

**Delivering Culture Change in Elite Sport Performance Teams: A First
Exploration**

by

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Redacted Version

**Please note that parts of this thesis have been omitted for reasons of
participant confidentiality**

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Abstract

1
2
3 The efficient and effective management-led implementation of change is often required for
4 successful performance across a host of organisational domains (By, 2005; du Gay &
5 Vikkelsø, 2012; Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004). However, while a major modern-day
6 industry, elite sport organisations have seen limited development of their change management
7 practices; particularly those deployed in the department responsible their core product: on-
8 field performance. Reflecting growing awareness of the need for elite sport performance
9 team managers to rapidly create and sustain high performing cultures when taking over at a
10 new team (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; League Managers
11 Association, 2012; Lee, Shaw, & Chesterfield, 2009), the aim of this thesis was to therefore
12 provide the first exploration of this specific culture change process. Accordingly, interviews
13 were undertaken with performance team managers in professional then Olympic sport as part
14 of a grounded theory approach for developing domain-specific models of culture change best
15 practice. Illuminating the criticality of the manager's initial programme integration phase,
16 both models primarily depicted a holistic, dynamic, and 360-degree process which was rooted
17 to the manager's power- and political-based interactions with key internal and external
18 stakeholders. To further understanding of these features and their effective management, a
19 case study of a successful change programme in a professional sport performance team was
20 undertaken. This time examining multi-stakeholder perspectives (i.e., team management,
21 players, support staff, and CEO) through a decentred theory lens, successful change was
22 shown to have been facilitated by the team managers' deployment of processes which
23 proactively encouraged a "to and fro" of social power. Additionally, and falling out from the
24 analysed data across the grounded theory and case studies, a unique change-mechanism plus
25 a range of novel and previously overlooked leadership styles and management skills were
26 also found to underpin optimal change in all settings. Overall, this thesis represented a long

- 1 overdue study of the challenges faced by newly appointed elite sport performance team
- 2 managers and, most significantly, provided the first sports team-specific, evidence-based
- 3 implications on which these may be surmounted to enable consistent success.

Table of Contents

Author's Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	xiii
List of Tables.....	xiv
Acknowledgments.....	xv

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Change Management and its Relevance to Elite Sport Performance Teams.....	1
1.2. The <i>Management</i> -led Creation and Regulation of <i>High Performing Cultures</i> within the <i>On-Field Elite Sport Performance Team Environment</i> : Defining the Change Management Challenge.....	4
1.2.1. Manager/Management.....	4
1.2.2. High Performing Cultures.....	4
1.2.3. The On-Field Elite Sport Performance Team Environment.....	5
1.3. Identifying Benefits of Culture Change Research in Elite Sport Performance Teams.....	6
1.4. Objectives of the Thesis.....	9
1.5. Overview of the Work Programme.....	10

Chapter 2 Culture Change in Elite Sport Performance Teams: Contextualising and Parameterising the Construct

2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2. Challenge I: Methodological Shortcomings of the CM Literature.....	14
2.2.1 Business/Non-Sport Organisation CM Literature.....	14
2.2.2. Sport Management Literature.....	18

2.3. Challenge II: The Theoretical Ambivalence of CM Research.....	20
2.4. Challenge III: The Unique Features of Elite Sport Performance Team Environments.....	23
2.4.1. Pressure from the Board.....	25
2.4.2. Pressure from the Fans.....	26
2.4.3. Pressure from the Media.....	27
2.5. Challenge IV: The Lack of Parallel Knowledge in Applied Sport Psychology.....	28
2.5.1. The (In)Utility of Leadership Knowledge.....	31
2.5.2. The (In)Utility of Team Building Knowledge.....	33
2.5.3. The (In)Utility of Organisational Sport Psychology Knowledge.....	35
2.6. Summary.....	39
Chapter 3 Culture Change in Elite Sport Performance Teams: Selecting and Defining the Research Philosophy and Methodology	
3.1. Introduction.....	41
3.2. Defining the Research Philosophy: A Pragmatic Approach.....	42
3.3. Selecting and Defining the Research Strategies and Methods.....	47
3.3.1. Exploring Management Perceptions of Culture Change Best Practice: Grounded Theory Methodology.....	49
3.3.2. Exploring Multi-Stakeholder Perceptions of a Successful Culture Change Programme: Case Study Methodology.....	52
3.4. Data Collection Method: Qualitative Interviews.....	55
3.5. Evaluation of Research Quality.....	57
3.6. Summary.....	60

Chapter 4 Delivering Culture Change in Professional Sport Performance Teams: A

Grounded Theory Model of Best Practice

4.1. Introduction.....	62
4.2. Method.....	63
4.2.1. Sampling and Participants.....	63
4.2.2. Data Collection.....	64
4.2.3. Data Analysis.....	66
4.3. Results.....	68
4.3.1. Initial Evaluation, Planning, Set-up, and Impact.....	69
4.3.1.1. Evaluating Fit with the Club and Board.....	69
4.3.1.2. Evaluating the Performance Department.....	70
4.3.1.3. Identifying and Harnessing Social Allies and Cultural Architects.....	75
4.3.1.4. Withholding Initial Action in Sub-Optimal Conditions.....	77
4.3.1.5. Delivering Instant Results.....	78
4.3.2. Management of a Holistic, Integrated, and Dynamic Culture Optimisation System.....	79
4.3.2.1. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Support Staff.....	79
4.3.2.2. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Playing Staff.....	81
4.3.2.3. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Board.....	82
4.3.2.4. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Fans.....	84
4.3.2.5. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Media.....	85

4.3.2.6. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Other Significant Influences.....	87
4.3.3. A Grounded Theory: Culture Change in Professional Sport Performance Teams.....	88
4.4. Discussion.....	92
4.4.1. Integrating and Distinguishing the Grounded Theory Model.....	92
4.4.2. Evaluation of Research Quality.....	95
4.4.3. Limitations and The Next Step.....	96
Chapter 5 Delivering Culture Change in Olympic Sport Performance Teams: A Grounded Theory Model of Best Practice	
5.1. Introduction.....	98
5.2. Method.....	100
5.2.1. Sampling and Participants.....	100
5.2.2. Data Collection.....	101
5.2.3. Data Analysis.....	101
5.3. Results.....	102
5.3.1. Initial Evaluation, Planning, Set-up, and Impact.....	103
5.3.1.1. Gaining an Understanding of the Cultural, Political, and Performance Landscape.....	103
5.3.1.2. Identifying, Recruiting, and Harnessing Multi-Domain Experts, Allies, and Cultural Architects.....	106
5.3.1.3. Facilitating Shared Perceptions and Multi-Stakeholder Support.....	110
5.3.1.4. Prioritising and Addressing Most Pressing Needs.....	113
5.3.1.5. Withholding Initial Action in Sub-Optimal Conditions.....	114

5.3.1.6. Facilitating Optimal Immediate Results.....	115
5.3.2. Management of a Holistic, Integrated, and Dynamic Culture Optimisation System.....	116
5.3.2.1. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Upper Echelon Team Management and Support Staff.....	117
5.3.2.2. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Lower Echelon Support Staff.....	118
5.3.2.3. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Performers.....	119
5.3.2.4. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Governing Body Board(s)	121
5.3.2.5. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with UK Sport.....	122
5.3.2.6. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the BOA.....	125
5.3.2.7. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with External Partners.....	126
5.3.2.8. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Media.....	128
5.3.2.9. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Other Significant Influences.....	130
5.3.3. A Grounded Theory: Culture Change in Olympic Sport Performance Teams.....	131
5.4. Discussion.....	134
5.4.1. Convergence with Professional Sport Performance Team Manager-Led Culture Change.....	134
5.4.2. Divergence From Professional Sport Performance Team Manager-Led Culture Change.....	135
5.4.3. Limitations and The Next Step.....	138

Chapter 6 Culture Change in a Professional Sport Performance Team: Exploring Successful Change Through Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives and Decentred Theory

6.1. Introduction.....	140
6.2. Rationalising the Importation of Decentred Theory.....	141
6.3. Method.....	145
6.3.1. Selection of an Exemplar Culture Change Programme: Leeds Carnegie 2008-2010.....	145
6.3.2. Participants.....	146
6.3.3. Procedure.....	146
6.3.4. Inductive Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions.....	148
6.3.5. Addressing Trustworthiness.....	148
6.3.6. Recentred Analysis of Higher Order Themes.....	150
6.4. Results.....	150
6.4.1 Legitimising the Success of the CM Programme: Markers of Change.....	150
6.4.2. Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives on the CM Programme's Performance Impact.....	155
6.4.3. Exemplar Critical Success Factors of the CM Programme.....	155
6.4.3.1. Initial Transition and Integration.....	155
6.4.3.2. Holistic Culture Optimisation System.....	161
6.4.4. Sub-Optimal Features of the CM Programme.....	165
6.4.4.1. Informing Players of Performance-Based Decision Making and Action.....	165
6.4.4.2. Facilitating Social Interaction.....	167
6.4.4.3. Player Ownership Issues.....	168

6.4.5. Managing and Exploiting the Power Flux.....	169
6.5. Discussion.....	176
6.5.1. Insights on the Specific Case.....	176
6.5.2. Integration with the Developed Models of Elite Team Culture Change.....	176
6.5.3. Further Contributions to Knowledge: The Decentred Perspective.....	179
6.5.4. Evaluating Research Quality.....	180
Chapter 7 Shaping Environmental Contexts: The Underpinning Mechanism of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change?	
7.1. Introduction.....	183
7.2. Shaping Environmental Contexts: Explaining the Mechanism.....	184
7.3. Shaping Environmental Contexts: Exemplifying the Mechanism.....	185
7.3.1. Shaping Performance Systems.....	185
7.3.2. Shaping Performance Structures.....	187
7.3.3. Shaping the Physical Environment.....	189
7.3.4. Shaping the Psychosocial Environment.....	191
7.3.5. Shaping the Operational Environment.....	198
7.4. Discussion.....	201
Chapter 8 Operating the Models of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change: Crucial Leadership Styles and Management Skills	
8.1. Introduction.....	205
8.2. Leadership Styles.....	205
8.2.1. Distributed Leadership.....	205
8.2.2. Dark Side Leadership.....	207
8.2.2.1. Demonstrating and Retaining Ultimate Authority.....	207

8.2.2.2. Performance-Focused Ruthlessness.....	210
8.3. Management Skills.....	213
8.3.1. Micropolitical Abilities.....	213
8.3.2. Complexity Adapting Behaviour.....	217
8.3.3. Context-Specific Expertise.....	219
8.4. Discussion.....	223
Chapter 9 Implications: The Theory, Practice, and Training of Elite Sport Performance	
Team Culture Change	
9.1. Introduction.....	228
9.2. Theoretical Implications: Initial Understanding <i>Of</i> Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....	228
9.2.1. General Implications: Grounding Theory in Context.....	228
9.2.2. Specific Implications: Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change Theory.....	231
9.2.2.1. The Chronology and Nature of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....	231
9.2.2.2. The Underpinning Mechanism of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....	232
9.2.2.3. Leading and Managing Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....	233
9.3. Applied Implications: Initial Understanding <i>For</i> Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....	234
9.3.1. Applied Implications for Elite Sport Performance Team Managers....	234
9.3.2. Applied Implications for Elite Sport Organisations' Top Management Structures.....	240

9.3.3. Applied Implications for Sport Psychologists.....	242
9.4. Implications for Management Training: A Workshop-Based Resource.....	245
9.5. Evaluating the Quality and Impact of the Implications.....	250
Chapter 10 Conclusions and Recommendations	
10.1. Introduction.....	253
10.2. Summary of Findings.....	254
10.3. Specific Recommendations: Future Research in Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....	261
10.4. General Recommendations: A Forewarning for Research in the “Twilight Zone”	267
References	273
Appendix A	298
Appendix B	302
Appendix C	304

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. The Focus and Permeation of the Elite Sport Performance Team
Culture Change Construct.....37

Figure 4.1. A Grounded Theory Model of Manager-Led Culture Change
Best Practice in Professional Sport Performance Teams.....91

Figure 5.1. A Grounded Theory Model of Manager-Led Culture Change
Best Practice in Olympic Sport Performance Teams.....133

Figure 6.1. Graphic Representation of Decentred Theory Application.....142

Figure 6.2. Perceived Team Performance Level, Key Events, and
Distinct Phases of the Change Process.....153

Figure 9.1. Schematic of the Enactment of the Initial Evaluation, Planning,
Set-up, and Impact Phase of Professional Sport Performance Team Culture Change.....247

List of Tables

Table 6.1. Higher-order Constructs of the Culture Change Program at Leeds Carnegie.....154

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University Education; You can't beat it.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Change Management and its Relevance to Elite Sport Performance Teams

Organisational change and change management have moved centre stage within the field of organisation studies Because change is regarded both as omnipresent and omnipotent, the ability of organisations to adapt to its imperatives is deemed pivotal. Managing change is therefore seen as a, if not the, crucial feature of the business of organising (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012, p. 121).

As proposed by du Gay and Vikkelsø (2012), the effective management of change is arguably the most critical marker of peak organisational functioning and performance. Consistently implicated across the spectrum of organisational studies, interest in organisational change is inextricably linked to its abiding “real world” pervasiveness and significance. Indeed, with businesses continuing to compete in highly dynamic environments (By, 2005), the practice of change management (hereafter CM) has received much attention in organisational literature. Defined as “the process of continually renewing an organisation’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers” (Moran & Brightman, 2001, p.111), the CM construct has also been studied and applied across a variety of other domains such as health services (e.g., Bamford & Daniel, 2005), education services (By, Diefenbach & Klarner, 2008), and the military (Ruvolo & Bullis, 2003). While a major modern-day industry, elite sport organisations have, in contrast, seen limited theoretical and practical development of their CM practices; particularly those in the department responsible for these organisations’ core product: on-field performance.

Resonating with the above definition of organisational CM, most contemporary elite sport organisations must provide a constantly “marketable” product (e.g., results, entertaining performances, star performers) to a group of highly demanding internal (e.g., support staff,

performers) and external stakeholders (e.g., funders, sponsors, fans, media: Mielke, 2007) if they are to achieve their short- and long-term goals. Accordingly, it is imperative that these organisations are sensitive to the oscillating requirements of the system which delivers such prosperity-supporting outcomes, namely the on-field performance team. However, while sport-based research has recently begun to study processes of change, enquiry to date has primarily focused on business/administrative elements or whole organisations rather than on-field team performance (Bloyce, Smith, Mead, & Morris, 2008; Frontiera, 2010; Thibault and Babiak, 2005; Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012a; Zakus & Skinner, 2008). With on-field success strongly influenced by the performance of the supporting business (Guzmán, 2006; Smith & Stewart, 2010), this off-field/holistic focus is of course merited. Nonetheless, recognising that it is the on-field team which ultimately delivers the sport organisation's most decisive product - and accordingly governs the longevity of off-field systems (Benkraiem, Louhichi, & Marques, 2009; Lewis, 2004) - there is a need for research which develops theoretical and practical understanding of CM in this performance context.

Indeed, as well as a conceptually valid pursuit, study of elite sport performance team CM also represents a highly pertinent applied agenda. Specifically, and contrasting with the time which CEOs may be afforded to reinvigorate underperforming organisational elements, when elite sport organisation top management (i.e., Boards of Directors) view the functioning and/or performance of the "front-line" workforce (i.e., team performers) to be insufficient for delivering set targets, a "hiring and firing" policy is often employed in relation to the on-field performance team manager. For instance, in pursuit of a manager who can engender beliefs, expectations, and behaviours across the performance department to enable consistent success (in short, a high performing culture: see below), some European, North American, and South American sports now grant team managers less than 1.5 seasons to achieve this goal (Flores, Forrest, & Tena, 2012; League Managers Association, 2010; Zinser, 2008a). As a specific

exemplar, the life-expectancy of English league football managers' now stands at a record low of 1.4 years. Moreover, if sacked from a first position, 49% of these figures are never then entrusted with another (League Managers Association, 2010). Nor is this purely a UK challenge. Bruinshoofd and ter Weel (2003) have reported a turnover of 125 managers in the highest professional Dutch football league between 1988 and 2000, an average of seven managers for each of the division's 18 clubs. While not suffering to quite the same general extent, the turnover of Olympic sport Performance Directors is also increasingly prevalent; particularly in higher profile sports (e.g., Hart, 2012). Although such statistics and trends are concerning in their own right, these are further compounded by the now sizable body of work showing management turnover to regularly fail in eliciting either lasting *or* instant gains (Andersen, 2011; Audas, Dobson, & Goddard, 2002; Audas, Goddard & Rowe, 2006; Hughes, Hughes, Mellahi, & Guermat, 2010). Further recognising that CM aimed at culture optimisation is a lengthy process (Price & Chahal, 2006) - taking up to ten years (Kotter, 1996) - alongside the inherently stressful task of leading sports teams (Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard, 2009; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings, 2008), the applied importance of assessing how culture change is best delivered in such pressurised conditions has arguably, therefore, never been greater. Indeed, elite sport performance team managers are now explicitly requesting the provision of training courses which address how team culture can be changed (League Managers Association, 2012).

Reflecting the recent identification of culture change services as a key function of contemporary applied sport psychologists (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011) and my own status as an in-training sport and exercise psychologist, this thesis examined manager-led culture change in elite sport performance teams from a sport psychology perspective. The rest of this chapter consequently defines some key terms used throughout the thesis, identifies the benefits of culture change study in elite sport

performance teams, details the objectives of inquiry, and provides an overview of the work programme designed to meet these intentions.

1.2. The *Management*-led Creation and Regulation of *High Performing Cultures* within the *On-Field Elite Sport Performance Team Environment*: Defining the Change Management Challenge

Recognising the semantic challenges that “manager/management” and “culture” have faced in sport/social psychology literature (cf. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Shteynberg, 2010) and the novelty of the CM construct in on-field elite sport performance team environments, it is important to define these key terms to best frame the objectives and scope of this thesis.

1.2.1. Manager/Management

Resonating with the views of Northouse (2010) and Fletcher and Arnold (2011) that managers lead and leaders manage, “manager” and “management” are used as general labels for positions such as *manager*, *head coach*, and *performance director*. Although conceptual and operational differences exist across each position (as shown by the results of this thesis), any instance of “manager” and “management” without further specific qualification therefore refers to any individual with direct responsibility for the vision, organisation, preparation and performance of an on-field elite sport performance team (NB. “leader/leadership” could equally have been deployed).

1.2.2. High Performing Cultures

Although “team culture” is well established in the sport psychology lexicon (cf. San-Fu & Bor-Shiuan, 2005) “culture” remains one of the most vaguely deployed terms in social science (Shteynberg, 2010). Based on an integration of recent assertions in sport psychology, social psychology, and organisational studies (where the topic has received greater attention) (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; San-Fu & Bor-Shiuan, 2005; Schein, 2004; Shteynberg, 2010; Zou et al., 2009), this thesis will adopt my own developed definition and consider culture to be “a

dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a, p. 340). Further drawing on my work, high performing cultures are thereby actualised when group members’ shared values, beliefs, expectations, and practices “a) support *sustained* optimal performance; b) *persist* across time in the face of variable results (i.e., wins, losses, ties); and, most importantly, c) lead to *consistent* high performance” (p. 340). As such, high performing cultures primarily contain members who: a) make day-to-day, moment-to-moment decisions which support the continued search for and attainment of peak performance; and b) self-regulate performance-optimising perceptions and behaviours within and across generations of the group. Operationalised in this manner, accordance is found with Hartmann and Khademian’s (2010, p. 848) pragmatic approach to culture in that this definition alludes to a process which is “purposeful”, holds an ability to be influenced, and “is continuously practiced or enacted.”

As a vital appendage, the reader should note the subtle yet significant difference between high performing and high performance. Specifically, although by definition elite teams operate in high performance sport and may even achieve reasonable levels of objective success, this does not necessarily make them high performing (i.e., they represent those who consistently underperform relative to their resources).

