histories, for example, allowed the sport psychologists to consider their personal backgrounds and how they are influenced by these in the present day. The in-depth data obtained from the sport psychologists in this research suggests that reflective diaries and life histories are potentially powerful tools in the development of self-awareness of personal qualities. Perhaps of greatest importance is the following quote from Novack et al., which states that a medical school curriculum “has a responsibility not only to the students’ present education but to their future process of future education. Self-awareness skills need to be planted as seeds to later development, and structures for acquiring these skills are clearly needed” (1999, p. 519).

It is suggested that sport psychology education and training providers can learn much from counselling psychology and the medical profession to inform their undergraduate and taught postgraduate (MSc.) programme content in this regard. Lectures that examine the relevant sport and counselling psychology personal qualities literature, and workshops, that encourage students to reflect upon themselves and their personal qualities in helping them to address hypothetical scenarios in applied sport psychology represent just some curricula suggestions that engage an awareness of personal qualities at an early stage of training. Moreover, many students on sport-related undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes are now given the opportunity to undertake work-related learning, and some

may be given a controlled and supervised experience of doing applied sport psychology in the real world of sport whilst on placement. This represents an opportunity to help students reflect on their experiences to generate insightful discussions on their work *and* how it is informed by ‘who they are’.

Following the completion of accredited sport psychology undergraduate and Masters degrees, some graduates will embark on their final stage of professional training to become HCPC Registered Sport Psychologists. Trainees engaged in supervised practice are required to explore, develop and evidence their professional practice philosophy and model of approach to consultancy, and to engage in and document their reflections on practice. It is suggested that this should include consideration of the congruence between practice philosophy and personal core beliefs and values, and how the trainee sport psychologist’s own personal qualities inform and interact with their practice. This is an important component of the training process (and the assessment of the trainee), and therefore implicates the supervisor in encouraging exploration of these key underpinning aspects of practice, providing guidance and support along the way.

Considering the similarities highlighted between the sport and counselling psychology professions, it is worth noting the following extract from Bury and Strauss (2006) who state that “the therapist’s role as collaborative helper is considered crucial, as is the reflexivity afforded through on-going supervision” (p. 121). A trainee counsellor’s supervisor is considered ‘crucial’ in affording them the opportunity to explore their role, which is informed by who they are as a person, or their personal qualities (Corey, 2009). The supervisory process needs to focus on developing a trainee sport psychologist’s understanding of self and self-in-practice through Socratic dialogue and asking important questions of one’s philosophy (Corlett, 1996a). By encouraging such dialogue, the supervisor can encourage the required rigorous self-examination and development of self-knowledge highlighted within the Socratic

approach, therefore allowing the supervisee to learn something that becomes part of them. Eubank and Hudson (2013) have discussed the importance of the supervisor in this regard and the role that they can play in supporting trainee sport psychologists who are often uncertain about the philosophies that underpin their applied practice. In supporting the trainee to explore their philosophy, a supervisor will also be encouraging “activity that explores the personal core values, beliefs and qualities that ground it” (Eubank & Hudson, 2013, p. 65). Nesti (2004) provides an account of an existential approach to the supervision of a trainee sport psychologist, stating that a supervisor operating in this way “constantly strives to attend to the key elements of authenticity, presence and empathy whilst maintaining a focus of the lived experience of the supervisee” (p. 85). Nesti discusses how the supervisee began to reflect on their own skills and qualities as a practitioner, as well as discussing aspects of their work in relation to their broader personal identity, and in doing so was encouraged to focus on increasing their self-awareness and self-knowledge. Nesti also states that “the role of the supervisor is always to help the supervisee to develop courage to move ahead in spite of feelings of anxiety and even despair” (2004, p. 89), feelings that were experienced and discussed by the sport psychologists within the current research.

The suggestion, therefore, is that supervisors offer guidance for trainee sport psychologists in considering their personal qualities, and that this would (hopefully) encourage the practitioner to pursue this guidance themselves throughout their career. Nesti (2004) also discusses the supervision of a sport psychologist who was working within professional football, and who characterised their club much in the same way as SPC did theirs; resistance from staff and players; negativity, abrasiveness, immaturity and criticism; and personal resentment towards the sport psychologist because of their enthusiasm and hard work in comparison to the general ‘apathetic and complacent behaviour’ of colleagues. The key dilemma for the sport psychologist was in how they could stay true to their values of

integrity and honesty in an environment that is inherently dishonest and selfish, which again resonates with the experiences of SPC. The sport psychologist discussed by Nesti (2004) discovered that the only way to ‘survive’ within this environment was to know who they were and what they stood for, and spent a large amount of time reflecting on their work with their supervisor and questioning their role and core values. Supervisors should be required to explore such issues with their supervisees at the trainee level, and thus possess the ability to do so for experienced practitioners. By being allowed to reflect on their practice in such a way, sport psychologists will be provided with someone who could empathise with them, which is of great importance to those practitioners who are isolated or operating in new and/or personally challenging environments (Nesti, 2004).