1.2.3. The On-Field Elite Sport Performance Team Environment

As asserted by Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009), the interaction of an elite on-field sports team with its wider organisation is a key performance factor as on- and off-field elements do not operate entirely separately. Indeed, the impact of organisational features on sporting success has been well documented (e.g., Gilmore & Gilson, 2007; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf & Chung, 2002; Fletcher, Hanton, Mellalieu & Neil, 2012). Nonetheless, the culture of the on-field elite sport performance team (encompassing team management, support staff, and

performers: Gilmore & Gilson, 2007) merits treatment as a distinct construct. Specifically, and beyond earlier comments on the dependence of the whole organisation on its on-field product, the practical relevance of focusing on the performance department “sub-culture” is further reinforced when acknowledging: (a) the bespoke goals and roles of management/support staff/performers in relation to their office-based, strategic/administrative equivalents; (b) the time members spend in each others’ company; (c) the extent of members’ emotional ties through their shared involvement in sport performance.

1.3. Identifying Benefits of Culture Change Research in Elite Sport Performance Teams

Study into the management-led creation and maintenance of high performing cultures in elite sport performance team environments carries three potentially important implications. First and second is bespoke knowledge development *of* and *for* this key CM activity; in short, establishing theoretical understanding into how change is driven and sustained in elite sport performance teams (the *of*) and then applying these results to enhance actual team manager performance (the *for*). Reinforcing benefits for applied practice, Fletcher and Arnold (2011, p. 236), recently acknowledge that “the potential [for sport psychologists] to affect change is far greater working through performance leaders and managers, rather than . . . counselling athletes . . . [through] creating an environment where high performance becomes sustainable across the team”. With sport psychologists currently advertising their culture change skills but from an apparently organisational evidence-base (e.g., www.lane4performance.com; www.stevensylvester.com), developing sport-specific understanding is a pressing issue for not only elite sport performance team managers but also the consultants who support them.

Reflecting prior use of sports teams as “laboratories” to test a range of organisational constructs (e.g., Berman, Down, & Hill, 2002; Dawson & Dobson, 2002; Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005; Goosby Smith, 2009), reported similarities between sports team managers and their business equivalents (e.g., middle managers; executives; senior operating officers: Beck,

Brüderl, & Woywode, 2008; Hughes et al., 2010; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002), reciprocal knowledge transfer between sport and business (cf. Aoyagi, Cox, & McGuire, 2008; Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2007; Dohmen, 2008; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Jones, 2008; Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012b), and calls for a trans-discipline approach in advancing organisational change theory and practice (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004), the third possible implication of elite sport performance team CM study is knowledge development *through* this domain. In short, using elite sport teams as a testing location from which more potentially generic organisational theory and practice can be critically explored and informed.

Certainly, as a consequence of CM's roots in organisational settings, the majority of work to date has focused on larger scale businesses (Bamford and Forrester, 2003; Wissema, 2001) resulting in theory and prescription shaped by the characteristics of organisational life. However, elite sport offers a unique environment in which to investigate the implications of the decisions and actions of change leaders at a more detailed, micro-level; a focus which has been advocated by other CM researchers (e.g., Cunningham, 2006a, 2006b). Specifically, in contrast to change in sizable organisations where employees commonly have limited shared interests and minimal interactions with strategic management (Driscoll & Morris, 2001), elite sport performance team managers normally lead far smaller groups and are, therefore, highly dependent on their subordinates (i.e., support staff and performers) to achieve success (Jones & Wallace, 2005). As the measures and mechanisms of change are likely to be experienced and interpreted in a particularly personal manner by the targets of change (i.e., performers and support staff), elite sport offers a useful natural environment in which to assess the impact and interplay of change processes. Moreover, the value of the elite sport performance team laboratory is further underpinned by the environment's unique internal and external power relations (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b).

Considering internal power relations first; as elite sports team performers (particularly those with a history of achievement) are often held in high peer and public regard (including notable media attention), receive huge salaries (and/or private sponsorships), and deliver the organisation's product in wide public settings (i.e., in stadiums/on television), the private and public power they hold in relation to their management is comparatively greater than most organisations' "front line" employees. Furthermore, while most business-based organisations are made up of interdependent sub-departments, elite sport performance team support staff contain practitioners (e.g., physiotherapists, conditioners, psychologists) bound by the legal and ethical standards and mores of their profession – not the organisation per se (cf. Collins, Moore, Mitchell, & Alpress, 1999). As such, all support staff are (at least partly) driven by their own unalterable interests and, in some cases, gripped by a need to justify personal worth against the predominantly unquantifiable nature of proportional contribution to sports team performance (Reid, Stewart, & Thorne, 2004).

In terms of external influences, top management, fans, and the media play a major and unique role in shaping professional sports team settings. Specifically, as professional teams usually play weekly, a team manager's product (i.e., on-field performance) can be constantly monitored by top management. Unlike most businesses, however, top management groups are rarely experts in the field in which the organisation primarily operates (i.e., performance sport: Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). Additionally, while business executives are accountable to a range of stakeholders, a sports team's fans present another bespoke challenge to professional sports team managers due to their: (a) direct impact on the organisation's product (e.g., via support, or lack thereof, at matches); (b) opportunities to acquire information and provide opinion on the running and performance of the team and wider organisation (e.g., via radio, television, internet); and (c) notable power in impacting top-management decisions (e.g., via withheld support/active protests: Flores et al., 2012). Finally, and mediating both fan and

top-management perceptions (amongst many others), the media's ubiquitous involvement in professional sport provide another significant challenge; particularly as their interactions are often motivated by personal and sensationalist-oriented agendas (Carter, 2007).

Based on the type and nature of these internal power relations and external influences, elite sport performance teams carry particular potential for critically advancing the theory and practice of organisational CM. Of course, this is not to suggest that businesses do not face internal/external stakeholder challenges; they clearly do (e.g., Hope, 2010; Tatlı & Özbilgin, 2009; Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, & Shapiro, 2012). Rather, it is the regularity and intensity of these challenges – as fuelled by the high stakes¹, the uncertainty of results, inflated egos, power imbalances, wide public interest, and high emotions - which make professional sports teams “special” and thereby a unique natural laboratory in which to explore how management can optimally negotiate the personal, political, and contested features which characterise any change environment.

1.4. Objectives of the Thesis

Reflecting the lack of theoretical understanding of manager-led culture change in elite sport performance teams, alongside the construct's practical relevance and potential to feed back into organisational CM understanding, the main objectives of this thesis were:

1. To explore perceptions of culture change across pertinent performance management levels in a British elite sport context (specifically professional and Olympic sport environments), develop models of best practice, and evaluate their congruence with/divergence from current business-based knowledge.
2. To explore the potential for generality of culture change best practice across British professional and Olympic sport performance team environments.

¹ As an example, the playoff match to gain entry to English soccer's Premier League has been reported to now be worth £90 million for the winner (www.deloitte.com)

3. To analyse and explain successful elite sport performance team culture change through multiple stakeholder perspectives.
4. To examine the power of an imported theoretical lens for explaining culture change in an elite sport performance team.
5. To identify common mechanisms of elite sport performance team culture change.
6. To identify common leadership/management skills for delivering elite sport performance team culture change.
7. To prescribe effective guidance for management seeking to efficiently establish and sustain high performing cultures in their team environments.

Driven by these objectives, the intended outcomes of this thesis were to: (a) establish the first models of optimal manager-led culture change in professional and Olympic sport performance teams; (b) offer the first assessment of an imported theoretical approach's utility for explaining successful culture change in an elite sport performance team; (c) provide initial understanding on *how* culture change is best delivered in elite sport performance teams (i.e., through what mechanisms and leadership/management skills do the models best operate); (d) identify implications for advancing the practice and training of elite sport performance team managers (and their supporting consultants); and (e) provide a platform through which broad organisational theory and practice may be critically informed.

1.5. Overview of the Work Programme

In Chapter 2, an indicative review and critique of relevant CM and sport management literature is presented, with particular focus on the methodological and theoretical limitations of these bodies of knowledge. Additionally, after further evaluation of the unique features of elite sport performance teams, a similar review and critique of sport psychology knowledge is also presented; as underpinned by the discipline's breadth of literature on team dynamics and recent consideration of culture change (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). Emphasising a need

for sport-specific study, the key messages from these analyses are used to define the direction of the thesis and its guiding philosophy and methodology (Chapter 3). More specifically, the thesis sought to identify the chronology, nature, mechanisms, and leadership/management skills of optimal culture change in elite sport performance teams via a pragmatic approach which provided recommendations and lessons for both theory and applied practice.

To address the thesis' first objective, Chapter 4 presents a study of professional sport performance team managers' (hereafter PM) perceptions on the culture change process, comparing and contrasting experiences to date across managed teams. Applying grounded theory methodology, analyses of detailed, temporally-grounded, case-based data leads to the development of a model of culture change best practice. More explicitly, this chapter explores and elucidates the chronology and nature of optimal culture change in professional sport performance teams and evaluates this process against current organisational knowledge.

Following this first exploration, Chapter 5 also addresses Objective 1 and moves to meet Objective 2. Applying the same methodology as in Chapter 4, this study specifically describes a parallel investigation of Olympic sport performance directors' (hereafter PD) perceptions and reflections on their culture change practice. Beyond providing initial insight on the culture change process in Britain's other major strand of elite sport, this study provides a contrast with Chapter 4 via its consideration of: (a) culture change "from distance" (with respect to most Olympic sports' distributed, multi-site networks); (b) the interaction of and challenges with public rather than private funding; and (c) the implications of working in a quadrennial as opposed to a season-on-season cycle. Unearthing the chronology and nature of optimal culture change in this specific performance team environment, the results reinforce many messages from the PM study and concurrently offer a number of bespoke findings.

Although the grounded theory models produced in Chapters 4 and 5 provide the first theoretical accounts of culture change in elite sport performance teams, these studies are also

constrained by shortcomings which have afflicted prior organisational CM investigation. In addressing Objective 3, Chapter 6 therefore adopted a 360 degree approach to explore multi-stakeholder perceptions of successful management-led culture change in a professional sports team (encompassing: team management, support staff, players, and CEO). Deploying a case study design and interview guide framed by each participant's bespoke experience, the focus of this chapter centred on (perceived) management action and its effectiveness over a two-year change process. Additionally, this study also attended to Objective 4 by exploring the utility of decentred theory, an imported perspective from political science, for explaining the CM programme's evolution and success. Via inductive then "recentred" analyses, the results substantiated much of the management team's approach, illuminated notable points of divergence across multi-stakeholder perceptions, supported the fundamental structure and features of the models developed in Chapters 4 and 5, and offered initial support of decentred theory's value as an framework for explicating elite sport performance team culture change.

With preceding chapters focused predominantly on understanding the chronology and nature of culture change best practice, Chapter 7 addresses Objective 5 by exploring *how* the developed models are best delivered. Expressly, from analyses conducted over Chapters 4 to 6, a discrete change mechanism found across all of these studies is identified and described. Extending this focus on how the culture change models are optimally delivered, Chapter 8 addresses Objective 6 and provides initial insight on some particularly important leadership and management skills which were also prevalent across the three investigations undertaken in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Synthesising the mechanism- and leadership-based findings with the two grounded theory models, the implications for elite sport performance team culture change theory and practice are presented in Chapter 9. Attending to the final objective of the thesis, this chapter also includes a description of a training workshop delivered for the Rugby Football Union's

Elite Coach Development programme. Based on the implications derived from Chapters 4 to 8, this project sees the thesis “come full circle” from identifying a pertinent applied challenge to providing guidance on its successful negotiation. Conducted as part of an ongoing action-research investigation, participant feedback on the utility of this first intervention is provided. In Chapter 10, conclusions are drawn on the thesis with a particular emphasis on its unique contributions to elite sport performance team culture change literature and practice alongside recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE CHANGE IN ELITE SPORT PERFORMANCE TEAMS: CONTEXTUALISING AND PARAMETERISING THE CONSTRUCT

2.1. Introduction

As identified in Chapter 1, the development of theoretical and practical knowledge in management-led culture change in elite sport performance teams represents a highly relevant and important pursuit. However, to identify a research agenda from which the objectives and outcomes of this thesis can be met, it is vital to first examine the contexts against which such work takes place and parameterise the sport-specific culture change construct. Further used to determine the extent to which bespoke understanding is required and therefore define the most suitable starting point and approach for study, this chapter is structured around critical indicative reviews of current pertinent knowledge in business/non-sport organisation, sport management, and sport psychology literature. More specifically, these reviews are packaged as four key challenges which this thesis must address if effective knowledge development of, for, and through elite sport performance team culture change is to be generated.

2.2. Challenge I: Methodological Shortcomings of the CM Literature

2.2.1. Business/Non-Sport Organisation CM Literature

Acknowledging that organisation management are routinely required to drive change initiatives when an improvement in functioning and/or performance is sought, and that the process via which management implement change is as, if not more important than what the change is (Mento, Jones & Dirndorfer, 2002; Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004), business-based CM researchers have produced an abundance of applied frameworks (e.g., Hartmann & Khademian, 2010; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003; Mento et al., 2002; Price & Chahal, 2006; Ruvolo & Bullis, 2003; Wissema, 2001). Generally taking a linear form, involving stages of planning, initiation, implementation, and evaluation, CM scholars and consultants have also

disseminated a variety of measures by which effective change is considered to occur. Such measures, among many others, include creating a shared vision/expectations (Luecke, 2003; Kotter, 1996), empowering staff (Ruvolo & Bullis, 2003), managing resistance (Erwin & Garman, 2009), and self-reflection (Mento et al., 2002). However, while significant efforts have been devoted to illuminating and explaining applied CM models, Balogun and Hope Hailey (2004) reported that around 70% of CM programs failed to deliver on their intentions. As noted by By (2005), and further echoed in Cruickshank and Collins' (2012b) later sport-specific review, this concerning and often reported occurrence may be a direct consequence of the methodological limitations which plague business CM literature.

As a first example, business-based CM study has historically adopted a subjective approach toward developing and testing frameworks. Indeed, anecdotal prescriptions prevail, often derived from subjective experience (Ruvolo & Bullis, 2003) or arbitrary amalgamations of prior accounts (Price & Chahal, 2006; Mento et al., 2002), thereby raising doubt over the validity of garnered advice. For instance, while Ruvolo and Bullis (2003) offer (apparently) logical and face-valid recommendations from a failed culture change programme at a U.S. military academy, no qualitative or quantitative analyses were used to arrive at their conclusions. Thus, many frameworks appear to have obtained relative dominance in the field through unchallenged acceptance rather than any confirmation of their robustness (By, 2005).

A second area of methodological contention is the predominant theoretical focus on *process*. Underpinned by universal management hypes and fashions which promote a need for constant change (Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004), this macro-level approach has reflected a rationalistic perspective for uncovering tangible change procedures; although it is significant that very few enquiries have tracked change programmes in real time (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Consider, for example, the work of Mento et al. (2002) who, from merging lessons from previous change models filtered through practical experience, offer a definitive 12 step

process for implementing change. The work of Luecke (2003) seems to offer an ‘even better’ plan, with nirvana accomplished in only “seven steps”. Such prescriptions intuitively appeal to the needs of managers across the organisational environment, offering CM “insights and recipes that are punchy, succinct, explicit and plausible” (Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004, p. 1207). The lack of testing and monitoring, however, prevents us knowing which, if any, are the most accurate or useful (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004).

Moreover, it is both surprising and counterintuitive that little focus has been devoted to assessing the perceptions of employees as the *targets* of change and how new processes impact upon them (Cunningham, 2006b; Devos, Buelens & Bouckennooghe, 2007; Driscoll & Morris, 2001; Neves & Caetano, 2006). Indeed, due to many CM consultants’ focus on devising well-marketed “brand solutions” rather than lucid, evidence-based recommendations - in doing so, exploiting the tendency for business managers to outsource external specialists as change facilitators or “commercial reducers of complexity” (Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004, p. 1207) - simplistic, leader-centric, step-by-step methods are often offered without critical evaluation of the mechanisms by which they operate. For example, while the *Lane4 Change Framework* claims to be “a scientifically rigorous platform from which . . . successful change can be designed and implemented” (Warriner, 2008, p. 19), no evidence can be sourced on its analytic emergence. While a need to protect product IPR and market edge is understandable, the failure to submit such tools to peer review should be seen as a weakness. Contrast this with the England and Wales Cricket Board’s use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a well researched and publicly-derived instrument (Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Vaughan, 2011).

The third methodological shortcoming of business-based CM literature is the widespread failure to uncover and evaluate actual change *mechanisms*: For example, *how* do managers “instil trust” or “create a shared vision” (both common central pillars of any of the proposed systems)? The question of “how” appears to have been considered at a somewhat

superficial level, often only through the prescription of broad directives (Devos et al., 2007). Indeed, as a solution to resistance, Price and Chahal (2006) stipulate that resisters should be made part of the project: However their guideline to achieve this states that “if done with enough skill and with good employees, the implementation team can successfully use the doubters to improve the change process” (p. 249). The actual means by which resisters may be included remains unspecified, although recent research suggests that leaders may require a range of mechanistic abilities to manage change effectively, such as political bargaining (Hope, 2010; Potrac & Jones, 2009) and the utilisation of pivotal “tipping points” to enforce strategies (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Taylor & Ford, 2008). Unfortunately, leader succession literature also offers limited insight as this domain’s traditional positivist underpinnings have channelled focus onto the correlates of succession rather than what it is successors do, how they do it, when they do it, who with, where, and why. (Giambatista, 2005; Hutzschenreuter, Kleindienst, & Greger, 2012). Conversely, how, when and why CM methods are chosen and deployed to optimally interact with the cognitive-affective interpretations of the programme’s targets seems important for any framework to hold real theoretical and applied value, as well as greater market worth. Indeed, this point has been echoed in the recent work of du Gay and Vikkelsø (2012, p. 133):

While it is clear that such [under-described] discourses have some intuitive rhetorical appeal – offering, for instance, a powerful set of generalisations that can act as a catalyst for ‘transformation’ – it is not at all obvious how such abstract injunctions are to be acted upon practically It may well be the case that their lack of precision and specificity has some serious implications for the appropriateness of particular changes in different organisational settings.

While employee/targets’ psychological wellbeing is a significantly underrepresented line of enquiry, it should also not be forgotten that the ultimate purpose for initiating change

is to enhance performance. Surprisingly, although business-based prescriptions have been widely distributed, the relationship between change processes, their psychological impact on change targets and performance outcomes has been largely ignored (cf. Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001; Wischnevsky & Damanpour, 2006). Recognising that the ultimate goal for programs in the applied setting is to enhance, or certainly maintain, performance and outcome success, failure to comprehensively consider the change-performance association is therefore another notable methodological limitation of business CM research.

2.2.2. Sport Management Literature

As a result of elite sport teams' status as businesses (e.g., Gilmore & Gilson, 2007), the process of change has become a topic of notable interest in sports company management. Similar to the bulk of guidance from business-based work, successful evolution is considered to be underpinned by, among other aspects, the creation and acceptance of shared goals (Cunningham, 2009), relationships of trust (Smart & Wolfe, 2000), and empowerment of change targets (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004). While rarely utilising or testing specific CM prescription, these commonalities nonetheless reinforce the conjecture in Chapter 1 that the CM construct is both highly applicable and pertinent to the elite sport environment, where such process aims (i.e., shared goals, management-support staff-performer trust, performer empowerment) are common (cf. Collins, Button, & Richards, 2011).

In a notable step toward developing sport-specific CM knowledge, Frontiera (2010) recently studied the delivery of culture change in US professional sport organisations. From interviews with the owners and general managers of successful American football, basketball, and baseball teams, this author presented a five-step change framework, involving: assessing the symptoms of a negative culture, implementing a new way of doing things, emphasising and reinforcing new values, embedding the new culture, and crystallising the new culture. Beyond uncertainty over the extent to which this (and others') organisational-derived work

can be directly applied for research and practice in on-field sports team environments (NB. this point is covered in greater detail in Challenges II, III and IV below), Frontiera's research is limited by: (a) interviewing successful owners/general managers only (overlooking learned lessons from unsuccessful owners/general managers and the perceptions of change-targets); (b) the short interview duration (the shortest being 31 minutes); (c) the use of closed questions in the interview guide (e.g., "How did you communicate that change was necessary?"); (d) incoherence between the organisational theory-driven guide and (apparently) purely inductive data analysis; and (e) the consequent provision of partial, abstract, and simplistic advice as to when and how each of the five steps should be addressed.