The assumption here is that supervisors have themselves considered their own personal qualities in relation to professional practice philosophy. However, as suggested by Eubank and Hudson (2013), it would seem ambitious at this point to suggest that all sport psychology supervisors should be ‘taught’ how to encourage their supervisees to explore these aspects of practice, especially when an understanding of what is meant by personal qualities is still being developed within the profession. However, the one-to-one relationship that exists between supervisor and supervisee would appear to be the perfect opportunity to explore ‘core self’. SPB (also an experienced supervisor) highlighted that with regards to their supervisees, “I encourage them not to produce four people that are practically the same as me...don’t copy what I do, create yourself”, and the current research suggests that this could be achieved or promoted by focussing on the individual’s personal qualities. Another quote from SPB emphasises the importance of developing education and training provision in this regard and the inherent relationship between self-awareness and personal qualities:

Education and training...I think that’s a given, I think there has to be a basic standard, but I also think it doesn’t matter how many certificates you have and how many degrees you’ve got, if you haven’t got the personal qualities

you're not going to get anywhere...if you've got those personal qualities, you're reflective and self-aware and self-confident and you make better use of [your experience]

### *5.6.2 Organisational psychology*

As highlighted by the findings of this study, there would appear to be value in exposing trainee sport psychologists to organisational psychology concepts, and providing detailed knowledge regarding the realities of working within professional sport during their education and training. It has been argued that the emerging organisational literature within sport psychology, and indeed sport psychology education and training programmes, focus too heavily upon skill-based psychological interventions rather than the development of the role-related qualities and competencies of the practitioner, therefore failing to adequately prepare individuals who may be required to fulfil organisational roles (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2004). This perceived lack of expertise relates to additional comments that SPC made about the suitability of sport psychologists' education and training in preparing them for a Human Resources-type role, which they described as 'pretty poor'.

SPA offered a slightly different perspective to SPB and SPC in that their role was far more varied but also more structured in terms of what was expected of them. SPB described how they had little role clarity and resisted taking on an organisational role, instead choosing to focus on what they are comfortable with and what they are good at; one-to-one sessions with athletes driven by their humanistic philosophy. It cannot be stated that should SPB have been provided with adequate training they would have more willingly taken on an organisational role (arguably this would have been unlikely based on their discussions of their strengths and personal beliefs about helping people). However it does raise an important question regarding how practitioners can be prepared for such a role, or indeed recognising when this is not for them. This relates to SPC's belief that there are 3 distinct types of role that a sport psychologist can operate within:

In my head...psychology is counselling, mental skills or organisational, and mental skills sits in coaching, so it's about education and development, I think counselling is a very specific set of skills, a lot to do with empathy and listening and so on, and the organisational stuff is probably more what I'm interested in, putting things in place, all psychology-related and impacts the mentality and behaviours of people...the counselling skills, I don't really do enough of it, I don't read around it, I don't enjoy it as much as I enjoy some of the other stuff, so I do it, but I don't do much of it...I don't think my role now allows me to do that, I think there's a very external person who can do that sort of work, whereas because I'm in a tracksuit, I speak to the manager, I speak to admin, all that, I think I've kind of gone too far to do a lot of that work, and I probably perceive myself that that's not what I want to do either.

SPC's practice evolved and saw them adopting an organisational role due to a combination of the demands of the sport (football) environment and their expertise and interest. They also highlight, based on their immersed position within the team, that it would be difficult to operate in a counselling psychology-type role and that this would be better suited to a practitioner external to the organisation. Perhaps, therefore, there are 2 aspects to sport psychologist education and training in organisational psychology. The first is developing an understanding of the environment that the sport psychologist may find themselves operating within, and to include knowledge of professional relationships, organisational culture, leadership and organisational change. Secondly, sport psychologists must be knowledgeable of how to perform this role should it be taken on. This must include an understanding of what would be required of them in relation to the features listed above and how they as a person can manage this, but equally an understanding of how they can remain successful should they resist the organisational role. Occasionally a sport psychologist may need to balance this decision with the likelihood that should they consistently resist the organisational role, they may no longer be considered employable! By educating sport psychologists as to the requirements of this organisational role, practitioners may be able to develop an understanding to inform their judgement of the individual environment and whether such a role is the one they should or must adopt.

Emphasis is again placed on the individual sport psychologist's self-awareness and understanding of themselves in a given environment. This engages all aspects of a sport psychologist with regards to the hierarchical model of professional philosophy proposed by Poczwadowski et al. and the proposed adaptations based upon the findings of this thesis. The reflections from the three sport psychologists in this research have highlighted that they are each highly aware of 'who they are' (the bottom layer of personal core beliefs, values and qualities) and how this relates to their ability to operate within an organisational role (the middle layer of model of practice & consultant role). SPC, for example, was very secure in their level of integrity and maintained their desire to do the right thing. They reflected that this was essential in driving good practice and moving forward within the football environment and that they felt comfortable in this role. On the other hand, SPB was acutely aware that even though the scope for a sport psychologist to adopt an organisational role exists, they did not feel qualified to do so, or have any real interest in trying. Rather, SPB reflected on their personal qualities and humanistic beliefs, realising that they were better suited to and received greater enjoyment from working with athletes on a one-to-one basis.

Based on the self-awareness demonstrated by both, it could be argued that SPC possessed the personal qualities to be effective within an organisational psychology role, such as resilience when adapting to the prevalence of and in dealing with staff conflict. It is not necessarily the case that SPB did not possess the qualities to aid them in this role; indeed, resilience *was* identified as a quality of theirs. Rather, SPB used their personal qualities to affect success in a more traditional, one-to-one role, and in particular discussed the role their resilience plays in their ability to balance this role with demands in their personal life. SPA's reflections suggested that they were able to operate within both a traditional sport psychology role as well as an organisational one. However, they were also working within their organisation's established multidisciplinary support structure with a more clearly defined job

description, which may explain their ability to switch between roles as required. Sport psychology education and training should promote self-reflection in students and trainees that allows them to explore the specific roles they could be most suited to and how they would manage a situation whereby the demands of the environment do not align with one's personal strengths and preferences, as encountered by SPB, to ensure their effectiveness is maintained.

There also needs to be greater consideration afforded to the content of sport psychologist education in particular in terms of what organisational psychology is. While sport psychologists currently receive education and training in philosophy and understanding people, this is, in essence, with regards to addressing 'traditional' sport psychology issues i.e. poor motivation. The following quote from Sparrow and West (2002) illustrates how this understanding of people must be coupled with organisational understanding for success:

Organizations are not simply buildings or products or cultures or traditions. They are all of those things of course. But most fundamentally, they are groupings of human beings working together (more or less) to achieve often overlapping and sometimes shared goals. It is the management of their human needs, the release of their creativity, the co-ordination of their efforts and the creation of co-operative and effective communities that determines the productivity of organizations (pp. 35-36).

Sport psychologists, therefore, must not only understand 'traditional' sport psychology but be able to translate this to understand how people operate in the context of a professional sport organisation, as described in detail by SPC. It makes increasing sense that sport psychologists should find themselves operating in this organisational role considering Kwiatkowski and Winter's (2009) statement:

In the UK many occupational psychologists work 'undercover' in jobs without any mention of psychology in the title, with few colleagues ever realizing their background, only knowing that they are very effective in solving organizational problems. This is actually a return to many of the fundamental beliefs and methods upon which occupational psychology was founded – good scientists acting on the world and gaining credibility by understanding people (e.g. often doing the jobs themselves) and knowing organizations, by being practical, accessible and helpful; all founded on a fundamentally humanistic position

backed up with rigorous science expertly rendered relevant to the context (p. 171-2).

Arguably, all psychologists ‘act on the world’ and ‘gain credibility by understanding people’, and it was certainly the experience of the sport psychologists in this research that they were expected to do so in an organisational sense. The field of sport psychology therefore needs to ‘borrow’ from organisational psychology in terms of how the latter educates and trains its practitioners, and this borrowed knowledge should be applied to the unique nature of professional sport environments.

Typically, mainstream psychology degree programmes offer a module on organisational psychology, with a greater focus on the subject offered through postgraduate programmes of study. However, it is unlikely, and certainly not mandatory, that a sport psychologist would be exposed to organisational psychology to a similar degree on the taught programmes that precede their supervised practice, the final dimension of training that leads to HCPC registration. The problem therefore is that sport psychologists, based on current programmes of education, could feasibly be registered to practice without any exposure to organisational psychology. It is suggested that the current accreditation criteria for M.Sc. programmes in sport psychology should include components that require students to explore, for example, social relationships and dynamics within sports teams and organisations, and that focus on organisational culture and how this can impact a sport psychologist’s work in developing athletes. Such a focus should also be adopted by supervisors when working with their trainees to develop a comprehensive understanding of applied practice. Eubank, Lafferty and Hudson (2013) facilitated a recent workshop at the BPS’ Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology Conference, which focussed on the realities of the sport environment and how the culture of an organisation can impact upon sport psychology practice. Eubank et al. state that a practitioner’s failure to understand and/or consider the sport culture will impact upon their ability to be effective in their work, and that experiencing these cultures for the first time can

be daunting and challenging for neophyte practitioners. Eubank et al. (2014) believe that supervisors of trainee sport psychologists must be more cognisant of organisational psychology and its value in applied sport psychology practice. This supervisor will ideally possess both theoretical and experiential knowledge of organisational psychology to help them operate as an 'active guide' rather than a 'passive listener' for their supervisee. Kyndt and Rowell (2012) have also highlighted the importance of the supervisor in enhancing a trainee sport psychologist's reflective practice and, subsequently, self-awareness. This will subsequently aid practitioners in consciously defining themselves in accordance with personal core values and motivations to subsequently inform congruent and effective practice (Kyndt & Rowell, 2012).