Indeed, while comparable CM guidance has been offered from work across both non-sport and sport organisation research, other sport management-based study has been similarly and significantly afflicted by limitations in design and methodology, thereby diminishing its value for application in the elite sport performance team (and arguably the sports company itself). Firstly, research has again primarily focused on macro, system-level changes (Skinner, Stewart, & Edwards, 1999; Zakus & Skinner, 2008) which have often been triggered through changes in the external environment (Bloyce et al., 2008; Hanstad, 2008) rather than management-led initiatives focusing on team performance. Second, there has been a widespread failure to consider *how* change is both successfully and unsuccessfully delivered at the individual level (cf. Cunningham, 2006a). Finally, and in stark contrast to the thrust of business-based CM investigation, study has often been occupied with theoretical explanations of previous change processes (e.g., Morrow & Idle, 2008; Thibault & Babiak, 2005) rather than the development of frameworks which can direct and inform practice. For example, while Kelly (2008) illuminated the multifaceted nature of professional football management and some mechanisms for optimal effectiveness, such as the appointment of trusted staff, focus was on explaining these processes through the writing of Max Weber

rather than offering guidance to individuals appointed into such demonstrably precarious positions.

2.3. Challenge II: The Theoretical Ambivalence of CM Research

Although a number of methodological contentions have been aimed at the nature and value of much CM research to date, perhaps the most concerning aspect of this work in both business and sports company management lies in the failure to be guided by robust theory. For example, it is unclear from which theoretical framework (and epistemological position) many business-derived CM frameworks are developed, while some work appears to prescribe advice based upon no evident theoretical position at all (e.g., Mento et al., 2002; Oakland & Tanner, 2007). Alternatively, in sports company management research, while research has been historically atheoretical (cf. Waddington & Skirstad, 2008), more recently a number of approaches have been adopted in attempt to best explain change processes (e.g., stakeholder theory: Morrow & Idle, 2008; institutional theory: Kikulis, 2000); sometimes even within the same work (Cunningham 2009; Slack & Hinings, 1992, Morrow & Idle, 2008). As noted above, however, little work in this particular domain has explored and explained unfolding management-led programmes.

Recognising that regardless of the reason for change there must always be a strategy for delivering it (Neves & Caetano, 2006; Price & Chahal, 2006), and the significant applied demand for efficient and effective CM practices (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004), research focussing on CM processes has been traditionally dominated by two overarching approaches; namely the planned approach and the emergent approach (By, 2005). Both focused on the process of how change comes about, the planned approach is grounded in the work of Kurt Lewin and maintains that current behaviours, processes, and cultures can be abandoned and new states achieved via a pre-planned, three-step method of: *unfreezing* the current culture, structure, processes, or behaviour; *changing* to new culture, structure, processes, or

behaviour; and *refreezing* the new culture, structure, processes, or behaviour (cf. By, 2005). While providing a broad basis from which a host of planned models have been developed (cf. Bamford & Forrester, 2003), this umbrella perspective has nonetheless faced many challenges. Indeed, as summarised by By (2005), this perspective has been highly criticised for its: (a) rigidity (or inability to deal with and adjust to dynamic environments: Bamford & Forrester, 2003); (b) shortcomings in accounting for open-ended/continuous change processes; (c) encouragement of managers to remain fixed on the programme rather than tailoring action to initial and evolving feedback; (d) dependency on effective top-down action; (e) dependency on pan-stakeholder buy-in (thereby ignoring the inherent CM-based politics, conflict and interpersonal challenges); and (e) shortcomings in accounting for situations which require directive, rapid, or transformational action.

In stark contrast to the planned perspective's key tenets, the emergent approach to CM places less significance on detailed top-management plans and instead promotes organisation-wide sensitivity to environmental complexity and the identification of a variety of potential change strategies. The process of emergent change is not therefore a linear, sequential, time-locked activity but rather via a continuous, adaptation- and learning-based approach which encourages optimal responses to changes in the organisation's surrounding circumstances and conditions. In this manner, change is driven through "bottom-up" as opposed to "top-down" action, with managers considered facilitators rather than controllers of organisational systems and structures (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Guided by the assumption that environmental contexts change at too fast a pace and rate for top-managers to control responses via well-developed strategies, the emergent approach is therefore also characterised by decentralised power and responsibility; involving a shift from "managerial hierarchies" to "spontaneously forming centres of innovation" (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012, p. 127).

Although receiving greater support than the planned approach through its treatment of complexity (a feature which organisational change theorists have paid increasing attention to: Anderson, 1999; Cilliers, 2000; Smith, 2004; Theodoridis & Bennison, 2009), *specific* theory under the emergent umbrella has not been forthcoming. With this approach considered to be “more concerned with change readiness and facilitating for change” (By, 2005, p. 375), much work in this area therefore offers universal yet vague advice. Indeed, the “one size fits all” approach again prevails over more context-specific advice (i.e., a “one size fits each”) with even the more explicit applied models (with typically “marketable” titles: e.g., Kanter, Stein, & Jick’s *Ten Commandments for Executing Change*, 1992; Kotter’s Eight Stage Process for *Successful Organisational Transformation*, 1996; Luecke’s *Seven Steps*, 2003) still highly abstract. For example, take CM steps such as: *separate from the past* (Kanter et al., 1992); *anchor new approaches in the culture* (Kotter, 1996); and *start the change at the periphery* (Luecke, 2003). Furthermore, it is uncertain how the emergent approach’s bottom-up thrust can explain scenarios whereby: (a) change is instantly required; (b) middle/lower managers and employees do not hold the knowledge, interests, motivations, and skills to drive performance-optimising change; and (c) top managers are placed under pressure by their superiors to first and foremost deliver results. Also underplayed is the role of choice, whereby organisational leaders may stick with (rather than constantly altering) practices which, while contributing to temporary underperformance, fit with the organisation’s ideal state. As a result of the limitations in the planned and emergent approaches (as well as the lack of clear and coherent messages from other perspectives such as contingency theory and choice theory: By, 2005), deeper debate over the future of CM theory has recently arisen.

Most pertinently, in a recent insightful review by Du Gay and Vikkelsø (2012) on the current state of CM theory and knowledge, these authors emphasise how “cases of change are routinely introduced and analysed as examples of abstract theoretical or historical axioms,

rather than as specific, concrete instances of reorganisation from situation A to situation B” (p. 122). Extending earlier commentaries relating to the decontextualised and oversimplified nature of organisational change literature (e.g., By, 2005; Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004), du Gay and Vikkelsø describe how the treatment of change as a ubiquitous and generic entity has led to “the growing oblivion of classic concerns” (e.g., change design parameters, structures, control mechanisms). Certainly, while CM was originally addressed by scholars as a highly applied activity - in that it focused on the process of improving and/or adjusting an organisation’s core systems, structures, and processes – contemporary theoretical accounts have tended to focus on individual-level experiences/interpretations (or “people approaches”: Du Gay & Vikkelsø, p. 126). Accordingly, these authors argue that “by depicting change as instituting a promising yet ambiguous moment . . . [the emergent change] literature works to divert the attention of scholars and practitioners from the specific and practical to the abstract and ethereal dimensions of organisational life” (p. 127). Perhaps accounting for part of this abstraction, it is significant that organisational approaches to CM have rarely considered the fundamental differences which exist between businesses of varying sizes, orientations, and core functions. On the premise that optimal CM frameworks should be built on specification and detailed description, du Gay & Vikkelsø thereby encourage CM scholars to adopt a more contextually-specific, practically meaningful approach and undertake study which is founded on an exploration of the content, purpose, and elements of CM.

2.4. Challenge III: The Unique Features of Elite Sport Performance Team

Environments

As suggested by the preceding reviews, an accurate depiction and prescription of elite sport performance team CM is dependent on investigation which considers and addresses the frailties and limitations of prior organisational-based research. Similarly and further, beyond accepting culture change as a relevant and important construct for the managers of elite sport

performance teams, a second equally pivotal caveat is that it recognises and responds to the unique features of this highly complex and idiosyncratic environment.

Acknowledging contemporary elite sport's multidimensional focus on "performance, entertainment and financial profit" (Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne, & Richardson, 2010, p. 166), fundamental to the appeal for bespoke understanding is the argument that "for a coach to last, they must please the owner, management, players, fans, media, and be impermeable to the criticism that will occur when they fail" (Mielke, 2007, p. 107). Certainly, Potrac and Jones (2009, p. 223) describe leading sports teams as a "power-ridden" activity whereby impression management is crucial for acquiring the necessary time and support necessary to deliver change. As could be justifiably argued, the management of key internal and external stakeholders represents a crucial task in the effective delivery of change in any domain (Kihl, Leberman, & Schull, 2010). However, while the stakeholders highlighted by Mielke may also be implicated within organisational-level change (more so in sports companies), it is the nature and extent to which the leader of elite sport performance teams must manage these power-based relations which challenges the applied utility of current CM frameworks' application in the domain. For example, and extending points made in Chapter 1, with some professional football, baseball and basketball teams paying their performers more than £3.5 million *on average* per year (Harris, 2011) and high profile Olympic performers earning hundreds of thousands of pounds in sponsorship on top of significant prize money (Goodley, 2012) it is clear that most of these individuals hold significantly more power than many business' employees in shaping the success or failure of change programmes². As such, how performer needs, preferences and aspirations shape and align with an incoming manager's values and practices must be astutely evaluated (Greenleaf, Gould & Dieffenbach, 2001). Similarly, concerted efforts from a range of support disciplines

² A recent example of this power has been seen in the decision of many high profile British athletes' decisions not to relocate to Loughborough as part of UK Sport's drive for the centralisation of World Class Performance Programmes (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2012/nov/27/dave-brailsford-uk-athletics-loughborough>)

are required for organising and preparing the team (e.g., coaching, strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, nutrition, sport psychology, scouting). However, with each profession guided by its distinct codes and interests (as noted in Chapter 1), the potential for program-derailing conflict always looms (Collins et al., 1999). Indeed, Reid et al. (2004) have noted that interpersonal, individual-group (e.g., one coach-all coaches) and group-group (e.g., coaches-physiotherapists) conflict can swiftly spiral to detrimental impasse, rogue alliances, and the perishing of a cooperated and collaborated approach.

As noted above and in Chapter 1, the role, perceptions, and actions of external groups with a significant “stake” in team success may also impact upon the creation and maintenance of high performing cultures; particularly Boards of Directors, fans, and the media. Indeed, the bespoke interactions emanating from these groups further reinforce the suggestion that present CM models are not suitable for direct application in elite sport performance teams.

2.4.1. Pressure from the Board

Reflecting their ability to shape the conditions in which change is conducted through the extent of their facilitative support (e.g., resource provision), the perception of the Board is logically pivotal for culture change success³. Indeed, reflecting on the high rate of sackings in U.S. professional team sports, including his own from the NHL’s Tampa Bay Lightning (where he won the Stanley Cup), John Tortorella noted: “It’s the owners’ call. I’m not the one who has invested millions in the team . . . You work through the bumps and become a tighter team. But some owners are not willing to go through that, and the coach is out the door” (Zinser, 2008b). Complicating the issue of manager-Board coherence for the leaders of elite sport performance teams, many competitive sports are distinct from business domains with respect to the (apparently) direct and regular opportunities for boards of directors to monitor and assess the activity and outputs of the performance team manager’s programme. Indeed,

³ In some professional sport cases, however, oligarch team owners (rather than a number of Board members) may hold all the power in determining the level and extent of resource provision, carrying bespoke implications for the manager’s efforts to ensure compatibility between their perceptions and those ‘above’.

with Dawson and Dobson (2002) revealing how variations in managerial performance can arise from owners' inability to appropriately examine activity due to its costly nature, and that objectively measuring performance in business has been a long-standing problem, sport is matchless in this regard as top directors or owners are able to observe and evaluate the product derived from the management of all pertinent inputs in the form of competitive performances (Gould et al., 2002), which in sports such as football, rugby and basketball occurs weekly, if not even more frequently. The down side of this apparently 'informed' viewpoint is that these individuals are normally business people, and relatively naive on the mechanisms of the sport setting (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). Thus, while culture change is not a swift process (Price & Chahal, 2006), the pressure on performance team managers to achieve instant and regular success against a context of constant evaluation provides a unique and conflicting circumstance. Tactical management of the board's perceptions of the team's strengths, shortcomings and requirements, particularly in the face of initially inconsistent results may therefore be a critical factor for ensuring both success and longevity.

2.4.2. Pressure from the Fans

The psychology of fans' commitment to specific teams has received notable attention in the sport literature (Bee & Havitz, 2010; de Groot & Robinson, 2008) and may account in part for the pressure placed on managers to create and maintain a successful team. Indeed, Vallerand et al. (2003) have suggested that the enjoyable activities which constitute fandom become internalised into individuals' identities, and develop into a personal passion which is worthy of time and energy investment. As a consequence of this psychological commitment, the activities, decisions, and performances of the team will have a significant impact on fans (Wann & Schrader, 2000). For example, notable coverage has been given to the resistance of many English Premier League fan groups toward the influxes of foreign capital into clubs (Bainbridge & Vulliamy, 2010; Hutchins, Rowe, & Ruddock, 2009), while Nash (2001) has

revealed that supporter groups have been formed in direct reaction to the attitude and playing style of a manager; ultimately contributing to their eventual dismissal. Fan opinion therefore appears to be of crucial importance to the level and nature of support given to a manager, and gaining a favourable interpretation by this group - which can generate vital financial, social and psychological capital - may be a central mechanism for creating optimal environments in which to deliver a program of change.

2.4.3. Pressure from the Media

The media's involvement and interest in elite sport has grown exponentially in recent times as the volume and depth of coverage continues to push new boundaries. For example, in considering these requirements in relation to elite sport team management, Carter (2007) provides a valuable account of the media's growing participation in English Premier League football; specifically detailing how managers' time is increasingly spent attending to media responsibilities. Significantly, Carter notes how Sir Alex Ferguson, long-term manager of Manchester United FC, contests that such appearances have lost a sense of their original purpose, instead becoming an exercise of character assassination. As noted earlier, time does not appear to be a commodity offered to managers of elite sport performance teams (League Managers Association, 2010; Mielke, 2007) and, as a consequence, the media's consumption of this resource (alongside the nature of their apparent intentions: see below) may provide a significant challenge to efforts to guide and drive through change.

Significantly, it also appears necessary to consider the media as not only a direct source of pressure but also as a mediator of pressure from other sources; specifically from the board and the fans. Regarding the former, Sisjord and Kristiansen (2008) have discussed how a positive media representation can assist with attracting sponsorship, a vital source of income for the boards of elite sport organisations. In similar fashion, Carter (2007) revealed how directors of football clubs have increasingly felt the need to have a manager in place that

transmits a certain “promotional” image of their club. Perhaps more importantly, however, may be the relationship between the media and the fans. As discussed, fan dissatisfaction can cost a manager their position (Nash, 2001) and facilitating positive perceptions through the media’s portrayal appears a necessary measure for creating optimal environments in which to conduct change. However, as a consequence of the shift from traditional objective accounts to sensationalist reporting (Carter, 2007), in which certain journalists are considered to thrive on “ammunition” (Reid, 2008, p. 67) from publicly stated comments in their pursuit of attention-grabbing headlines/stories, achieving such a positive portrayal of one’s character and competence may not appear as straight forward as it seems. With much contemporary journalism considering readers as consumers who desire entertainment (Knoppers & Elling, 2004), media outlets do not merely report news but actively frame and construct it (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008; Reid, 2008). Interestingly, Sir Clive Woodward has also commented that coaches often refrain from deviating from coaching norms due to a fear of the media reaction (Lee, Shaw, & Chesterfield, 2009). Reflecting these trends, Pedersen, Miloch and Cothran (2006) have highlighted that the effective handling of the media and subsequent positive coverage can be of vital importance for achieving success, and of particular importance to leaders in their attempts to enforce their intended programs.

2.5. Challenge IV: The Lack of Parallel Knowledge in Applied Sport Psychology

Recognising that the unique features of elite sport present a further major consideration for the development of bespoke performance-team specific culture change knowledge, what can sport psychology offer in guiding a research agenda with this focus? With ever-expanding knowledge in group dynamics, applied sport psychologists are in a strong position to identify an array of process markers which may enable the creation and maintenance of high performing cultures. Indeed, and among others, role clarity (Holt & Sparkes, 2001), sound coach-athlete relationships (Olympiou, Jowett & Duda, 2008), optimal

achievement goals (Heuzé, Sarrazin, Masiero, Raimbault & Thomas, 2006), performance feedback (Noblet & Gifford, 2002) and goal setting (Sénechal, Loughhead & Bloom, 2008) all appear to be logical areas for analysis and action. However, after determining the extent to which each of these processes may be required or enhanced (a change *of* or *in* culture: Scott, Mannion, Davies, & Marshall, 2003), the more testing task, if culture change is the goal, is determining from the literature: (a) how and when they should be operationalised; and (b) how they can be efficiently internalised and governed by the group.

Certainly, and challenging sport psychologists' abilities in packaging and deploying high performing processes, almost all prior research has examined these markers' correlations with other pertinent variables rather than the process of their delivery and regulation (e.g., Bray, Beauchamp, Eys & Carron, 2005; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). For instance, a sizable body of work has investigated the link between a range of processes and cohesion (e.g., Heuzé et al., 2006; Sénechal et al., 2008). Accordingly, while practitioners are acutely aware of the general importance of specific processes, awareness of *how* they are optimised is limited (cf., Smith, Fry, Ethington & Li 2005). Furthermore, of the few ecologically-valid, practically-relevant studies conducted to date, none have considered these factors' enhancement as part of a new manager's CM program. For example, in their delivery of a season-long team building intervention with adolescent netball teams, Sénechal et al. (2008) did not discriminate between the tenure status of each team's coach (e.g., recent appointment or long-standing leader). Accordingly, although theoretically sound, the murkiness of applied implications leaves practitioners tasked with delivering culture change faced with educated guesswork rather than solid, evidence-based consultancy. However, sport psychologists can at least take a small degree of comfort in having a recognisable literature base upon which to ground such speculation.

Indeed, only Schroeder (2010) has assessed how new values have been internalised in team performers and staff as part of a management-led culture change programme. However, as the perceptions of the coaches alone were examined and not the targets of change themselves, the work is still limited. Perhaps because of this shortcoming, culture change was portrayed as a largely top-down process and the extent to which prescribed values were actually internalised by change-targets or perceived to lie at the heart of enhanced performance remains unknown. Further highlighting the challenges of direct CM knowledge transfer between business and sport (and/or the limits of organisational change theory), Schroeder also found that Schein's (2004) model of organisational culture change did not fully account for the process as delivered in a performance sport environment. Notably, the study by Frontiera (2010) described earlier in this chapter also revealed that Schein's culture change approach did not accurately depict his sport-specific results. Finally, as participants in Schroeder's investigation led teams in NCAA competition, the deployed tools' value for elite domains is restricted. For example, it seems reasonable to consider that an elite sport performance team manager's provision of written assignments (op cit, p. 74) could be met with much contempt and/or derision from many multi-millionaire performers. So, what other knowledge sources can sport psychologists draw upon?

Due to their reported ability to shape the way in which group members perceive and behave (Romand & Pantaléon, 2007; Windsor, Barker & McCarthy, 2011), other related areas of sport psychology knowledge appear to be leadership and team building. Importantly, this inference is based on both processes' reported association with cohesion (Bloom, Stevens & Wickwire, 2003; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur & Hardy, 2009), arguably the most familiar covariate of high performing teams (albeit questionable: cf. the importance of healthy conflict/uncomfortable debate; Bowman, 1998; Reid et al., 2004). Moreover, with a focus on socially-aggregate constructs (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009) and prior implication of

culture within its texts (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2012b), organisational sport psychology seems to offer another face valid resource for informing performance team culture change practice. Beyond domain-specific literature, and as suggested in Chapter 1, sport psychologists would also appear to be drawing on organisational works to aid their culture change services. On deeper evaluation, however, the focus and applied credentials of leadership, team building, and organisational sport psychology leaves culture change consultants asking more questions than providing answers⁴.