Based on the findings from this research, it is clear how exposure to such material would benefit sport psychologists, in particular those such as SPC who have found themselves working as an organisational psychologist, and who had to use their knowledge of the sport and understanding of psychology, but without ever being formally educated or trained in how to operate in that role. Sport psychology education and training has expanded in recent years to incorporate counselling psychology, and the same should now be the case for organisational psychology. As a result, sport psychologists will be better prepared to enter into the sporting world, armed with a broad understanding of organisational processes as well as the required understanding of sport psychology. It would be ideal, should students be exposed to this content at an education level, that they then take this knowledge with them to inform their 'practice under supervision' learning and development. This would allow trainee sport psychologists to combine their sport, counselling and organisational psychology knowledge with a developing ability to reflect upon and understand themselves in the context of practising in professional sport.

## **5.7 Where now for sport psychology?**

Based on the findings of the research, there is a strong case for revisiting and potentially revising the education and training routes for sport psychologists. The recommendation here is not for drastic and wholesale change of the current options available to those with aspirations of practice within the discipline. In particular what this research has highlighted is how essential an understanding of the environment and the self-in-environment is for effective sport psychology practice and therefore exposure to these is of considerable benefit. This does not need to be exposure as a practitioner who is physically present within a sport environment or organisation; specifically in terms of education and training this exposure could be achieved by studying alongside those from other sport science disciplines, or sport psychology modules that apply the parent discipline in context. Whatever the method of exposure, future practitioners should be encouraged to consider their work in the wider context of a team or organisation's culture, and with regards to multidisciplinary sport science support. The aforementioned recommendations regarding an increased focus on counselling and organisational psychology within sport psychologist education are important, but this theoretical knowledge alone will remain 'useless' without the application to sport.

Currently there exists three 'types' of student who could feasibly progress to becoming sport psychologists. There are those who have spent three years studying a psychology degree and who are therefore permitted to pursue accreditation with the BPS and practice under the title sport psychologist, yet who potentially have little or no prior experience of sport (at least as a product of the completion of their undergraduate studies). They will most likely have covered the core disciplines of counselling and organisational psychology, but are they able to apply these in context? The second group of students will be those who have spent three years studying for a sport science degree and are therefore permitted to pursue accreditation with BASES as a sport scientist. Such students will have

less knowledge of core psychology but arguably be better placed to understand the psychology they have studied in the wider context of sport environments. The final group will be students who have studied in more recent years on sport psychology programmes accredited by the BPS, who can therefore train with them and who possess the most balanced understanding of both psychology and sport. It is worth noting at this point that it is only those students who pursue BPS Chartership who can register with the HCPC.

The case that is being put forward here is not one that seeks to find a solution for the sport science students who cannot pursue BPS accreditation and HCPC registration based on their undergraduate degree alone. The researcher recognises that given they fall into this category, it would be easy to do so and for a reader to perceive this section in this way! However, the ultimate aim is to ensure that all practitioners, whatever their route to accreditation, are suitably knowledgeable and prepared for effective practice. The researcher argues that for entry onto the HCPC register, a sport psychologist should be able to demonstrate competence across sport (context), sport science (basic knowledge of other disciplines), sport psychology, and psychology, yet arguably even after studying a postgraduate programme in sport psychology, the psychology students would be deficient in sport, and the sport students deficient in psychology. Considering this in relation to personal qualities, let us take empathy as an example. The BACP (2010) define empathy as “the ability to communicate understanding of another person’s experience from that person’s perspective” (p. 4) yet the data generated from this thesis suggests that empathy relates to a sport psychologist’s more global understanding of the environment they are working within. Is a sport psychologist empathic because they have studied psychology, a discipline in which empathy has long been considered as important for effective practice? Or is a sport psychologist empathic as a result of being exposed to and therefore understanding and appreciating sport environments and other sport science disciplines? It is feasible that this

long-standing association of empathy, and indeed personal qualities, with psychology, has led to its inadvertent monopoly over the concept of personal qualities and self-awareness. However, this does not guarantee that, for example, empathy has been developed by those who have trained within psychology any more so than those within sport science, or how aware the individual is of their empathic quality.

Empathy, by its very definition, relates to an individual's ability to communicate their understanding of another person's experience from their perspective. Perhaps a sport science student would be better placed to understand an athlete's experience based upon their own knowledge developed through their wider study of the context of sport and other sport science disciplines? Indeed, the psychology student may have a better grasp of appropriate psychological interventions to utilise with the athlete after a relationship had been established and their needs analysed, but would they reach the intervention stage at all? Empathy is cited as a key quality in developing therapeutic relationships in counselling psychology (Rogers, 1957), yet it is ironic that perhaps this empathy is developed not within the confines of psychology study, but in the 'real world' of sport. Empathy is just one example. What has hopefully been articulated is the relevance of the sport psychologist's educational background to their personal qualities and how they are developed, alongside an understanding of the environment in which these qualities are 'brought to life'. Those responsible for educating future sport psychologists within the UK must consider whether, in all honesty, this knowledge is being addressed sufficiently through programmes of study.

Those individuals who have studied a sport psychology programme and who are most favourably placed in terms of overall knowledge of both psychology and sport are not exempt from considerations regarding their education, however. The information provided previously regarding how education and training programmes could be developed applies to any future practitioner, as do the following recommendations regarding the supervisor's role throughout

this process. The supervisory process could be revisited by the relevant organisations to ensure that when under supervision, trainee sport psychologists are encouraged to reflect not just on their work, but on who they are as people in practice. Eubank et al. (2014) highlight that whether current training routes adequately prepare sport psychologists for the realities of the workplace is not clear, and that the quality of this training is largely dependent on the quality of the supervisor. Eubank et al. (2014) have further elaborated on the need for sport psychologists to develop their understanding of self, and the importance of their personal qualities in maintaining effectiveness in challenging environments. Away from the success and enjoyment, Eubank et al. describe how sport can be an unforgiving environment characterised by the need to address conflict, disagreement, misunderstanding and failure, and recommend the following:

The trainee may look to the supervisor for advice on how to develop their underlying practice philosophy, how to manage themselves, and respond to difficult phases in their work. The supervisor can guide the trainee to attend relevant courses or read key literature that could improve self-awareness and self-knowledge. Sessions may resemble counselling psychology interventions; dialogue between the supervisor and trainee could usefully be oriented towards helping the development of authenticity, courage, discernment, presence and other personal qualities that have found to be essential for successful practice in these sport cultures (p. 34).

Upon completion of supervised experience, a sport psychologist can gain accreditation and entry onto the HCPC register, but it should be noted that registration is about competence to practice; it does not make the practitioner an expert. Supervisors should be engaging the sport psychologist in dialogue that encourages and enhances their reflection on self within training to ensure that a) the sport psychologist is best placed to be as effective as possible in practice, and b) that they continue this reflection and development of self throughout their careers. Increased self-awareness enables individuals to better adapt their behaviour in given situations; how do neophyte sport psychologists know 'how to be' when stepping into practice? Or even experienced practitioners when entering a wholly new environment? They

must take cues from the environment whilst looking inwardly to determine behaviour (Kyndt & Rowell, 2012), yet without developing the knowledge and understanding as articulated above, they may not find many answers to these questions.

Revisiting the Poczwardowski et al. (2014) model of hierarchical philosophy for a final time, the framework can be used to contextualise personal qualities in sport psychology practice. The thesis, loosely, was about trying to understand the bottom layer in more detail by adding a concept (personal qualities) and then exploring this in detail and in context. In doing so, the research has emphasised the importance of this base for effective sport psychology practice, whilst also illuminating how this base is developed. Each individual sport psychologist will have their own base that represents their personal beliefs, values and qualities, yet two different sport psychologists may end up utilising the same intervention technique to varying degrees of success. What the model therefore does not account for is the specific impact on practice of this bottom layer combined with the unique sport environment each practitioner is working within. In light of the education and training issues discussed above, there are a variety of potential future practitioners from different backgrounds who are ultimately trying to get to the same point; applied practice and being able to ‘use’ Poczwardowski and colleagues’ model. If this bottom layer of personal beliefs, values and qualities is informed and developed by a practitioner’s experiences and self-awareness, then it becomes ever more important to consider how the years of undergraduate and postgraduate study can inform this.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This research endeavoured to rigorously explore the novel concept of sport psychologists’ personal qualities in the context of effective practice in elite, professional sport. Furthermore, the studies within the research were designed to illuminate and expand the knowledge base relative to the experiences of sport psychologists working in this

environment, and how this information could be used to inform and innovate education and training programmes within the profession. Findings highlighted that effective sport psychologists can be considered ‘good human beings’ who may possess qualities such as humility, integrity, and authenticity. Such qualities have been alluded to extensively within previous literature in the counselling psychology profession, but to a much lesser extent within sport psychology literature. Furthermore, what remained relatively unexplored was how such qualities (and others) relate to the unique sporting environments within which a sport psychologist may operate. Coaches and sport physicians offered a novel insight in this respect, and through rigorous qualitative methodology, the longitudinal tracking of sport psychologists in applied practice provided a deep and meaningful insight into the personal qualities central to their professional practice philosophy, approach and role. A key finding that emerged from the research is that effective sport psychologists were highly self-aware of their individual personal qualities, and possessed sufficient self-knowledge to understand how they impacted their professional practice. In doing so, sport psychologists were able to strive for effectiveness despite the often challenging situations that confronted them within their work in elite professional sport. Often these challenges related to the varying and ambiguous function that the sport psychologist was required to adopt, especially with regards to the organisational psychology-type role that sport psychologists are increasingly required to fulfil (Nesti, 2010).