2.5.1. The (In)Utility of Leadership Knowledge

Reflecting the client group in question and the nature of the task, leadership literature holds obvious appeal for the culture change practitioner. Indeed, there is now burgeoning evidence supporting transformational leadership's value for creating environments conducive to success (e.g. Callow et al., 2009; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Zacharatos, Barling & Kelloway, 2000). By empowering performers to reach their full potential through “personal, emotional and inspirational exchanges” (Callow et al., p. 396) the approach offers much promise for harbouring a group which is highly motivated to maximise its potential. However, while providing a set of principles which the practitioner may be wise to engender in the elite team manager (e.g., individual consideration; intellectual stimulation), this body of work and, arguably, leadership research as a whole is limited in its failure to provide extensive guidance on the situation-specific employment, deployment and monitoring of such behaviours (cf. the situation specific nature of leadership shown by earlier research and as commented on below: e.g. Chelladurai, 1980).

Indeed, without an appreciation of their interplay in the context of a new manager's program, generalised implications support generalised practice. For example, from a study of

⁴ As neither leadership, team building and organisational sport psychology has expressly identified culture optimisation as a core research intention, the reader is reminded that the following critique is presented from the perspective of practitioners currently attempting to make decisions on their culture change practice based upon the most face valid, currently available knowledge.

transformational leadership in low and high performing ultimate Frisbee players, Callow et al. (2009) report that as “high performance expectation predicted task cohesion irrespective of performance level [this] leads to the suggestion that this specific leadership behaviour could be encouraged irrespective of performance level”. However, assuming the guise of elite sport culture change practitioner, what about a manager taking over a team which underperformed in the previous season and has lost its most influential players? Will immediate and generic deployment of this behaviour promote beneficial perceptions amongst performers and support staff and establish the credibility and trust required for immediate success? If contextually appropriate, how should it evolve or be individually tailored? Finally, if apparent in both high and low performing teams, is this factor actually playing a role in ‘causing’ performance at all? Recognising that moment-to-moment actions may have vast implications in change of this scale (e.g., tipping points: Kim & Mauborgne, 2003), relying on advice from correlational findings is inherently problematic.

In the only published study to examine leadership traits’ in specific contexts within the same team (certainly of which I am aware), Höigaard, Jones and Peters (2008) applied Chelladurai’s (1980) multidimensional model to assess Norwegian soccer players’ preferences for manager behaviour in periods of prolonged team/personal success or failure; a framework which combines performer preferences and environmental demands to propose that effective leader behaviour is a product of: (a) the actual behaviour of the leader; (b) the leader behaviour preferred by the performers; (c) the leader behaviour required by the situation. Interestingly, while performer preferences were consistent across those regularly in the starting team, they were situation-dependent for those who were not. Noting that culture is “continuously produced and reproduced in the dynamic interaction between individuals and their social and natural environments” (Kimmelmeier & Kühnen, 2011), the variance in these results highlights the necessity for methods and mechanisms through which multiple

needs, motivations and roles can be effectively negotiated and regulated to support sustained optimal performance. However, due to the lack of longitudinal research, potentially useful applied tools such as Cope et al.'s (2007) identification of 360-degree feedback have emerged as tentative suggestions rather than derivatives of detailed evaluation. Moreover, as research has primarily focused on performer-recipients (e.g., Callow et al., 2009; Höigaard et al.; Rowold, 2006), knowledge of which behaviours are optimally effective for promoting coherency and consistency in the beliefs and action of influential support staff members is also limited (Bloom et al., 2003). Finally, and returning to the earlier point that culture is a group-level phenomenon, exclusively leader-centric approaches do not appear capable of comprehensively meeting the activity's rudimentary intentions (i.e., that the group creates and regulates the principles of sustained high performance).

2.5.2. The (In)Utility of Team Building Knowledge

As asserted by Bloom et al. (2003, p. 129), "if cohesion is the desired final outcome, then team building is the process to facilitate its development." However, while considered a critical process in performance optimisation, significant shortcomings exist in the breadth, depth and contextual-sensitivity of its guidance (cf. Pain & Harwood, 2009). For example, by predominantly focusing on pre-season social activities without examining their impact on performance (e.g., an army-administered training course with a professional soccer team: Martin & Davis, 1995), sport psychology's understanding of in-season, performance-relevant, outcome-determining processes and mechanisms is threadbare, particularly for elite team settings.

Addressing some of these gaps, work in top-end sport has recently examined the utility of personal-disclosure mutual-sharing (PDMS) activities as a means of optimising performance through enhanced social cohesion and a shared knowledge of teammates (Holt & Dunn, 2006). Interestingly, Windsor et al. (2011) have also indirectly suggested the

benefits of such interventions to team culture by reporting that shared perceptions between group members can emerge through the activity's ability to unearth and amalgamate individual-level values and beliefs. Such mutual sharing is clearly powerful and may play an important part in generating a team culture if used appropriately. However, Windsor et al.'s guidelines also encourage practitioners to "select an appropriate 'important' match before which the PDMS session will be conducted" (p. 111). Such sporadic intervention alone, especially when juxtaposed to critical moments, is clearly not suited to the day-to-day, power-ridden optimisation and regulation of enduring high performing cultures. Indeed, given that pre/post-test measure of cohesion did not significantly change and performance worsened, it may not even be fit for enhancing its immediate targets. Taken alongside other "firefighting" recommendations (e.g., after a loss of confidence: Bloom et al., 2003), the insufficient, inconsistent and short-term nature of elite-level team building knowledge seriously devalues its worth as a driver of culture change. More importantly, at a conceptual level it is also fundamentally inappropriate. Certainly, practitioners have already argued that management of group homogeneity-heterogeneity, relative to the phase of team development, is a more accurate predictor of sustained success than cohesion (cf. Reid et al., 2004). In short, sport psychology doesn't seem to know enough of the declarative underpinnings (the why, when and even why not) of team building packages to be able to optimise their deployment.

In addition to timing, the need for use of such interventions as part of a targeted 'block' of work is another important qualification. Indeed, while team building is an important process in shaping group culture, Hardy and Crace (1997) noted some time ago that group culture paradoxically shapes the success of team building. For example, in Bloom et al.'s (2003) examination of such activities in elite University coaches, it was asserted that support staff "all have to be on the same wavelength for...success..[as]...[o]ne breakdown in

that machine could lead to a series of events that have an effect on the playing field” (p. 136). Furthermore, in their PDMS intervention guidelines, Holt and Dunn (2006) suggested that familiarity with the team’s culture is mandatory for successful consultancy. In short, team building appears to operate as a function of culture to a greater extent than the reverse. Certainly, as cohesion (i.e., the common aim of team building) is a shared perception (Carron, Colman, Wheeler & Stevens, 2002) and derived from “member’s *selective processing* and *personal integration* of group-related information” (Heuzé et al., 2006, p.203), this is unsurprising given culture’s governance of both of these (italicised) processes (Paskevich, Brawley, Dorsch & Widmeyer, 1999). Consequently, without an understanding of mechanisms which can subtly shape these deeper-level occurrences, team building alone will only provide a variable, transient or superficial change. Indeed, Carron, et al.’s assertion that cohesion and performance interact in a positive circular fashion (i.e., when performance decreases so does cohesion) supports this assertion. Essentially, in an environment where performance outcomes are the most critical and sometimes only gauge of success, the utility of interventions which easily succumb to competitive losses and/or poor performances are insufficient for delivering an enduring high performing culture.

2.5.3. The (In)Utility of Organisational Sport Psychology Knowledge

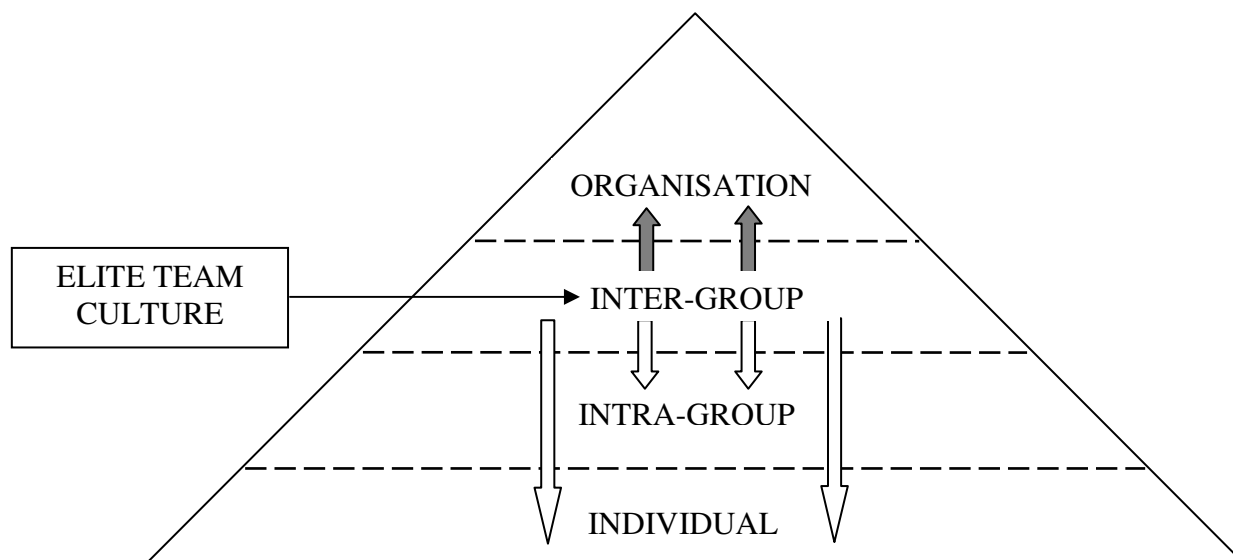
As sport psychologists aim to optimise their impact in elite sports team environments, recent literature has provided impetus for an expansion of knowledge in the optimisation of pan-individual and pan-group performance; that is, in organisational structures and systems surrounding performers (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). In contrast with sport psychology’s historical “bottom-up” progression from individual performer-focused enquiry against sport management’s “top-down” evolution from policy/administration-focused research, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) have suggested that the extensive impact which organisational, climatic, and cultural issues have on elite performance had, at the time of publication, been relatively

untouched. Based upon their evaluation of the emergence and application of organisational psychology in elite sport research, Fletcher and Wagstaff have consequently asserted that organisational-based service delivery by sport psychologists should focus on four distinct yet interdependent levels. Specifically, in order of their cascading influence on organisational functioning and performance, these were the: *organisational level* (e.g., overarching policies/strategies; socio-political and economic alignment), *inter-group level* (e.g., cross-group dynamics and their alignment with organisation goals), *intra-group level* (e.g., effective/united sub-groups and support teams), and *individual level* (e.g., individual-level role clarity). Importantly, a key caveat of this perspective is that consultancy is isomorphic; in short, intervention is aimed at impacting and permeating *all* levels of the schema:

To change a sport organisation, consultants will need to target the beliefs and behaviour of individuals who operate at all layers of the organisation. While the role and responsibilities of the chief executive officer will be different to a head coach, which will in turn differ from the team captain, all members of the sport organisation will have an impact on its functioning and effectiveness. (Fletcher & Wagstaff, p. 431)

As outlined in Chapter 1 and above, elite performance team culture change is *not* focused on changing a whole sport organisation; to the contrary, elite team culture change is focused on changing *part* of the sport organisation; a change which *may then* impact on other elements. To convey this point, Figure 2.1 demonstrates the explicit focus (line arrow) and permeation of elite team culture change (block arrows) according to Fletcher and Wagstaff's organisational service delivery theory.

Figure 2.1.

The Focus and Permeation of the Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change Construct

Note. The focus (line arrow) and permeation (block arrows) of elite team culture change according to Fletcher and Wagstaff's (2009) organisation service delivery theory: clear block arrows indicate the construct's cascading impact; shaded block arrows indicate the potential for reverberation throughout the whole organisation (as governed by attainment of consistent high performance/objective on-field success).

Since publishing their organisation service delivery theory, Fletcher, Wagstaff and colleagues have since led the generation of a burgeoning organisational sport psychology literature (cf. Wagstaff et al., 2012a; Wagstaff et al., 2012b; Wagstaff, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2013). Presently, however, few inroads have been made into the culture element of the sport psychology-sport management "twilight zone" (Fletcher & Wagstaff, p. 428), especially that which envelopes the elite team performance department. Certainly, even in work which draws explicit reference to culture change practice, the construct has received limited explicit treatment (e.g., Lee et al., 2009) and been primarily approached from an organisation-wide rather than performance team perspective (e.g., Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Schroeder, 2010; Wagstaff et al., 2012b).

Regarding this latter point, while Wagstaff et al.'s (2012a) research on organisational functioning during a period of major change has begun to elucidate how peak organisational outcomes may be facilitated, the value of the findings for specific areas of the organisation, such as the performance department, are uncertain. Indeed, perhaps dictated by the size and scale of modern elite organisations - and therefore the size and scale of research projects required to investigate them (Wagstaff et al. undertook a 9-month ethnography) - it is difficult to determine where optimal benefit may be delivered. For instance, from assessing staff, volunteers, and performers at all levels, Wagstaff et al. "illustrate the pivotal importance of interpersonal relationships and highlight the emergence of emotion-related abilities as highly influential in successful person-organisation dynamics" (p. 26). Expressly, a summary of the applied implications (p. 33) promote the need to: work hard at developing internal and external relationships; consider others' emotional investment during conflict; deploy attention to and interpret the meaning of underlying emotions in transactions; develop the ability communicate with and about emotion; be aware of the expectations, norms, and routines of emotion expression; be aware of how emotional expressions and communication influence others; and develop the ability to reactively or proactively modify others' emotions. While pointing to the salience of emotion-related abilities in large-scale change, as guidelines are described in relation to *organisations* or *the organisation*, practitioners are left to assume, rightly or wrongly, that *every* area and *every* individual may profit if these features were addressed. This "all in" approach is also highlighted by the fact that this advice could easily apply to almost any organisation in any field of business; a feature which resonates with the decontextualised and oversimplified advice provided in organisational CM (By, 2005; du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012; Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004). However, acknowledging that many elite team performers possess high egos, multi-million bank balances, and media eminence, efforts to optimise these figures' emotion-related skills may well be a fruitless pursuit.

Indeed, and in short, elite sport performance teams are special; albeit not in a nice way! Of course, Wagstaff et al. (2012a) did not explicitly study the culture optimisation process. As such, the point made is *not* that organisational sport psychology has not or cannot investigate culture change; instead, the point is that even if it does, this field's underpinning orientation toward the multifaceted holistic organisation inevitably results in a lack of specificity and sensitivity – features which du Gay & Vikkelsø (2012) vehemently warn against – to the idiosyncratic contexts of its departments (in the case of this thesis, the performance department). Of final note, while organisational sport psychology has primarily utilised a positive psychology approach to study (Wagstaff et al., 2012a; Wagstaff et al., 2013), the contested and political features of elite sport performance teams (as described in Challenge III) would indicate that such theoretical perspectives may be conceptually unsuitable for team-level culture change.

2.6. Summary

As outlined above, the development of accurate theory and valuable practice for elite sport performance team culture change faces a number of specific and significant challenges. As suggested above, initial sport-specific investigation must acknowledge and respond to the methodological and theoretical limitations which have tarnished much of the organisational CM literature. More specifically, research in elite sport performance teams must generate knowledge which straddles the theory-practice divide. Indeed, while the abstraction of CM theory has impeded the development and refinement of effective applied prescription (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012), the non-evidence based, fad-driven practice of many CM consultants has equally contributed to the predominantly decontextualised and generic nature of CM understanding (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004). Remaining sensitive to the fact that CM is an essentially applied topic, the lessons from organisational literature suggest that an approach which facilitates effective, context-specific practice underpinned by conceptually

and methodologically sound research is paramount. Certainly, the unique features of elite sport performance teams depicted above reinforce this call for contextually appropriate investigation and simultaneously warns against the uncritical transfer of theory, concepts, and practices from organisational domains.

With sport psychology's only explicit study into culture change to date having been conducted in a US college setting, there is also a clear need for initial inquiry to work from an explorative rather than hypothetical-deductive/comparative stance. Certainly, as well as the organisational/sport management literature offering few implications from which opening sport-specific research could profit, sport psychology too provides little direction for the elite team culture change agenda. Expressly, the focus, nature, and applied credentials of its most relevant constructs/knowledge sources (i.e., leadership, team building, organisational sport psychology) provide limited guidance on how culture change in elite sport performance team settings should be addressed. Indeed, of Mohammed and Dumville's (2001) four areas of shared team knowledge (i.e., task-specific; task-related; teammate-related; attitudes/beliefs), no previous research has sought to explicitly optimise the coherency of members' values and beliefs to aid sustained high performance. Based on these key messages, Chapter 3 moves to select and define a research philosophy and methodology which can support the development of theoretically and practically meaningful knowledge in elite sport performance team culture change.

CHAPTER 3:
**CULTURE CHANGE IN ELITE SPORT PERFORMANCE TEAMS: SELECTING
AND DEFINING THE RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY**

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the chosen philosophy and methodology for meeting the research programme's objectives and purposes. Of late, much attention has been focused on the need for scholars to better understand and locate their research within specific paradigms (e.g., positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, interpretivist, poststructuralist) with equal sensitivity to these approaches' philosophical foundations, primarily covering matters of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Culver, Gilbert, & Sparkes, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Holt & Tamminen, 2010; Sparkes & Smith, 2009; Krane & Baird, 2005; Suddaby, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Accordingly, my chosen research philosophy adheres to the recommendations made within contemporary discussions and frames all methodological decisions made within the undertaken research process.

Based upon (a) the applied orientation of this thesis (i.e., uncovering manager-led culture change practice in elite sport performance teams); (b) the issues which organisational CM has faced through its historically generic and abstract approach to study and theory building; (c) the unique features of elite sport performance team environments; and (d) the lack of parallel knowledge in applied sport psychology (cf. Chapter 2), a pragmatic research philosophy was selected as the lens through which to engage the work programme outlined in Chapter 1. Although differences exist between various conceptualisations of pragmatism, this thesis follows the approach of Morgan (2007) and adheres to recent work which has illuminated and operationalised the key ideas of John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead (Bryant, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Giacobbi, Poczwardowski, & Hager, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To fully elucidate this philosophical perspective and its

implications for the thesis, an overview of the pragmatic approach to research is now offered with particular focus on its relevance and importance to the management-led culture change agenda in elite sport performance teams. Second, details on the consequent methodologies used to generate knowledge on this topic are provided, as contextualised against this pragmatic philosophy and the principal objectives of the thesis (cf. Chapter 1).

3.2. Defining the Research Philosophy: A Pragmatic Approach

Recently identified as a perspective through which organisational culture change/CM research can be revived (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012; Hartmann & Khademian, 2010) and one which sport psychology could apply to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and practice (Giacobbi et al., 2005), the pragmatic research philosophy is fixed to the assumption that scholarly pursuits should ultimately “make a difference” to the groups and/or individuals which it studies. Meaningful research endeavours are therefore characterised as those which attempt to uncover *practical*-level truths within *specific* contexts (Giacobbi et al., 2005) about issues which can’t typically be overcome by automatic or habitual action (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); as the high turnover of team management suggests, this would appear to be the case with the contemporary culture change task in elite sport performance teams. Knowledge from study under a pragmatic philosophy is therefore intended to help understand rather than mirror the world. Additionally, theory and concepts derived from such oriented inquiry are at all times provisional and fallible in nature and therefore dependent on constant re-evaluation and adjustment to ensure their continued specificity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Accordingly, rather than distinct entities, knowledge and action constantly feed into each other as applied environments evolve and present novel conditions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Consistent with the power-ridden and contested nature of leading sports teams (Potrac & Jones, 2009), pragmatism therefore directs attention onto optimal *processes* due to the unremitting and temporally-grounded contingencies of applied settings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Focused on the “experience of actions in the world, rather than the existence of either a world outside those experiences or experiences outside such a world [as per a metaphysical paradigm]” (Morgan, 2007, p. 68), pragmatism counters all other philosophical approaches to research by *not* prioritising ontological and epistemological issues (cf. Krane & Baird, 2005; Culver et al., 2012). Indeed, for pragmatists there is no perceived gap between theory and practice:

Knowledge is not a hierarchical structure, with science or philosophical insight at the top and . . . common-sense or practical wisdom [below] [but rather] a web or a network of statements . . . [where] the value of any form of knowledge is its *usefulness* and *applicability* [emphasis added]” (Bryant, 2009, para. 46).

In short, ontological and epistemological concerns do not carry the same critical, “top-down” influence in the pragmatic approach as they do in the other major research paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, interpretivism, poststructuralism: Morgan, 2007).

Significantly, however, this does not mean that ontological and epistemological issues are uncritically discarded, “glossed over”, or avoided by pragmatists. On the contrary, the approach explicitly rejects the foundational notion of a single, objective reality and rebuffs the ontological and epistemological premise that it is possible to elucidate whether one theory is closer to “the truth” than another (Bryant, 2009; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Morgan, 2007). Yet, in seeking solutions to pertinent applied problems, pragmatism does not fall under any one specific non-foundational ontological and epistemological position and is not concerned with understanding “reality”. By rejecting the objective epistemology/realist ontology of pure positivism (i.e., based on a rigid belief in an observable world of generalisable truths) *and* the subjective/relativist equivalents of pure constructivism (i.e., based on a rigid belief that all knowledge is socially-constructed and contextually-bound: Denzin & Lincoln, 2008;

Krane & Baird, 2005), pragmatism instead views these polar perspectives as the ends of a continuum rather than categories in a strict dichotomy⁵ (Giacobbi et al., 2005).

As such, while foundational models consider knowledge from different paradigms to be incommensurate (i.e., knowledge acquired under one cannot be compared/integrated with knowledge from another: Culver, 2012; Morgan, 2007), pragmatism instead places weight on the *implications* of thinking or acting in that way over another. Specifically, focal concerns for pragmatists are: (a) the extent to which shared knowledge can be generated; and (b) what shared behaviours can be facilitated from this shared knowledge (Morgan, 2007). Again, a belief in the complex and interactive nature of continual “*knowing*” (rather than a top-down, ontological-epistemological-methodological chain of “*knowledge*”) is central to this approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Morgan, 2007). Indeed, as long as a study produces *useful* applied implications (i.e., those make a beneficial difference to practice: Bryant, 2009), meaningful communication and interaction across paradigms is promoted. In the case of this thesis, support is therefore found for a research programme which examines both the leader-centric perceptions of elite team managers in isolation and the more socially-orientated exploration and contrast of multi-stakeholder perspectives.

While not committed to any specific ontological or epistemological position or neatly fitting with the top-down organisation of other paradigms, a pragmatic philosophy still shapes all aspects of the research process; including, the goal of inquiry (i.e., practical solutions), the function of theory (i.e., an instrument/tool to support applied discoveries), data interpretation (i.e., a focus on process), the role of the researcher (i.e., a constructor of knowledge), and the criteria for evaluating research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Krane & Baird, 2005; Morgan, 2007). In

⁵ Interestingly, Bryant (2009) has recently written at length on pragmatism’s ability to clarify and resolve the issues and debates which have surrounded the philosophical underpinnings of grounded theory literature (cf. Holt & Tamminen, 2010)

contrast to tenets of other models, however, the primary focus of pragmatism lies with the research questions and the methods through which knowledge can be acquired (Morgan, 2007). Indeed, with the ultimate intention to identify new and effective ways of tackling a particular applied task, pragmatism prioritises methodological over philosophical issues. As noted by Giacobbi et al. (2005, p. 21), “pragmatists opt for methods and theories that are more useful to us within specific contexts (e.g., answers to practical problems), not those that reveal underlying truths about the nature of reality.” Critically, deployed methods and theories are also highly dependent on the *stage* of inquiry into the topic (Giacobbi et al.). This principle can be seen in the decision within this thesis to investigate multi-stakeholder perspectives through an imported theoretical framework (cf. Chapter 6), *after* uncovering initial understanding on the precise nature of elite sport performance team culture change across two different settings (cf. Chapters 4 and 5).

Indeed, as well as applying a pragmatic approach to individual studies, the adopted research philosophy also permeated throughout the whole structure of this thesis. Primarily, the work programme utilised diverse samples (i.e., comparing and contrasting perceptions of PMs, PDs, support staff, performers, top-management), addressed study limits (cf. progress from Chapters 4 and 5 to Chapter 6), and disseminated findings to pertinent individuals and groups (cf. Chapter 9) (Giacobbi et al., 2005). This structure further bears the hallmarks of a pragmatic philosophy in that the research process used multiple methodologies in an iterative programme (Giacobbi et al., 2005) which focused on the evolution of thought and an accumulation of knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Noting that epistemological concerns are still pertinent to the pragmatic perspective, it is important to consider the relationship between the researcher and the topic and participants. Indeed, as noted by Morgan (2007, p. 69):

Research questions are not inherently ‘important’ and methods are not automatically ‘appropriate’ It is we ourselves who make the choices about what is important and what is appropriate, and those choices inevitably involve aspects of our personal history, social background, and cultural assumptions.

In this case, pragmatism maintains that researchers (and all humans) are not passive observers (or “spectators”) who approach matters with “empty vessel” minds (Bryant, 2009, para. 49). Indeed, the biases and prejudices inherent within the individual - acquired via socialisation in general and specific environments – are actually considered to facilitate novel and innovative insights (Bryant, 2009). Significantly, while discoveries on a particular phenomenon cannot be separated from the lens of “the knower”, this does not confer an extreme relativist position (in which *no* interpretation can be considered more accurate than another); instead, pragmatic researchers embrace the existence of multiple realities but maintain that the knowledge they co-construct with participants corresponds to tangible applied artefacts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005). Reflecting growing consensus on the inevitability of such co-construction and interaction of self, qualitative and pragmatic researchers have been encouraged to provide a more reflexive outlook on their chosen research topic, research questions, and methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Culver et al., 2012; Morgan, 2007).

Indeed, Morgan (2007, p. 70) has asserted that “our values and our politics are always a part of who we are and how we act [to the extent that] these aspects of our worldviews are at least as important as our beliefs about metaphysical issues”. In my case, I approached this thesis with an outlook shaped by prior and current experiences and interests. Regarding prior experiences, as a former professional football player who had been a target of incoming managers’ programmes, the research topic is one which I have been directly involved with. More generally, through my time in high performance sport, I also undertook this thesis with an acute awareness of the demanding, pressurised and outcome-oriented nature of elite teams.

Reflecting on the whole research process (Culver et al., 2012), this experience alongside my supervision by Dave enabled a critical level of credibility with participants – facilitating their provision of a breadth and depth of detailed information (including that on sensitive/socially undesirable topics) - which I seriously doubt would have been otherwise possible. Indeed, as knowledge is, to an extent, co-constructed between researcher and participant(s), not having the credibility or understanding of/empathy with elite team challenges would have weakened my theoretical sensitivity (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and likely led to a potentially different (and potentially lesser quality) set of findings. In this instance, I have found much agreement with other researchers who have pointed to the merits of familiarity with a research topic or participant group (Eklund, 1996; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008)

Further shaped by prior coaching experience which offered insight into the leadership and management of elite-level performers - with a developed awareness on the unique power relationships which characterise sports teams – my recently completed training as a chartered sport and exercise psychologist (which ran simultaneously with this thesis) was, however, my greatest driver. Unquestionably, the professional and theoretical philosophies which I have developed as an applied practitioner fed into the focus, direction and undertaking of this work programme. Particularly, my focus on supporting client performance enhancement through the subtle application of contextually-specific, layered agendas guided my focus throughout this thesis to the covert as much as the overt processes and mechanisms of optimal culture change delivery. Additionally, my prioritisation of practical solutions to applied problems in consultancy contexts both aligned with and supported the principles of a pragmatic research philosophy. Finally, engagement with this thesis was also underpinned by a desire to provide theory-driven support to high performance teams/organisations in the future.

3.3. Selecting and Defining the Research Strategies and Methods

Reflecting the importance of stakeholder perceptions as a measure and marker of CM (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Stewart & Kringas, 2003), the thesis employed a qualitative methodology. Specifically, and recognising that qualitative research is ideally suited to questions which are concerned with “*how* social experience is created” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14), this approach was chosen due to its ability to generate “multiple maps of the world” (Strean, 1998, p. 344) and its idiographic focus on “the specifics of particular cases” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 16). Consequently aimed at developing rich understanding of a construct’s processes and qualities rather than its outcomes and frequencies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), qualitative inquiry was therefore further aligned with: (a) requests for scholars to seek greater detail and specificity in CM research (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012); and (b) pragmatism’s focus on creating context-specific knowledge (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Moreover, further coherence with the pragmatic research philosophy is found in the shared premise of a close relationship between researcher and the topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Indeed, as outlined by Denzin & Lincoln (2008, p. 28), qualitative researchers are “biographically-situated” in that they study within a bespoke “interpretative community” and from philosophical positions which interact with the research process and participants. Of further overlap, qualitative inquiry is also not concerned with creating a “correct” map of the world but rather a *useful* one (Strean, 1998). Importantly, while the pragmatic philosophy has often been used to underpin mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011; Giacobbi, Dietrich, Larson, & White, 2012; Gould et al., 2007), the combination of pragmatic and exclusively qualitative approaches was considered appropriate for the explorative nature of this thesis and supported by its prior application in sport psychology study examining the methods and strategies of high-level coaches (Gould et al., 2007).

As pragmatists consider methodological decisions to be shaped by the practicalities of inquiry and select methods which are accepted within their community (in this case, via peer-

review literature: Morgan, 2007), the following section details and rationalises the strategies applied in this thesis. Adhering to the pragmatic principle of adopting methodologies which are optimally sensitive to the specific research question, information sought, and the phase of inquiry (Giacobbi et al., 2005), each section is contextualised against the particular objective (cf. Chapter 1) and research questions which it aims to address. Moreover, the underpinning rationale of these choices is also made against the practical issues of the research process itself (e.g., access issues: Buchanan & Bryman, 2007).

3.3.1. Exploring Management Perceptions of Culture Change Best Practice: Grounded Theory Methodology

Research Objectives

1. To explore perceptions of culture change across pertinent performance management levels in a British elite sport context (specifically professional and Olympic sport environments), develop models of best practice, and evaluate their congruence with/divergence from current business-based knowledge.
2. To explore the potential for generality of culture change best practice across British professional and Olympic sport performance team environments.
5. To identify common mechanisms of elite sport performance team culture change.
6. To identify common leadership/management skills for delivering elite sport performance team culture change.

Research Questions

- What is the chronology and nature of optimal manager-led culture change practice in elite sport performance teams?
- How does the process of optimal manager-led culture change compare and contrast across professional sports team managers and Olympic sport performance directors?

- How do processes of optimal manager-led culture change in elite sport performance teams compare and contrast with organisational CM models?
- Via what mechanisms and leadership/management skills are models of culture change in elite sport performance teams best operated?

Of particular value for applied disciplines which seek to generate theory to inform and advance practice (Bryant, 2009), grounded theory was designed as a methodology to “occupy a pragmatic middle ground” between extreme empiricism and relativism (Suddaby, 2006, p. 638). Devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in response to the prevalent quantitative writing of the time to “demonstrate how some forms of qualitative research could claim a robustness and authority equal to quantitative research” (Bryant, 2009), many versions of the approach have since been tailored by various scholars to fit different philosophical perspectives (e.g., Charmaz and Bryant’s constructivist-based approach: Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Reflecting its roots in philosophical pragmatism, and therefore alignment with my guiding belief system, Corbin and Strauss’ (2008, p. vii-17) most recent variant was selected for application in this thesis. Crucially, with an explicit focus on generating practical insight, this choice also addressed Pettigrew et al.’s (2001, p. 697) view that “theories of change . . . must face the double hurdle of scholarly quality and practical relevance.”

Adhering to pragmatism’s primary focus on the methodology by which the identified applied issue and its linked research objectives/questions can be addressed, a grounded theory approach was chosen with respect to its focus on how complex social processes work within “particular contextual conditions” (Holt & Tamminen, 2010, p. 420) via multiple and varied perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). More specifically, with my intention to develop the first models of elite sport performance team CM, this methodology was considered especially apt with respect to its focus on generating context-specific (or substantive) theory. Moreover, this selection was also made with respect to the lack of sport-specific theory and the inherent

shortcomings of business frameworks. Indeed, the need for a flexible and open approach in *any* contemporary CM investigation is reinforced by this following passage from du Gay and Vikkelsø (2012, p. 133):

It is a key maxim in classic organisation theory, that the nature of the management task, and the appropriateness of the management methods deployed, can be defined only in relationship to the particular purposes, or ‘core tasks’ of the organisation to be managed. When it comes to ‘change’, the differences between organisations . . . are as vital as their similarities. It is unlikely that they will experience ‘change’ in an identical manner – as an abstract phenomenon – but rather as a particular matter of concern, with distinctive characteristics and practical implications related to the conduct of concrete aspects of their activities. If this is indeed the case, then it is unlikely that a generalised set of ‘change’ injunctions or recipes would be appropriate to them all. Indeed . . . generalisations about and injunctions to ‘change’ are at best somewhat gestural or gratuitous, and at worst potentially quite destructive.

Warning against “decontextualised importation of any general principle or recommendation” from generic and abstract CM frameworks (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012, p. 140), such as those described in Chapter 2, the implication for this thesis is that research cannot confidently rely on business literature to provide theory on which sport-specific study can be initially driven. Indeed, the commentary of du Gay and Vikkelsø suggests that even business scholars should apply methodologies which do not frame or force data and its interpretation through current abstract frameworks. Notably, grounded theory methodology has also been proposed as a useful approach for advancing CM knowledge in business settings (cf. Bamford, 2008).

Aligning with a pragmatic research philosophy, grounded theories developed through Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) methodology are neither speculative nor universal explanations, but transient and fallible tools (cf. Bryant, 2009). Additionally, and reflecting my intention to

develop models which are primarily specific to elite sport performance teams and of use as a critical mirror for organisational-based understanding, this approach produces theory which is substantive rather than formal.

3.3.2. Exploring Multi-Stakeholder Perceptions of a Successful Culture Change

Programme: Case Study Methodology

Research Objectives

3. To analyse and explain successful elite sport performance team culture change through multiple stakeholder perspectives.
4. To examine the power of an imported theoretical lens for explaining culture change in an elite sport performance team.
5. To identify common mechanisms of elite sport performance team culture change.
6. To identify common leadership/management skills for delivering elite sport performance team culture change.

Research Questions

- What management systems, processes, and actions do support staff, performers and top management consider effective (and ineffective) for optimising team culture?
- How and why were these management systems, processes, and actions successful (or unsuccessful)?
- What insight can an imported theoretical framework provide in explaining successful culture change in an elite sport performance team?

Reflecting the objectives and questions outlined above, a case study methodology was chosen for exploration of successful CM in an elite sport performance team with respect to its suitability for concentrated study of a specific and bounded system (Stake, 2008). Of further pertinence with regards to the groups implicated in elite sport performance team settings (cf.

Chapters 1 and 2), case study methodology also recognises that such bounded systems (such as elite sport organisations' performance departments) are characterised by dynamic internal interactions (i.e., within and across subsections/groups; such as support staff and performers) and activity patterns with external factors (e.g., top management). Importantly, by focusing on the interplay of internal and external contexts (e.g., including social, political, historical), case study methodology also therefore matches calls for contextual specificity and sensitivity in CM study (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012).

Aligning with a pragmatic philosophy, where research objective and question-specific methodology is prioritised ahead of epistemological or ontological matters, using case study methodology to examine the process of successful CM in an elite sport performance team is further supported through the strategy's organisation around complex and situated research questions. Indeed, although a distinctive qualitative research strategy, Stake (2008) notes that "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied". With focus explicitly on the selected case and what can be learned from it, methods of inquiry are shaped by the researcher's interests (i.e., research objectives/questions) and underpinning philosophy rather than "imposed" in the form of methodology-specific investigative/analytical processes (as in the many different versions of grounded theory). As such, with the final products and presentation of inquiry shaped by the researcher's objectives, questions and philosophy, the "case study" is both the process and product of inquiry (Stake, 2008). Indeed, the same case could viably be studied and explained from polar philosophical perspectives.

Applying the terminology of Stake (2008), the selected case study methodology for this thesis was *instrumental*; more specifically, study aimed to provide a contextually-bound account of the case and also wider insight into the culture change construct as applied to elite sport performance teams (the alternatives being an *intrinsic* case study, for understanding the full particularities of a specific; or *collective* case study, for understanding a series of cases).

Although any case study requires the researcher to focus on topic-relevant observations, interpret data patterns, and develop assertions on the case (Stake, 2008), the instrumental approach aims to enable knowledge development in more general constructs and therefore views the specific case of secondary interest. As such, and while still examined in detail and against its specific contextual backdrop, the instrumental case is selected due to its ability to provide insight into particular (i.e., why was this CM programme successful?) and wider interests (i.e., what can it tell us about optimal CM processes?). Importantly, this choice aligned with the intention of this thesis (and its pragmatic underpinnings) to create accumulated knowledge; indeed, case studies themselves cannot be understood without knowledge of other cases (Stake, 2008). Extending this point, Stake (2008, p. 128) has asserted that:

The methods of instrumental case study draw the researcher toward illustrating how the concerns of researchers and theorists are manifest in the case. Because the critical issues are more likely to be known in advance and to follow disciplinary expectations, such a design can take greater advantage of already-developed instruments.

With this thesis initially examining the perceptions of PMs and PDs and developing grounded theory models of best practice, knowledge had been accumulated on the nature and critical success factors of culture change and was therefore used to inform the research process and methodological decisions of Chapter 6. Most pertinently, and with reference to the ability of researchers to “take . . . advantage of already-developed instruments” in instrumental case study designs (Stake, 2008, p. 128), the chosen methodology allowed for importation and use of decentred theory as a tool for explaining the reported CM process (as supported by the findings from Chapters 4 and 5). In this case, a theoretical framework is used to frame the research findings based on the results from the two grounded theory studies. Importantly, the suitability of case study methodology was also supported by its prior deployment in other

work using decentred theory as an explanatory framework (e.g., Durose, 2009; Lindsey & Grattan, 2012).

3.4. Data Collection Method: Qualitative Interviews

With a focus on *how* high performing cultures were created and sustained (rather than *what* such cultures looked like) via key stakeholder perspectives, semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect data. As noted by Culver et al. (2012), interviews are the most popular method of qualitative data collection in sport psychology. Guided by the assumption that methodological choices are made in direct response to the questions and practicalities of the research (Culver et al.; Gould et al., 2007), and recognition that qualitative inquiry does not privilege any particular method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), the decision to use qualitative semi-structured interviews was informed by their:

- ability to explore and capture participant perceptions, experiences, and reflections and the social constraints under which they operate under (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008);
- suitability for studies exploring processes which follow a temporal sequence (Culver et al., 2012); and
- utility for examining previously unexplored topics and constructs (Creswell, 2003)

Additionally, interviews were also chosen with regard to a number of pragmatic issues which surrounded the research process itself (cf. Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). Specifically, through targeting high level participants – many still in employment and with limited time to contribute – the level of access to these figures’ meant that data collection in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 was considered to be best facilitated by one-shot interviews. Reflecting a need to optimise contextual specificity and sensitivity (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012) and protect confidentiality - especially as interviewees held high profile positions and were the focus of (or potential focus of) significant media coverage - other methods such as focus groups were neither feasible nor appropriate. Indeed, highlighting the concern with which managers treat

the media, one PM who was interviewed for this thesis has since requested that his anonymity-protected data not be quoted in any papers written for publication in academic journals.