Students and trainees within sport psychology need to be adequately prepared for the world of professional practice, and the findings of this research propose that innovation of the existing training programmes should take place to improve their competence and expertise in understanding a) how their personal qualities may interact with the environment and b) how to survive and prosper in an organisational psychology role. Educators and supervisors should seek to provide sport psychology students and supervisees with the opportunity for,

and support in exploring their personal qualities first and foremost. Additionally, they must also take responsibility for educating trainees about the potential organisational psychology role they may find themselves operating within, and what this may entail. Self-awareness of a sport psychologist's personal qualities is an important foundation of professional practice. It is hoped that this thesis (and any outputs from it) will help practitioners develop and maintain the effectiveness of their practice through a better knowledge of core self and the personal qualities that are important to a sustained and successful career in the field. This thesis also hopes to inform reflection and debate around the current education and training provided within the UK, and how its findings may positively impact this provision to create future high quality practitioner psychologists.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Phase 1 Participant Information Sheet**

Researcher: Charlotte Chandler

Supervisor: Dr Martin Eubank & Dr Mark Nesti

Contact details: [c.chandler@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.chandler@ljmu.ac.uk)

07891000853 or 0151 904 6247

Title of research: Exploring the Contribution of Personal Qualities to the Effective Delivery of Sport Psychology Service Provision

You have been invited to participate in a postdoctoral research project, exploring the effectiveness of sport psychologists with regards to their professional competencies and personal qualities.

The study will involve you, as a participant, answering questions related to your experience of working with, and/or your opinions of, sport psychologists, the competencies and qualities which you believe to aid them in their work, and to what extent you agree with published standards (to be provided).

The questions will form a previously determined interview which will be conducted by the above researcher. The interview will be recorded and will last approximately 1-2 hours. The interview will take place at a time and location most convenient for you as the participant, most likely where you work or study.

There are no envisaged risks for your participation in this research. Informed consent will be obtained from you before the interview commences and you are free to choose not to answer a question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your identity, and all of the information gathered, will be kept confidential and stored securely. Should you accept the above, thank you for agreeing to participate. If there are any questions or problems, please contact the researcher on one of the above numbers.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Phase 1 interview schedule - coaches**

#### **Background**

- Could you please outline for me your sporting background? For example what sport(s) you coach, how long for, level etc
- Could you detail please your route into your coaching career i.e. participation → coaching, qualifications
- What is/was the support network or structure at your club like in terms of other coaching staff, medics, sport scientists etc

#### **Use of sport psychology services**

- Within your sport, could you explain to me your experience of working with (a) sport psychologist(s)? i.e. amount of contact, individual/team work, specific or individualised
- How did the sport psychologist(s) come to be working with your athletes? i.e. personal recruitment, request from athletes, employed to work with team
- Did you have any pre-conceived ideas about what your athletes' work with the sport psychologist(s) would involve or how they would be as a person?
- Who dictated what the sport psychologist(s) would work on with your athletes? i.e. you, your athlete, governing body, the sport psychologist themselves? How did this work for you?
- What were your thoughts regarding the way the sport psychologist(s) approached their work? Did you perceive them to fit in and understand the environment?
- To what extent did you feel you developed a good rapport or relationship with the sport psychologist(s)? Why do you think this was?
- To what extent did you feel your athletes developed a good rapport or relationship with the sport psychologist(s)? Why do you think this was?
- How worthwhile did you perceive the work they did with your athletes to be? Were there any notable changes in performance or to them personally?
- Would you use the services of this, or another, sport psychologist again?

- How important is it to you that the sport psychologist(s) you worked with can fit in with your athletes?
- In your experience, do you think sport psychologists differ from other people employed to work with your athletes in terms of their character?
- What did you consider were the positive characteristics of the sport psychologist(s) your athletes worked with? How did these aid them in their work with them?
- Are there any personal characteristics you consider essential for a sport psychologist to possess if they are to work effectively with you and your athletes, based on your experience?

#### Training and regulation of practitioners

- How familiar are you with the training routes and qualifications required to be a sport psychologist?
- If I were to provide you with some examples of what the professional regulators of psychologists want from their practitioners, i.e. the areas they wish them to demonstrate competence within, could you please offer some comments on how important you do or do not believe these to be and why?
  - ➔ Health Professions Council
    - expectations of a health professional
    - the skills required for the application of practice
    - knowledge, understanding and skills
- Given previous discussion around training, we know academic knowledge combined with practice competence to equate to certification/qualification. How important do you perceive these qualifications to be i.e. do they contribute to the discussion we've had relating to effectiveness?
- Are there any other comments you'd like to make either regarding your expectations, experiences or thoughts on sport psychologists or future use of sport psychology services?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Phase 1 interview schedule – sport physicians**

#### **Background**

- Could you detail please your route into your career, and your current practice i.e. qualifications, employment, interest in sport
- Could you please outline for me your background in terms of your work within sport? For example what sport(s) you've worked in, how long for, at what level etc
- What is/was the support network or structure at your club/organisation like in terms of other staff: sport scientists, coaches etc

#### **Experience of working with SP**

- Could you explain to me whether you have experienced working with (a) sport psychologist(s) and if so the context around that, i.e. amount of contact, depth of contact
- How did the sport psychologist(s) come to be working with you? i.e. team-based, referral
- Did you have any pre-conceived ideas about what a sport psychologist's work would involve or how they would be as a person?
- Were you correct in these ideas? Did your opinion of the work they did and the person they were change over time?
- What were your thoughts regarding the way the sport psychologist(s) approached their work? Did you perceive them to fit in and understand the environment?
- To what extent did you feel you developed a good rapport or relationship with the sport psychologist(s)? Why do you think this was?
- Did this relationship differ in any way to those you had/have with other colleagues?
- Have you ever come across any situations with an athlete where you've recognised yourself the need for a sport psychologist's involvement?
- To you, what is a 'good' sport psychologist? Why?
- In your experience, do you think sport psychologists differ from other people employed to work with athletes in terms of their character?