The interview guide on which all interviews for this thesis (including grounded theory and case studies) were undertaken is provided in Appendix A. Adhering to the advice that “time must be an essential part of investigations of change if processes are to be uncovered” (Pettigrew et al., 2001, p. 697), these questions followed a chronological sequence and focused on: program goals; pre-change steps; processes and actions for initiating change; processes and actions for sustaining change; important personal attributes/skills for carrying out changes; evaluation processes and actions; reflections on success and/or failure. Crucially, however, while all of these questions were posed to each participant⁶, discussion flowed naturally and issues were pursued as they were presented to ensure that this general structure did not restrict interviewees’ scope to freely describe their perceptions, experiences, and reflections (as can be the case with “more structured” semi-structured interviews: Culver et al., 2012). Consequently, this guide facilitated information of “the hows” (i.e., how was it done) as well as “the whats” (i.e., what was done) of elite team culture change (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) and, adhering to the key tenets of a pragmatic philosophy, the essentially open-ended and flexible guide was also therefore “sensitive to the social, historical, and political context from which inquiry begins” (Giacobbi et al., 2005).

As an important qualification, while ethnographic methods are commonly utilised by researchers examining cultural elements of sports teams/organisations (e.g., Krane & Baird, 2005; Wagstaff et al., 2012a), the research objectives and questions which underpin this thesis did not align with the intentions of ethnography. Indeed, and to clarify, rather than trying to understand “culture . . . from the perspective of the group members . . . [to] lend

⁶ Please note that the wording of this guide was modified for the non-performance team management participants of the case study described in Chapter 6.

insight into . . . behaviours, values, emotions and mental states” (Krane & Baird, 2005, p. 87), this thesis was focused exclusively on exploring the chronology, processes, mechanisms, and leadership skills by which cultures were created and sustained rather than their outcomes. Moreover, as the case study was conducted retrospectively, observation-based methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Stake, 2008) were not deployed in this chapter. Additionally, and aligning with the rationale provided above, focus groups were also again not viable due to the need to protect player confidentiality (to ensure their selection in the team was not compromised) and to optimise the likelihood of acquiring optimally critical perspectives.

3.5. Evaluation of Research Quality

Research Objective:

7. To prescribe effective guidance for management seeking to efficiently establish and sustain high performing cultures in their team environments.

As recently outlined by Sparkes and Smith (2009), the variety of methodologies and philosophical positions which researchers can operate from has led to much debate over the markers of “good” qualitative research. Predominantly, qualitative study in sport psychology has adopted the *parallel perspective* to validity which, built on the notion that qualitative research is distinct from positivist and postpositivist paradigms (Sparkes, 1998), maintains that qualitative study can be evaluated against its own set of permanent and universal criteria. Commonly, qualitative investigators have drawn upon Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility (internal validity parallel), transferability (external validity parallel), dependability (reliability parallel), and confirmability (objectivity parallel). Emanating from this approach, research quality is consequently conferred from the number of employed criteria-facilitating techniques. In contrast, however, Sparkes and Smith support an approach to research quality judgements which do not invoke or succumb to such controlling features by highlighting how the rigid application of criteria fundamentally contradicts the non-foundational nature of

qualitative inquiry, limits research (i.e., if criteria are not met then the research cannot, by definition, be good), and discourages the development and delivery of novel and innovative approaches.

Emphasising the importance of the products, outcomes, and negotiation of research as well as their methods, Sparkes and Smith (2009) consequently argue that research quality is best judged against contingent lists which consist of different markers according to a study's specific contexts and internal meaning structures (i.e., philosophical orientation). Built on the assumption that subject and object cannot be differentiated, and that captured social reality is always shaped by the interests and intentions of the researcher(s), these authors' consequently promote the use of "characterising traits" rather than pre-defined, inflexible criteria to convey support and quality. In this manner, the traits used to judge one particular qualitative study may take on more, less, or even no relevance and/or importance in another (even under the same philosophical approach). Indeed, this position resonates with Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 35) who assert that "there is no single interpretative truth . . . [but rather] multiple interpretative communities, each with its own criteria for evaluating interpretations." As such, the reader is directed toward characterising traits within each study of this thesis which are consistent with the selected research philosophy, strategies, and methods.

From a wider perspective, and reflecting the chosen pragmatic philosophical position, it is important to consider how the overall quality of this thesis may also be evaluated (NB. as per comments above on the need for coherence between philosophy and quality markers, this also helps to contextualise judgements of each individual study). Primarily, and as suggested throughout this chapter, the research process and its findings are ultimately measured against the nature and usefulness of the practical implications which they provide for those who the research is focused on (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Indeed, as the topic under study is "typically . . . precipitated by a problematic situation [i.e., high turnover of elite sports team managers],

where one [i.e., study participants] can't just act automatically or habitually", the evaluation of research quality is directly accountable to the consequences which it presents (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 3). Taken against the preceding paragraph, it is this focus on consequences which distinguishes pragmatism from the positivist (and postpositivist) pursuit of validity and truth (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As noted by Bryant (2009, para. 102), "the ultimate criterion of good [pragmatic] research should be that it makes a difference." More colloquially, the "so what?" principle applies; specifically, what practical difference do the findings make if they *do* correspond to tangible applied artefacts? (Bryant, 2009, para. 47).

In addressing the question of whether acquired knowledge (or ways of knowing) is useful, pragmatism prioritises the quality marker of community agreement. Specifically, to explore the extent to which inquiry has discovered and disseminated valuable *practical-level* truths (i.e., those which are functional for the context in which study was engaged: Giacobbi et al., 2005), feedback and interaction is sought from those with topic-relevant experience and expertise (including, in this case, elite sports team managers and applied sport psychologists). Accordingly, the value of work underpinned by pragmatism is tested "through dialogue, the usefulness and consequences of knowledge, and negotiations within communities" (Giacobbi et al., 2005, p. 22), all of which demands ongoing discussion and reflection over the findings' implications (Buman, Yasova, & Giacobbi, 2005). In this regard, significant effort has been made throughout this thesis to disseminate to, interact with, and source feedback from sport psychologists (academic, applied, and both). More specifically, three oral presentations have been delivered at conferences of the British Psychological Society's Division for Sport and Exercise Psychology on the studies reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 (cf. Appendix B). Additionally, and alongside two co-authored book chapters, five papers have been accepted for publication/published in peer review journals (see Appendix B) - one of which was solicited by the journal's editor after observing one of the conference presentations described

above - conveying a consensus that the culture change construct and my findings to date are useful and impactful for applied practice.

Significantly, beyond the *perceived* usefulness of the results from this thesis, practical application of the findings have also recently been incorporated into a training resource for a group of current and aspirant elite sport performance team managers (rugby union). Using a one-day workshop as the vehicle, participants' engagement with, response to, and perceived utility of this event are described in Chapter 9. As the pragmatic research philosophy views research-derived theories and implications as provisional and fallible tools (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), with knowledge an unremitting social activity (Bryant, 2009), this workshop has also acted as the first step in an ongoing action-research study which aims to support participants' practice and provide an opportunity to continue the modification and refinement of this initial knowledge. While specific details of this study and its methodology are not included in this thesis (as this represents the "next step" rather than the primary agenda), action research is considered particularly apt due to its generation of both scientific and practical understanding and, of fundamental importance under a pragmatic research approach, collaboratively (i.e., researcher-participant) designed solutions to applied challenges (Berg, 2004).

3.6. Summary

Reflecting my focus on elucidating optimal manager-led culture change in elite sport performance teams, this chapter has identified a pragmatic research philosophy as suitable for meeting the objectives of the thesis (cf. Chapter 1). This decision was rationalised against: (a) the culture change construct's clear applied focus; and (b) lessons learned from organisational CM's problematic treatment change as an abstract and decontextualised phenomenon (cf. du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012; Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004). In adopting this perspective, and reflecting the explorative nature of the thesis, qualitative methodology was therefore selected as the most appropriate means for investigation. More specifically,

this approach was chosen for deployment within grounded theory (cf. Chapters 4 and 5) and case study (cf. Chapter 6) research strategies. Importantly, these strategies were primarily selected with respect to their ability to best meet the objectives and questions on which this thesis was based (rather than imposed by rigid ontological and epistemological assumptions) and their privilege to methods (i.e., interviews) which were sensitive to the practicalities of the research. To support reader judgment on the quality of these decisions, as well as the products of inquiry, this chapter has also proposed that research quality is best assessed against a set of characterising traits which are specific to (and described in) each of the three studies conducted for this thesis (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Finally, and consistent with my pragmatic research philosophy, it has also been identified that the quality of the overall work programme needs to be considered against the level of community agreement reached over its findings and the consequences it provides for applied practice (Bryant, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005); both of which are discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 4:

DELIVERING CULTURE CHANGE IN PROFESSIONAL SPORT PERFORMANCE

TEAMS: A GROUNDED THEORY MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE

4.1. Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, managers of professional sport performance teams face a significant challenge in establishing and sustaining a culture which can deliver enduring high performance. Indeed, acknowledged as a key feature of the contemporary remit (Lee et al., 2009; Bennie & O'Connor, 2010), the requirement for this process to be paired with instant and enduring objective success has arguably never been greater. As indicative (albeit extreme) examples, Chelsea FC has recently appointed its ninth manager in the last 10 years (Fifield, 2012) while Nottingham Forest FC has named its fourth manager in seven months after the third incumbent lasted 40 days (James, 2013). While not suffering to the same general degree, rugby union and rugby league team managers are also now regular victims of the results-oriented short-termism which pervades professional sport (Foy, 2010; Prentice, 2012). Between the “lost specification” and untested models of organisational CM (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012, p. 121), the “immature” status of leader succession literature (in terms of links with strategic CM: Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012, p. 729), limits of current CM and culture change theory for sports teams (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010), and a lack of parallel knowledge in applied sport psychology, change consultants are, however, faced with an unsubstantiated and fragmented evidence-base on which to support these figures’ practice. Accordingly, and as detailed in Chapters 1 and 3, the purpose of this chapter was to generate the first contextually-specific, practically-meaningful understanding of the chronology and nature of optimal culture change practice as led by newly appointed managers of professional sport performance teams. To achieve this goal, Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) grounded theory approach was selected as the research strategy. As described in Chapter 3, this decision was

made with respect to the methodology's pragmatic underpinnings, value for practice-led disciplines, focus on how complex social processes work in specific contexts, and generation of substantive theory (Bryant, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Holt & Tamminen, 2010).

4.2. Method

4.2.1. Sampling and Participants

To facilitate a fully iterative process (i.e., an interaction between data collection and analysis), theoretical sampling was employed to select participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Rather than recruiting participants based on a set of standardised inclusion/exclusion criteria, theoretical sampling is a process which samples participants based on developing analysis. Importantly, rather than being used to confirm initial concepts and the developing framework, this process is underpinned by the pragmatic assumption that data is sourced which tests and assesses the circumstances and conditions in which these findings “work” (or don't work) in the context of inquiry (Bryant, 2009). Additionally, this approach aligns with philosophical pragmatism in acknowledging that participants can never be a “random” collection in terms of their personal history, background, and beliefs (Morgan, 2007); instead, reflexivity over sampling-based decision making is therefore prioritised (and detailed below).

To ensure contextual consistency, it was decided that sampling would focus on three high profile professional sports in the UK; namely: football, rugby union, and rugby league. To enhance the usefulness of the findings, sampling parameters were also set that participants held a variety of experiences (i.e., early sackings versus long-term successes versus a mixture of sackings and successes) at the highest level of each sport (i.e., Premiership/Championship football, Premiership rugby union, Super League rugby league, International). Institutional ethics approval to sample managers across the three sports was obtained.

Data collection was undertaken over three distinct phases. Initially, one football and one rugby league team manager were purposively sampled based on their varied experiences

across a number of teams (which also varied in profile: e.g., history of success, resources; fan base; media coverage). Based on the discovered consistency across analysed data from this first sample, alongside awareness of the social and political underpinnings of leading change programs (Hope, 2010) and sports teams (Potrac & Jones, 2009), sampling was consequently collapsed across all sports. Further driven by the analysis of data from the purposive sample – predominantly the findings that culture change delivery was notably constrained by team traditions and external stakeholder interactions – it was decided that the second recruitment phase would target individuals who had delivered programmes at more historically successful and/or publicly scrutinised teams (e.g., those who received significant media coverage). Additionally, as the “prototypical” sport in terms of the nature and scale of challenges faced by team managers (as per the implicated financial stakes and public profile), sampling in this second phase was also focused primarily, but not exclusively, on football team managers. Finally, as interviews in the first two data collection phases had centred on each interviewee’s perceptions of one or two of their delivered programs (see Data Collection section below), the final manager recruited was also involved in peer training/development in order to obtain a wider perspective on cross-team principles of best practice.

The overall sample included eight managers: four from football and four from rugby. All interviewees were male, aged between 37 and 57 ($M = 47.50$ years, $SD = 8.02$ years), and had held management roles (i.e., manager/head coach, assistant manager/coach, director/head of sport) for 79 years in total ($M = 9.88$ years, $SD = 4.80$ years). In terms of time in the role of team manager (i.e., with ultimate responsibility for a performance department), the shortest and longest tenure’s were 6 months and 5 years respectively, with average tenure across all managed teams 2.29 years ($SD = 1.44$ years). Four participants were currently employed in a management role, while four had left positions within a year preceding their interview.

4.2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through the semi-structured interview guide described in Chapter 3 (also see Appendix A). Significantly, while Schroeder (2010) used Schein's (2004) model of organisational culture change to guide his sports team-based research and an abundance of CM models exist, no predefined theory or concepts were employed at the start of enquiry (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Expressly, the literature detailed in Chapters 1 and 2 was used: (a) as a guide to express the overall intentions of inquiry (i.e., a temporally-underpinned process of change from one specific situation to a new/refined state: du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012); (b) to optimise sensitivity to the general topic and challenges faced by elite sport performance team managers (i.e., Board, fans, media, powerful players, diverse staff); (c) offer suggestions for initial follow-up probes for application in interviews; (d) to support theoretical sampling (i.e., directing focus onto managers who had overseen teams with varying traditions, histories, and public profiles); (e) to stimulate questioning during data analysis phases; and (f) to support the later comparison of data/findings to study-specific and wider knowledge (and identify any commonalities and distinctions from prior understanding) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Pilot interviews were undertaken with three elite sport performance team managers to evaluate and refine the focus, content, and clarity of the initially developed interview guide. For example, initial memos written during this piloting phase revealed that pressure from top management (i.e., the Board) played a major role in shaping a manager's focus (e.g., instant results vs. long-term development) and approach (i.e., instant changes or extended planning) at the onset of their tenure. While the main questions of the guide were not amended from these pilot interviews, follow-up probes were refined to enable in-depth discussion over the challenges of such "external" influence.

Turning to the main participant group, all conducted interviews revolved around the seven general open-ended questions detailed in Appendix A. Crucially, and as described in Chapter 3, while all of these questions were posed to each participant, each discussion flowed

naturally and issues were pursued as they were presented. For optimising data relevance and quality, managers were encouraged to compare and contrast their experiences across different teams (limited to three teams to prevent dilution of findings). Supporting an iterative process, follow-up prompts and probes were also further modified between each sampling phase. For instance, after analysing data from the purposive sample, follow-up probes were adjusted to enable greater exploration of *dark side* leadership actions (i.e., socially undesirable behaviours: Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; cf. Chapter 8) and optimal management of the media; factors which the purposive sample revealed to play a key role in driving and sustaining culture change. All interviews were conducted at locations chosen by participants and lasted between 100 and 200 minutes. Verbatim transcriptions were analysed using qualitative analysis software (QSR NVIVO 9). Confidentiality was assured and all participants provided informed consent.

4.2.3. Data Analysis

All transcripts underwent open coding to identify concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and the constant comparison method was used to support the generation of unique conceptual categories and elucidate their underlying properties and dimensions (involving comparisons between data, codes, concepts, and literature: Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To explain and expand on developing concepts and establish category and subcategory relationships, asking critical questions of the data (e.g., what is the manager saying he did what did he *not* do?) and axial coding was deployed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When further development and saturation of categories were required, this process acted as the trigger for further theoretical sampling. This interaction between data analysis and collection, alongside my immersion in and quality contact with the data (as per thesis engagement), also further facilitated my sensitivity to the issues and challenges being described by participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Suddaby, 2006). Importantly, in cases where comprehensive analysis could not take

place before the next interview, an iterative process was maintained through detailed note-taking (e.g., on new and/or key concepts), memo writing, listening back to the previous interviews, critical discussion with my supervisors, and preparing initial findings for intra-institution presentations (cf. Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Lastly, saturation was considered to have been achieved when participants provided little new data or explanations of professional team culture change (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

To discover a central process and refine the theory, theoretical integration was used (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To this end, memos detailing evolving ideas – some in reflection against my own personal experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) – and relationships between concepts and categories were used to facilitate “thinking theoretically” (as well as reflexivity and analytical distance), with diagramming also deployed for thinking through concepts and their relationships. Additionally, during the final phases of data collection and analysis, concepts and categories were compared, contrasted, and integrated with extant theories and constructs; as further supported by a delayed second exploration of the literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Aligning with Sorge and van Witteloostuijn’s (2004, p. 1222) assertion that “the purpose-specific generation of new specialist knowledge . . . is inappropriate when used in isolation [i.e., without integration with “old knowledge”]” this inspection process was used to establish whether pre-existing labels could be applied (to ensure consistency with current knowledge) and, importantly, confirm the uniqueness of a range of discovered concepts.

Finally, to ensure that the grounded theory model was grounded in both the data and culture change practice, and therefore optimising its utility as a tool for the specific contexts of professional sport performance team culture change, a separate and later meeting was held with the participant involved with peer training and development to “tell the story” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 113), obtain feedback on a proposed model, and further refine this model. Remaining consistent with the methodology’s pragmatic underpinnings, feedback from this

individual was elicited on the model's practicality and not its "truth" (the latter reflecting a realist ontological perspective⁷). The content of the model was not changed by this process.

4.3. Results

To illuminate the optimal process of manager-led culture change in professional sport performance teams, the activity's main components are now described before explaining their conceptual links in the grounded theory model (Figure 4.1). These results are a combination of team managers' perceptions of previously successful approaches, views on best practice, and reflections on key mistakes/lessons. Furthermore, while data was collected on the deployed systems (e.g., interdisciplinary support), structures (e.g., training schedules), and processes (e.g., role clarity) – or the "what" of culture change – my interest lay in *how* team managers ensured that these would be adhered to on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis (as required of a high performing culture: cf. definition provided in Chapter 1). Indeed, as noted by Sorge and van Witteloostuijn (2004), mixing the process (i.e., the *how*) with content (i.e., the *what*) in CM study is a fundamental error.

As shown in Figure 4.1, delivering and sustaining culture change was characterised by team managers' fulfilment of two linked yet conceptually distinct roles. Specifically, when appointed in a role, best practice involved *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact* and *management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimization system*. While both elements were co-initiated and co-dependent, the former acted as the catalyst for efficient and effective change. This opening process is now described, focusing on how incoming team managers manoeuvred and propelled themselves toward operating an optimal holistic system. Adhering to the tenets of Corbin and Strauss' (2008) methodology, variation and complexity

⁷ Reflecting my pragmatic research philosophy, the findings from this study did not "emerge" (as would be described through a positivist/post-positivist epistemology) but were developed and "grounded" in both the data and culture change practice (Bryant, 2009).

are provided in these results. Football manager quotes are denoted by (F), rugby union by (RU), and rugby league by (RL).