- What did you consider were the positive characteristics of the sport psychologist(s) you worked with? What did you perceive the impact of these to be on their practice, if any?
- Are there any personal characteristics you consider essential for a sport psychologist to possess if they are to work effectively with athletes, and also in a support team?
- Have you ever worked with other psychologists? E.g. clinical, counselling? Do sport psychologists need anything different or additional to these in terms of characteristics?

#### Training and regulation of practitioners

- How familiar are you with the training routes and qualifications required to be a sport psychologist?
- If I were to provide you with some examples of what the professional regulators of psychologists want from their practitioners, i.e. the areas they wish them to demonstrate competence within, could you please offer some comments on how important you do or do not believe these to be and why?
  - ➔ Health Professions Council
    - expectations of a health professional
    - the skills required for the application of practice
    - knowledge, understanding and skills
- Given previous discussion around training, we know academic knowledge combined with practice competence to equate to certification/qualification. How important do you perceive these qualifications to be i.e. do they contribute to the discussion we've had relating to effectiveness?
- Are there any other comments you'd like to make either regarding your expectations, experiences or thoughts on sport psychologists or future use of sport psychology services?

## **Appendix 4**

### **Phase 2 Participant Information Sheet**

Researcher: Charlotte Chandler

Supervisor: Dr Martin Eubank and Dr Mark Nesti

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Title of research: Exploring the Contribution of Personal Qualities to the Effective Delivery of Sport Psychology Service Provision

You have been invited to participate in a postdoctoral research project, exploring the effectiveness of sport psychologists with regards to their professional competencies and personal qualities.

Part 1 of the study will require you to engage in an interview to explore your life history. This will include questions on family, culture, social aspects, education, relationships, career, inner values and life views. The interview will be recorded and will last approximately 1-2 hours. The interview will take place at a time and location most convenient for you as the participant.

Part 2 will involve longitudinal data collection over 2 years through the use of reflective diaries and interviews. You will be asked to keep a reflective diary, noting any events within your work that impact upon your effectiveness, events outside of work and how they impact upon effectiveness within it and aspects of your personal and professional development. This will require a minimum of one diary entry per month, and the interviews will be utilised to probe results from the reflective diaries. Interviews will take place at approximately 6 month intervals, will be recorded and will last around 1-2 hours. The interviews will take place at a time and location most convenient for you as the participant.

Please note that this is a long-term commitment, however data collection through direct contact with the researcher can be at a time to suit you and the actual contact time should be minimal.

There are no anticipated risks for your participation in this research. You are free to choose not to answer a question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your identity, and all of the information gathered, will be kept confidential and stored securely. Should you accept the above, please sign the attached consent form. If there are any questions or problems, please contact the researcher (contact details above).

Thank you for agreeing to participate.

## **Appendix 5**

### **Life history interview schedule (based on Atkinson, 1998)**

#### **Birth/family origin**

- What was your family set-up at the time of your birth and in the years to follow?
- Do you have any distinctive/significant memories of your childhood?
- How would you describe your immediate family?
- Do you think you inherited/learnt anything from them?
- Did/do you get along well with your family members?

#### **Culture/tradition**

- Are there any cultural traditions or values that were passed on to you by your family or environment?
- Were you taught any particular beliefs or values?
- Was religion important in your family?

#### **Social factors**

- Do you feel you had a happy childhood?
- Were there any particular highlights or low points?
- Did you make friends easily? Were any friendships particularly important to you?
- How did you choose to spend your time?
- What special people have you known in your life? Has anyone helped develop your understanding of self?
- Do you currently feel any social pressures as an adult?

#### **Education**

- What is your first memory of attending school? Did you enjoy it?
- What role did your education play in shaping your future career choices?
- What did you learn about yourself throughout your education?
- What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?

#### **Relationships**

- What do you particularly value about the immediate relationships you have with others? (e.g. spouse , partner, sibling(s), parent(s)) (*suggest just focussing them on one of these, i.e., spouse or partner, but if none sibling(s) or parent(s)*)
- How important is closeness and interdependence in this relationship, or are you a more independent type of person?
- What has this relationship taught you and how has it influenced you in your life?

#### **Career**

- Did you have any specific dreams or ambitions as a child? Do you have any now?
- Do you find work in general, and your specific line of work, easy to do?
- Why do you think you ended up in the job that you did?

- What are the most enjoyable and important aspects of your job to you?
- Do you work because you have to or does it satisfy a greater need?

### **Inner values**

- What primary beliefs and values guide your life?
- What have these been dictated by and have they evolved over time?
- How do you perceive yourself? Are you content, do you ever have any doubts?
- Do you feel you possess an inner strength and if so, where does it come from?
- What values and aspects of your life would you never want to compromise?