4.3.1. Initial Evaluation, Planning, Set-up, and Impact

4.3.1.1. Evaluating Fit with the Club and Board

Reflecting the size of the culture change task against the incessant (and almost immediate) pressure to deliver results, the need for an initial and comprehensive evaluation was evident. Providing an anchor for cultural, performance, and outcome goals, appraisal began *before* accepting a job and primarily focused on the perceived fit between personal (e.g., management style, career goals) and team factors (e.g., history, tradition, current resources, competitive context). Interestingly, however, fit with key Board members was arguably the greatest early success factor, especially for novice managers:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F3)

Reinforcing the need for alignment with the Board, at least professionally, an examination of shared expectations over the team's short and long-term potential was also crucial:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F2)

The same manager quoted above revealed how failing to gain a detailed understanding of the team's most fundamental resource – its players – contributed to an early termination of their contract:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F2)

Thus, while the lure of personal reward (e.g., salary, profile) often mediated decisions on a job offer, alignment with the Board and an understanding of internal contexts was considered imperative for program success.

4.3.1.2. Evaluating the Performance Department

On accepting the team manager role, initial evaluation continued with an essential and intense phase of multi-source information gathering; the speed of which being dictated by the manager's time of arrival (i.e., off-/mid-season) and the team's current competitive contexts (e.g., league standing). Indeed, as each team's history, traditions, and current resources all interacted to provide a unique challenge, the uncritical application of prior successful methods was deemed naïve:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL1)

Primarily focused on the amalgamation of multi-stakeholder perspectives, including current and former players and support staff, evaluation of the performance department also involved assessing: player and support staff capabilities; training facilities; present systems, structures, and processes; player and support staff personalities; and the social milieu. For example, one manager described the importance of understanding the man-management needs of individual players; particularly those with greatest social standing/performance experience:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

As noted above, another key lesson was discovered to be a need to understand players' short and long term capabilities, thereby increasing the chances of the manager deploying methods and processes which would be well received and confer optimal impact on performance:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1)

Accordingly, rather than impose idealistic or imitative values, standards and practices, an extensive assessment process instead enabled cultural, performance, and outcome goals to be set and disseminated which were optimally grounded in the team's contexts and potential.

4.3.1.2. Setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations. To optimise the transition from the prior manager's program and create conditions which would enable the most rapid uptake of new or refined ways of operating, the importance of instantly setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations was revealed; a process often facilitated by proactive pre-appointment upward influence tactics (Yukl & Falbe, 1990):

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU1)

Indeed, reinforcing the importance of establishing immediate shared perceptions with those who held ultimate power over organisational decision making, another manager revealed that *not* working to set such expectations was a critical mistake in their tenure at a previous club:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL1)

Beyond Board-specific groundwork, managers also described the importance of optimising player and support staff belief in the imminent program as soon as possible after appointment (and/or quelling uncertainty and resistance). Notably, this task was often viewed as a “

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]” (F4). Indeed, regardless of personal reputation, the need to deliver impactful opening communication and action was vital:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F4)

Importantly, as well as facilitating optimal receptivity to the impending programme through interpersonal impact, another manager discussed how the dissemination of his intentions in more concrete/formal terms also eased his transition into a new club:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1)

Reflecting players’ primary focus on performance-based matters, the same manager noted the need for similar action with “substance” in training and performance contexts:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F1)

Importantly, while optimising player perceptions to gain support for the planned programme via innovative methods was impactful, another manager reported that, in a different context, gaining immediate support from the players was more simply achieved by addressing clear issues with the previous incumbent's regime:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
(F4)

In other cases where new approaches were required which were not inherently appealing to the players (e.g., processes to optimise effort and work-rate), introduction processes were explicitly justified and framed in terms of their performance-relevance:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL1)

⁸ GPS-systems are commonly used in professional sport performance teams to objectively quantify training- and match-based performance measures (e.g., heart rate) and feed back into the design of players' conditioning, recovery, and injury prevention processes.

Beyond structural and process changes to training, using players to model new performance-based behaviours was also considered an important mechanism in setting expectations:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1)

Interestingly, however, the process of setting and aligning player expectations was not always based on positive interaction:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F2)

As revealed by this quote, the deployment of dark side practices was often required to ensure that the team manager’s core standards and values were quickly “visible” and emphatically reinforced. Indeed, the need to overtly and covertly assert one’s position and power, particularly early in the manager’s tenure or at times when they were directly challenged by players and staff, was considered pivotal for role survival and enduring system success.

4.3.1.3. Identifying and Harnessing Social Allies and Cultural Architects

Reflecting the need to deploy dark side leadership skills alongside the inherent scepticism and/or uncertainty which an incoming manager’s program brings, best practice was also perceived to be dependent upon the simultaneous acquisition of support from socially powerful players who then acted as *cultural architects* (Railo, 1986); vital for

ensuring that new and/or refined values, standards, systems and processes were accepted and consistently adhered to by the playing squad:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

Furthermore, the need to rapidly ascertain the “dependability” of these allies and architects was also noted as a particularly important process:



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL 1)







For one manager who was an internal appointment after a period as player/coach, the task of acquiring support from influential players had to be treated with particular sensitivity due to the innate shift in interpersonal/power dynamics between this individual and his former peers:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F3)

Reinforcing culture change's status as a fundamentally social challenge, the need to identify, harness, and entrust social allies and cultural architects was a central theme throughout the data and resonates with prior organisational change models which point toward establishing guiding coalitions and political sponsorship (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996).

4.3.1.4. Withholding Initial Action in Sub-Optimal Conditions

While all managers discussed the need to instantly set and align stakeholder perceptions and expectations, some revealed that the extent to which they could engage with their identified, evidence-based changes was often constrained by the prevailing social milieu and capabilities of the players and support staff which they had inherited. For example, when “”, one team manager revealed the need for “” strategies to enable role survival to the point when significant personnel changes could be made:






 (RL 2)

Indeed, rather than forcing new values, standards and practices upon unreceptive or incapable recipients, participants reported that best practice often involved the careful avoidance of conflict, even if it temporarily compromised the manager's ideals and long-term vision:



 (F2)

Notably, when managers felt that some changes had to be made regardless of the inevitable resistance and conflict which they would incur, the introduction process was still somewhat softened and gradual in nature; thereby allowing any initial to flare-up to subside:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F3)

In short, sensitivity to the prevailing culture and social milieu at appointment was pivotal in determining the initial focus, nature, and timing of the new manager's changes.

4.3.1.5. Delivering Instant Results

While evaluations of the Board and performance department, setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions, harnessing social allies, and withholding from some hazardous initial actions were all viewed as crucial for establishing oneself at a new team, all interviewees acknowledged that the extent to which new values, standards, and practices were accepted and internalised by players and support staff was ultimately dictated by initial on-field results:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F4)

Indeed, another interviewee who had targeted tactical and technical improvement to support attainment of a long-term performance goal *without* pairing this to a focus on instant results recognised this as a fundamental mistake:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1).

Reflecting the outcome-oriented interpretative lens of players, support staff, the Board, fans, and media, balancing a program's initial focus on long-term cultural change and short-term results was therefore considered a crucial skill for rapid success and role longevity.

4.3.2. Management of a Holistic, Integrated, and Dynamic Culture Optimisation System

The second and most substantial role in delivering and sustaining culture change in professional sport performance teams was management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimisation system. Focused on constantly generating and sustaining shared performance-optimising values, standards, and practices within the performance department, this system was built upon a two-way interaction and power-share with internal *and* external stakeholder groups (the components of which were *managing multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations* and *action-guiding multi-stakeholder perceptions and actions*; see Figure 4.1).

4.3.2.1. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Support Staff

Common across all managers' perceptions, a united, loyal, and engaged support staff was viewed as fundamental to successful culture change delivery; enabled, for example, by

keeping this group optimally informed of any decisions and actions which impacted on their daily roles:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU1)

Reflecting the diversity of modern support staffing, and thereby the vast and varying opinions on general and specific performance-related matters, the acquisition and integration of inputs across all supporting professions was a further central theme:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F4)

Similarly, when discrepancies did emerge between manager expectations and support staff performance, interactions remained respectful of these individuals' contribution and agency:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

4.3.2.2. *Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Playing Staff*

Rather than solely top-down direction, the optimisation of players' values, standards, and behaviours also involved a two-way process of consultation and negotiation; in fact, as well as actively managing player perceptions and expectations (e.g., by providing an understanding of behavioural standards, the reasoning behind manager decision making/action, the demands of optimal and consistent performance, and pertinent upcoming plans/events), accommodating a "to and fro" of power was at times mandatory with respect to the power held by high-status and high-ego players:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F2)

Indeed, awareness that "[REDACTED]" (RU1), coupled with the power they held, led to an ebb and flow of power in many decision making processes:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

Similarly, the need to modify short-term action in relation to player opinion and power was often viewed as the most effective way to reach longer-term goals, even if it led managers to temporarily sacrifice or suppress some of their principals and intentions:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RU1)

4.3.2.3. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Board

Reflecting their control of resources and the overarching organisational strategy, facilitating support from the Board via similar to and fro interactions was also vital in driving and sustaining culture change. As stated by one manager: “[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]” (F2). Indeed, this challenge was particularly crucial with respect to the Board’s powerful but often uninformed position on performance department matters:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL1)

Important for generating the freedom to deliver innovative changes and “buying time” for when inevitable mixed or poor results would be experienced, another manager also revealed

how managing upwards was at times vital for even preventing chairmen and owners from directly interfering with the performance environment:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F4)

The significance of managing upwards echoes recent writing in sports and mainstream organisational change showing middle manager agency to be constrained by organisational position, resource access, and top management support (Cunningham, 2009; Tatlı & Özbilgin, 2009). Notably, however, participants' recognised that any bought time (e.g., via successful "issue selling": Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001) was finite and that the Board would expect a significant return on their patience; take the example of the manager who adopted the damage limitation approach until new players could be recruited:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

Reinforcing the need for continually open and transparent interaction with the Board, another manager noted how the lack of a two-way communication with their CEO was a significant factor in derailing what had been an initially highly successful CM programme:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU1)

4.3.2.4. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Fans

Reflecting their generation of important psycho-social and financial capital, managers also reported the need to engage fans in driving and sustaining team-level culture change. With a need to meet the “[REDACTED]” (RL1) and “[REDACTED]” to optimise the energy and atmosphere in the stadium (F4), a proactive approach was required to positively harness these stakeholders’ unique and substantial influence:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F1)

Recognising fans' ability to impact top management perceptions and decisions - even though their understanding of a manager's program was limited and filtered through the media's lens – participants also revealed the need to act as “sensemaker” and “sensegiver” via meetings with supporters clubs and, more commonly, media interactions (cf. Goosby Smith, 2009):

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F3)

4.3.2.5. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Media

Reflecting their ubiquity in professional sport team environments, and as suggested above, positive interactions with the media were essential for optimal culture change practice. However, one manager who found press conferences to be “[REDACTED]” discussed the challenge of engaging with and being held accountable to a group who were not necessarily experts on sports performance matters:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F2)

With another manager noting that the media “[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]”, efforts had to be made to

optimise this group's perception and increase the chances of positive coverage; or, in many cases, avoid responses or interactions which could lead to negative or sensationalised stories:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1)

Beyond such meeting of the media's needs (e.g., allocating extra time for interviews) and being "[REDACTED]" (RL2), managers also revealed how their interactions with this group were largely shaped by awareness of *who* the media disseminated information to:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F3)

Rather than viewing the media as an unwanted distraction (albeit they often were), managers recognised the unique opportunity they provided to send "flanking" messages: such messages either being explicit (e.g., reference to precise issues) or implicit (e.g., protecting credibility

by negotiating the media's "[REDACTED]"; F2). As one participant stated: "[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]" (RL1). Using a club's own media outlets was also considered especially valuable when messages could be completely controlled and appropriately framed:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F4)

Interestingly, this two-way interaction with the media contradicts Frontiera (2010, p. 78), in which team owners and general managers were encouraged to "ignore this media pressure, stay true to their values and remain focused on the larger plan". Indeed, the present sample reported that the media could in fact be used as a valuable tool to socially construct and reinforce new or refined values, standards, and practices within performance departments.

4.3.2.6. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Other Significant Influences

Beyond the Board, fans, and media, the need for profitable interactions with other significant influences was also revealed. Reflecting each team's bespoke context, history and traditions, a variety of groups were reported; for example, catering staff, the local community, potential investors, and team-specific icons/"legends" (i.e., former players and staff; celebrity fans):

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F1)

While these “other influences” were both diverse and variable in terms of the magnitude and speed at which they could impact the performance department, all were considered to play a key role in reinforcing the intended culture. Lying at the heart of this practice was sensitivity to social complexity and recognition that apparently minor actors could shape the culture optimisation process. For example, one manager discussed the need to “ [REDACTED] [REDACTED]” with players’ partners in order to create a performance-supporting and conducive personal life:



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RU1)

Similarly, another manager described the need to effectively engage with a groundskeeper to ensure that training pitches were kept in peak condition, thereby providing a platform upon which changes to the team’s playing style could be introduced and sustained:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F3)

4.3.3. A Grounded Theory: Culture Change in Professional Sport Performance Teams

The grounded theory of manager-led culture change in professional sport performance teams is depicted in Figure 4.1. After assessing fit with a club and its top-level management, best practice involved a concentrated and comprehensive period of evaluation and planning to ensure sensitivity to and exploitation of a team's historical, psychosocial, and competitive contexts. Reflecting an expectancy for improved performance and results, whether internal (i.e., players and support staff), external (i.e., the Board, fans, media), or both, this opening phase was paired with the need to set and align multi-stakeholder perception, identify and harness social allies, withhold some intended actions in sub-optimal conditions, and deliver immediate on-field results. Used to optimise respect and trust from players and support staff and buy time, space, and support from key external groups, this process was crucial for generating the psychosocial momentum required for rapid and enduring cultural change.

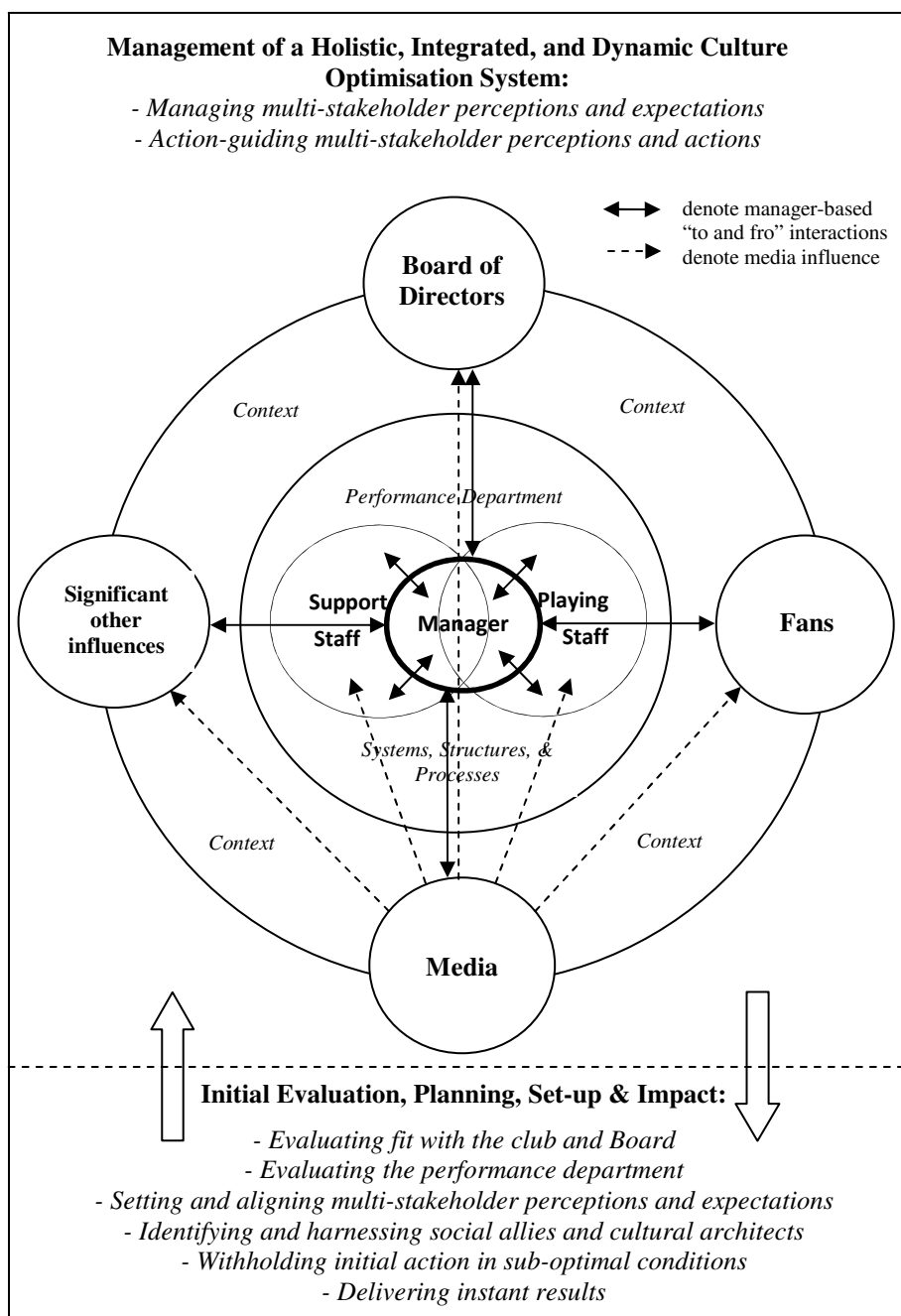
Regarding the major and permanent component (*management of a holistic, dynamic, and integrated culture optimization system*), the model explains that culture change was not only dependent on generating and regulating shared values, standards, and practices within the performance department but also protecting this “cultural bubble” (cf. circle surrounding manager, support staff, and playing staff) from external interference. Due to the nonlinear (cf. broken double-arrowed lines) and negotiated (cf. solid double-arrowed lines⁹) nature of social interaction, best practice therefore involved the constant acquisition, integration, and management of (a) players and support staffs' oscillating perceptions and opinions, and (b) perceptions and opinions of those who could indirectly reinforce and shape the developing and/or established team culture (i.e., the Board, fans, media, other significant influences). As summarised by F1: “
.” Rather than a step-by-step process, an explanatory framework is therefore presented which embraces the complex and

⁹ As the purpose of this study was to explore manager-led change, the research process and results section primarily focused on manager-based (not extra-manager) interactions

contested nature of professional sports team environments to ensure that players and support staff beliefs, standards, and behaviours supported the continual uptake of and adherence to deployed systems, structures, and processes.

Figure 4.1.

A Grounded Theory Model of Manager-Led Culture Change Best Practice in Professional Sport Performance Teams¹⁰.



¹⁰ As per the tenets of grounded theory methodology (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008), this model is a representation of the analysed data from this specific study (NB. predicted interactions between non-team management groups – beyond those involving the media – are therefore not depicted; cf. future research directions in Chapter 10)

4.4. Discussion

This study developed a grounded theory of optimal CM practice in professional sport performance teams, as delivered by incoming team managers. With *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact* considered the crucial foundation for efficient and enduring change, the model primarily presents a holistic and integrated approach to the optimisation of team culture. More specifically, the power, agency, and interaction of internal *and* external stakeholders generated a theoretical framework which revolved around a constant acquisition, negotiation, and configuration of multi-group perceptions; thereby ensuring that the “cultural bubble” surrounding the performance department was constantly sensitive to and exploitative of macro (e.g., history and traditions), meso (e.g., financial resources, competitive contexts), and micro (e.g., stakeholder perception) contexts. Indeed, the discovered model emphasises that the content of change (i.e., *what* is to be changed/modified/refined) is entirely dependent on the specific internal and external circumstances of each given team (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004). This model’s integration with and extension from prior knowledge is now evaluated in greater depth (cf. Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004).

4.4.1. Integrating and Distinguishing the Grounded Theory Model

As academics and practitioners of organisational change will note, many principles within the *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact* phase are not new concepts. For example: *evaluating the performance department* may be considered a variant of Kanter et al.’s (1992) *analyze the organization and its needs for change; identifying and harnessing social allies and cultural architects* a variant of Kotter’s (1996) *creating a guiding coalition*; and *delivering instant results* a variant of Luecke’s (2003) *focus on results, not activities*. As well as providing some much needed evidence-based support for these tasks and revealing their saliency in professional sport, this parallel also reinforces the professional sports team’s scope as laboratory for complimenting and critically extending organisational knowledge.