### **Life themes**

- What has/have been the most important learning experience/s in your life?
- Do you feel you are still changing now and in what way?
- What are your feelings towards those events in your life that have challenged you?
- What would you like for your future?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Has this been a fair representation of yourself?

## **Appendix 6**

### **Phase 2 Reflective Diary**

Reflect on your applied practice in general and document any experiences you consider important to your personal and professional development. Reflect on how your character and values impacted upon your practice, what you learned from that, and consider any developments, changes or adaptations made to yourself, your methods and/or your approach. Your experiences can include specific, significant events, inside and outside of your work.

You are free to go about documenting these experiences as you see fit. For the purpose of the research, diaries will ideally be in electronic format, to enable the researcher to receive diary entries at bi-monthly intervals. However, hand-written diaries can be accommodated. The diaries will be explored in more detail through interviews at regular 6 month intervals if possible, but always at your convenience.

## **Appendix 7**

### **Sample interview schedules**

#### **SPA**

##### Organisational issues

- Why is it difficult to work towards buy-in confidentiality with so many coaches? Is this something that you are continuously striving to achieve?
- What were the different philosophies of coaches that you mention? You facilitate communication between people it seems – is this naturally seen as the sport psych's role?

##### Skills and expertise

- You highlight that your role is to deliver how to do the basics of sport psychology excellently, but suggest that this is difficult based on the previously discussed issues with staff/environment - to what extent do they impact on your ability to do this? How capable do you feel in addressing this?
- You mention that it is refreshing to know you can find a solution (when discussing MI and solution focused therapy) – how so? Have you been unable to do so in past experiences?
- Overall you seem to address a range of issues, for a lot of different people – how/why are you able to do this and how do you get them all to trust you?

##### Personal qualities and values

- You state, due to the nature of the environment and your naturally open nature, that it's hard to remain neutral – how so and why do you think this is? What has allowed this open nature to develop? (supported by life history)
- In describing that there are no right or wrongs just different opinions you seem quite tolerant and patient? Is this the case and if so where did it come from? (life history – tolerant partner, learning quicker than other people) Is it important in this environment?
- Considering that you must hold your tongue and not share opinions, do you really believe that there are 'no right or wrongs' or are their underlying thoughts or feelings? How do you manage to stay congruent if so?

#### **SPB**

## Professional relationships

- You mention that certain things have changed/become more difficult in <sport> and in the past you were the antidote for any fall-out from that, as well as from any relationship/organisational issues, which is less so the case now. Why do you think the sport psych is looked at as the person to address these issues? Is it perception of the role or your own qualities, or both?
- Does the above test your ethical boundaries as a practitioner? And perhaps more so than other support staff? (being all things to all people)

## Philosophy/self in practice

- You discuss your practice evolving from a humanistic to a more solution-focussed approach – is this purely a function of your hectic family life or do you think this would have developed anyway? Have different qualities of yours surfaced in practice as a result?
- You mention in your reflections that you feel you've lost a bit of integrity by being unable to fulfil commitments – where does this integrity come from? How do you feel

## Finding a balance

- You mentioned burn out in your reflections, and wondering whether you were still doing a good job – does it bother you if you feel unable to do so? Would you say it is a value of yours throughout life to give 100%?
- You talk about experience helping you in your work – how does this balance with your own personal qualities, and your training and education? Is one more important than the others for your effectiveness or are they all equal?

## Personal development

- You mention that the plug has been pulled on projects or initiatives you set up on a number of occasions, but that you feel more robust in the knowledge that it isn't personal. Did you not always feel that way? Has that just come as a function of time or experience, or is it an overall development of self?
- Ultimately, your approach to applied work has evolved and developed as a function of your personal and family situation. Do you have any thoughts on whether this would have occurred had your circumstances been different?

## **SPC**

### Staff issues

- You mention relationship building with certain staff has been difficult – why is this? (personality clash, competition)
- Does this relate to the incident whereby one member of staff tried to 'stitch you up'? Do you react to such experiences as an employee or as a person?

- You mention 'playing the political game' – what do you mean by this and why is it so necessary? What enables you to be able to do this?

#### Skills and expertise

- You state that 1 to 1 work isn't your strength – could you explain in more detail what has led to this conclusion? (probe character)
- How did the evolution of your work to being more first team, performance related come about? Why do you think you were offered this opportunity – did you have any reflections on why they thought you could perform in this role?
- Your work has also evolved to include more organisational psychology – why does the environment necessitate this? Are you more comfortable with this type of work? If so, why?

#### Personal qualities and values

- Because of your position working across several departments you describe how you can sometimes feel 'isolated and vulnerable'. How do you manage this situation/feeling? Do you think certain characters excel or would struggle in such an environment?
- You mention, when reflecting on GM's visit, that 'we are trying to do the right thing's' – what do you mean by this? Why is 'doing the right thing' so important in this profession? Is this a value you hold?
- In the wake of the previous manager's resignation, you mention that your boss gaining more control and being disappointed. What values do you think he has shown by doing this? Why have you not approached the situation in the same way?