On this note, one theme from the present study which has received little coverage in organisational change frameworks was *withholding initial action in sub-optimal conditions*. Indeed, while organisational researchers have focused much attention on employee change readiness (e.g., Drzensky, Egold, van Dick, 2012; Sekerka, Zolin, Goosby Smith, 2009), CM frameworks have often overlooked the *active-disruptive* role that change-recipients can play. Further contradicting guidelines which promote an active “selling” of organisational change to recipients (e.g., Armenakis & Harris, 2009), this study showed that incoming sports team managers employ a subtle mix of creating readiness (e.g., by harnessing social allies, setting stakeholder expectations, etc.) *and* withholding from action until contextually appropriate circumstances prevail (e.g., after staff restructuring). With manager succession triggering an innate reconfiguration and redistribution of power due to the altered psychosocial dynamics, team manager decision making and action was not rooted to a checklist or the perceived *need* for change, but instead to moments and phases when optimal impact (or least damage) would likely be conferred (as tempered against the need for instant and consistent results).

While the *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact* phase demonstrated overlap with prior organisational CM frameworks (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003; Price & Chahal, 2006), the non-linear and boundless features of the developed model are in direct contrast to these sequential ‘n-step’ methods. Aligning with claims that theoretical perspectives should account for change *and* continuity (Graetz & Smith, 2010; Pettigrew et al., 2001), best practice in professional sport performance teams was portrayed not as a single, time-locked, prescriptive event, but rather as a pivotal transition/set-up phase adjoined to an unrelenting multi-stakeholder perception- and power-based system. Of further divergence from prior organisational models which *institutionalize, consolidate, or refreeze* change as a final step (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Schein, 2004), the model aligns with Schroeder’s (2010) sport-based work in that reinforcement, adaptation, and

sustainability processes were engaged instantly and permanently (cf. *managing multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations* and *action-guiding multi-stakeholder perceptions and actions* in figure 4.1). This finding resonates with Brännmark and Benn's (2012) concept of *stakeholder interest balance* - rather than prioritisation of particular groups - as a condition for sustaining change. Alignment is also found with Buchanan et al.'s (2005) work on the sustainability of change in that the present model incorporates all "influencing factors" identified by these authors (i.e., the program's fit with the organisation; stakeholder commitment/expectations; managerial style, approach, and behaviours; finances; leader vision, values and goals; organisational policies, systems, and structures; shared beliefs, perceptions, norms; stakeholder and coalition power; implementation methods; external contexts and norms; and the timing and flow of events). Finally, and aligning with Armenakis & Harris' (2009) assertion that leader- and recipient-centric approaches should not be considered mutually exclusive, the current model reported that culture optimisation is not best delivered by top-down imposition but by a two-way interaction and power-share with internal and external stakeholder groups.

Indeed, diverging from prior organisational CM models (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003; Price & Chahal, 2006) and leader-centric portrayals of manager/head coach-led programmes in sport psychology (e.g., Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), the current model is grounded in the contested agency of multiple stakeholders and therefore power- and political-based dynamics; a point which Tatlı and Özbilgin (2009) consider has been largely overlooked in change management processes to date. Notably, the model's elucidation of a to and fro of power between team managers and support staff, players, Board, media, fans, and other external influences aligns with organisational findings that point to the program derailing-potential of self-interested and marginalised stakeholders and organisation politics (e.g., Buchanan, 2008; Hope, 2010;

Reisner, 2002). Resonance is also found with earlier sport-based research which has reported links between successful change and power-sharing structures (Amis et al., 2004), the need for power and politicality to be incorporated into models of change (Cunningham, 2009), and the sports team head coach/manager's need for political skills (Potrac & Jones, 2009). Support is thereby found for Pettigrew's (1987, p. 650) statement that leadership is "a central ingredient [in delivering change] but only one of the ingredients, in a complex analytical, political, and cultural process".

4.4.2. Evaluation of Research Quality

To support judgment on the quality of this study, the reader is directed to a variety of "characterising traits" (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) which address both the process and product of this chapter (Sparkes, 2002). Considering process, and beyond markers of my sensitivity to the data (as noted in the reflexive content in Chapter 3), demonstration of *methodological coherence* (i.e., congruence between philosophical perspective, theoretical position, research question, participants, and methods) is a critical measure of quality (Holt & Tamminen, 2010; Suddaby, 2006). Furthermore, and for meeting the objectives of this study (cf. Chapter 1), the commitment to operate from precise specification as opposed to general abstraction acted to support the practicality of the research product. Additionally, the rapport established with all participants (as evidenced by the length of interviews; the longest being nearly 3.5 hours in duration) contributed to the construction of highly detailed, contextually-sensitive findings.

Regarding the study's product, the reader is encouraged to apply Corbin and Strauss' (2008) methodology-specific criteria and evaluate the findings': *fit* (i.e., do they fit with the experiences of professional sports team managers and CM consultants?); *applicability* (i.e., do they offer new insights and develop practice?); *concepts* (i.e., are they organised around concepts and themes which facilitate shared knowledge?) *contextualization of concepts* (i.e., are they contextualised against professional sport performance team challenges?); *logic* (i.e.,

do they “make sense” and follow a rational flow?); *depth* (i.e., do descriptions add richness?); *variation* (i.e., do they contain negative cases and demonstrate complexity?); *creativity* (i.e., are they innovative?); and *sensitivity* (i.e., are they the product of a data and analysis-driven process?). Upholding a pragmatic research philosophy, the reader may also benefit from applying the “so what?” principle described in Chapter 3 (cf. Bryant, 2009); more explicitly, what practical difference does the theory make if it *does* correspond to tangible applied artefacts? In this case, the framework’s status as the first bespoke model of professional sport performance team culture change is a significant indicator.

Addressing Sorge and van Witteloostuijn’s (2004, p. 1222) call for “multidisciplinary knowledge integration” (or “synthetic and diligent linking of distinct theories that are general and already available”) as well as Suddaby’s (2006) search for combined literature, data, and experience as a marker of theoretical sensitivity, the presented model is supported by its development from data grounded in professional sports team environments which has been consequently integrated with understanding in organisational change, CM, organisational behaviour, change sustainability, leader succession, sport psychology, and sports coaching. Finally, although the model does not provide a universal account of driving and sustaining culture change (as per the defining tenets of grounded theory and pragmatism: Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Suddaby, 2006), its’ contextual, social, and power-based foundations suggest that it may be a *potentially* useful framework for incoming managers in small to medium size organisations.

4.4.3. Limitations and The Next Step

While characterised by many strengths, this study was limited in aspects of design and focus. Due to the adoption of an identical methodological approach in the second study of this thesis, design-related constraints are acknowledged in greater detail at the end of the next chapter. Regarding focus, the results of this chapter are limited to the extent that they offer a

model of culture change best practice which is specific to the professional sport performance environment. Accordingly, it is unknown to what extent this framework and its underpinning features are common to other pertinent, UK-based performance domains; especially, Olympic sport performance teams. Typically running larger programmes as a result of operating on a national scale (in terms of performer/staff numbers and/or geographical distribution), work is therefore required to explore how optimal cultures are created and sustained in Olympic sport settings. Significantly, the relevance and importance of such research was reinforced by one manager interviewed for this chapter who reflected on a parallel comparison between his CM experiences in a small (sports team) and large (business) performance-focused organisation:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU1).

CHAPTER 5

DELIVERING CULTURE CHANGE IN OLYMPIC SPORT PERFORMANCE

TEAMS: A GROUNDED THEORY MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE

5.1. Introduction

In Chapter 4, the optimal culture change process as led by managers of professional sport performance teams was presented. From these findings, it was evident that CM best practice in this environment was dependent on successful negotiation of an *initial evaluation, planning, set-up and impact* phase which acted as the vital catalyst for efficient and enduring change. More broadly, and rather than a top-down, checklist-based activity, the delivery of change was also found to be an essentially open-ended activity, symbolised by a holistic and integrated approach and driven by the constant acquisition, negotiation, and configuration of internal and external group perceptions. Furthermore, and contrary to many organisational-based models (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003; Price & Chahal, 2006), this framework was rooted to the contested agency of these stakeholders and therefore power- and political-based dynamics. As such, the identified to and fro of social power between PM and all stakeholders pointed to the joint construction and propagation of a new or refined team culture. While these findings provide initial understanding of CM in professional sport performance teams, the purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the chronology and nature of the parallel CM process (i.e., optimisation of team culture) in traditionally amateur elite sport settings; or more specifically, Olympic sport performance teams.

Reflecting the “no compromise” and outcome-based approach by the UK government funding agency, UK Sport (Sam, 2012), and increasing demands of Olympic competition, it is crucial that Olympic sports teams possess cultures which support the continual search for (and attainment of) peak performance which are also protected from wider organisational distractions (e.g., internal politics: Arnold, Fletcher, & Molyneux, 2012). As the figure with

ultimate responsibility for managing the individual, intra-group and inter-group elements of Olympic sport performance teams (or at least the one who should be: Collins & Cruickshank, 2012), the optimisation of team culture is therefore a decisive task for the Olympic sport PD.

Certainly, while Olympic sport PDs typically deliver little if any “hands on” coaching (or at least should not if their role is to avoid becoming “clouded”), their influence on pan-individual performance (positively, negatively or indifferently) is arguably the most significant of any in the national sport organisation’s performance department (i.e., including team management, performance-specific administrative staff, support staff and performers) apart from personal coaches. Specifically, by holding responsibility for team policies, systems, structures, and processes (at least in an optimum system), the PD’s ambitions, actions, and decisions will always, to at least some extent, be reflected in the perceptions, preferences, and behaviours of all those lower down the organisational chart.

Alongside growing awareness of the role of Olympic sport organisations in delivering medal success (e.g., Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2012a), focus has recently turned to research the underpinnings of PD best practice (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). From work to date, results have suggested that the creation of a team culture is dependent on *establishing role awareness* and *creating an organizational and team atmosphere* (cf. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). While providing a first snapshot of the PD-led culture change process (albeit pointing to likely incomplete culture change competencies rather than comprehensive, expertise-based processes), Fletcher and Arnold have called for future research to “focus on *how* leaders and managers create, optimise and maintain a high performance environment” via approaches which facilitate “more lucid, evidence-based recommendations [emphasis added]” (p. 237).

As such, the purpose of this study was to develop a grounded theory of PD-led culture change in Olympic sport performance teams. As well as revealing the chronology and nature

of this domain-specific process, particular interest also lay in examining how findings would compare and contrast with PM perceptions and processes of elite team CM.

5.2. Method

5.2.1. Sampling and Participants

To enable interaction between data collection and analysis, as required by the iterative research process, participants were selected through theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Beyond requiring all participants to have held a PD role at a British Olympic sport in the last two Olympic cycles (2004-2012) - across either individual, team, and individual plus team sports - the credibility of findings was further enhanced by setting parameters that the final sample must have: (a) experienced varying degrees of success (i.e., short- and long-term role survival); (b) been employed by sports with contrasting public profiles (i.e., low to high); and (c) been employed by sports which received varying levels of public funding (i.e., low to high). No stipulations were set regarding objective medal success criteria, although such statistics did support the selection process. Institutional ethics approval was obtained to sample on these grounds.

Data collection occurred over four phases. Initially, two PDs (both from an individual plus team sport) were purposively sampled. Driven by the analysis of data from this sample, in particular the significant constraints placed on PDs by Boards of Directors and UK Sport, it was decided that sampling in the second recruitment phase would focus on PDs who had experienced particular challenges in dealing with top management and external agencies (one from an individual sport; one from a team sport); as informed by my supervisor (a former PD of UK Athletics). Guided by the ongoing analyses' recognition of "external distractions" alongside findings which pointed to the heightened challenges of an impending home Games, the third recruitment phase targeted two PDs (both individual plus team sport) who currently worked in multi-discipline sports. As the final data collection phase, and addressing findings

which pointed to the significance of media-based challenges, a PD from a high profile sport with high public scrutiny was recruited.

The overall sample included seven PDs: five who had led change in individual plus team sports; one in an individual sport; and one in a team sport. All interviewees were male, aged between 47 and 59 ($M = 53.00$ years, $SD = 4.28$ years), and had held PD roles for 68 years in total ($M = 9.71$ years, $SD = 6.26$ years). The shortest and longest tenure's were 4 years and 21 years respectively, with average tenure across all managed teams 7.56 years ($SD = 3.63$ years). Four participants were currently employed in a PD role at the time of interview.

5.2.2. Data Collection

Data was collected through the same semi-structured interview guide and procedures detailed in Chapter 4. Adhering to an iterative process, follow-up prompts and probes were again adjusted between each sampling phase. For example, after analysing the data from the purposive sample, follow-up probes were modified to enable detailed exploration of the role and influence of top management structures (particularly UK Sport). Additionally, after the data from the third sampling phase was analysed, follow-up probes were tailored to allow for greater discussion on the role of the media in the Olympic team culture change process. All interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants and lasted between 110 and 165 minutes. Verbatim transcriptions were again analysed using qualitative analysis software (QSR NVIVO 9). Confidentiality was assured and all participants provided informed consent.

5.2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the same procedures, processes, and techniques detailed in Chapter 4. Specifically, data were subject to Corbin and Strauss' (2008) methods of open coding, constant comparison, critical self-questioning, axial coding, note taking, memo

writing, critical discussion with my supervisors, and initial presentation at an applied sport psychology conference (cf. Appendix B). Saturation was again considered to have been achieved when participants provided little new data or explanations of culture change best practice (Corbin & Strauss). Similarly, the developing theory was also refined via theoretical integration based on detailed memo writing on concept/category relationships, diagramming, and comparison of concepts/categories with extant theories and constructs.

5.3. Results

To illuminate optimal PD-led culture change in British Olympic sport performance teams, the activity's main components are presented first before explaining their conceptual links in the grounded theory model (Figure 5.1). As in Chapter 4, results are a combination of perceptions of previously successful approaches, views on best practice, and reflections on some key "lived" mistakes/lessons.

Mirroring the findings in Chapter 4, efficient and effective culture change in British Olympic sport performance teams was characterised by PDs' implementation of two related yet conceptually distinct activities. Explicitly, when appointed into the PD role, best practice involved an opening phase of *initial evaluation, planning, set-up and impact* adjoined to the *management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimization system*. Of further overlap with Chapter 4's results, these features were both co-initiated and co-dependent, with the initial evaluation, planning, set-up and impact phase acting as the vital platform upon which change was optimally delivered. Crucially, while a high level of accordance was found with the results in Chapter 4, the nature and finer components of this grounded theory model are nonetheless specific to the unique contexts of British Olympic sport performance teams (as shown within the results and, more explicitly, in this chapter's discussion section). A description of the opening CM process - during which the thrust toward management of a holistic culture optimisation system was generated - is now provided.

5.3.1. Initial Evaluation, Planning, Set-Up, and Impact

5.3.1.1. Gaining an Understanding of the Cultural, Political, and Performance Landscape

Reflecting the magnitude of the PD-led culture change process, as dictated by the need to deliver change on a national scale and in conjunction with a considerable number and variety of stakeholders (i.e., upper/lower echelon support staff, performers, governing body Boards, UK Sport, the BOA, external partners, the wider sport membership, general public, and the media), the importance of gaining an optimal understanding of the sport's cultural, political, and performance landscape was a fundamental initial CM responsibility. Indeed, such analysis acted as the central pivot from which short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals, plans, and implementation strategies could be designed, deployed, monitored, and modified:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (P1)

Invariably, this exploration of the sport's history, traditions, resources, competitive contexts, governance and staffing network, and relationship with key external agencies (e.g., UK Sport, the BOA, Institutes of Sport) involved the acquisition and assimilation of perceptions from a spectrum of pertinent internal (i.e., team management, support staff, performers) and external (e.g., governing body Board members, top management) stakeholders:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

While speaking to a variety of stakeholders was undoubtedly important, as reinforced by all other PDs, of particular note in this quote is this PD's focus on developing a pre-appointment understanding of the personality and working style of their line manager (i.e., CEO). Indeed, reinforcing a need for detailed awareness of internal *and* external conditions before officially accepting a PD role, another interviewee described the problems of not being provided with a precise understanding of the sport's internal management structures:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD7)

As such, as well as unearthing important “factual” information (e.g., funding levels, facilities, numbers of supported performers, staff numbers/spread, equipment, etc), the optimal opening assessment was also a highly tactical and political process, with certain individuals explicitly targeted for initial interaction on the basis of holding influential structural or social positions:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD7)

Ensuring political sensitivity “from the off”, this gathering of multi-stakeholder perceptions was therefore also an early opportunity for PDs to ease their transition into their environment and garner support (or minimise dissent) from those who could significantly influence the nature and outcomes of the CM process (even though such elder statesmen/influential figures were often ill- or misinformed as to the requirements of optimal performance systems). Equally, who the PD chose *not* to speak to in the opening phases of their tenure could also send out a more “subliminal” message as to the intended focus and direction of the ensuing programme.

Beyond developing a picture of the existing Olympic programme, pertinent historical events (especially in the relationship between UK Sport, governing body, and the governing body’s performance arm), traditional approaches to performance, and the pervading culture, initial analysis also included assessment of: the capabilities and potential of “upper echelon” team management/support staff (i.e., those operating at the top-end of the performance: e.g., performance managers, technical directors, discipline head coaches) and funded performers;

established systems, structures, processes, resources, and facilities; and the internal/external social milieu and its “key players” (e.g., powerful team managers/staff, coaches, performers). Significantly, a number of PDs reported that this process was best framed by consideration of the standards of and opportunities for Olympic medal success (as perpetuated by UK Sport’s outcome-based funding model). Protecting against uncritical application of prior successful approaches and the formulation of strategies based on inaccurate or invalid assumptions, this breadth and depth of information was vital for optimising the contextual appropriateness and therefore likely success of the ensuing culture change programme.

5.3.1.2. Identifying, Recruiting, and Harnessing Multi-Domain Experts, Allies, and Cultural Architects

Due the inherent scepticism and/or uncertainty surrounding the new PD and their programme, and in some cases overt disapproval (especially in sports where the role had not previously existed), best practice in the opening CM phase was considered to be reliant on the concurrent facilitation of personal and programme support from multi-domain experts (e.g., Head of Science and Medicine, expert coaches/performance analysts) and socially influential actors who could then act as cultural architects (Railo, 1986). Reflecting the operational and geographical scale of the national PD culture change task (particularly so for non-centralised sports), the establishment of a guiding coalition (or as PD3 described it, “██████████”) was a critical marker of instant and enduring success:

██
██
██
██
██ (PD1)

Often adjoined to an immediate reorganisation and/or streamlining of management structures, such coalitions also often required the PD to recruit personal and programme allies due to the shortcomings of incumbent staff for delivering their intended programme:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

Importantly, and rather than “passively” facilitating the desired culture via their adherence to the PD’s espoused values and standards, such structurally significant individuals were used to actively construct the values, perceptions, and practices of the staff which they oversaw:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD7)

While all PDs felt that the crux of their role lay in driving change via developed and deployed systems, structures, and process, it was nevertheless widely recognised that key individuals within the performer group and lower echelon support staff also had to be instantly engaged and their support acquired (or their opposition dampened):

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

Interestingly, social allies and cultural architects at the coach/performer level were not always the current top performers or those based at historically successful training locations. Indeed, and highlighting how short-term actions were often (and optimally) delivered against longer-term agendas - as shaped by the need to (most significantly) peak every four years - one PD described how they explicitly targeted a performer (and their coach) who were “[REDACTED]” in their system rather than another who was a multi-World champion but who “[REDACTED]” and whose “[REDACTED]”:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

Outside of the performance department, and as alluded to above, one particularly clear point made by all PDs – primarily in the form of significant learned lessons – was the need to immediately establish (and then sustain) alignment with and support from the sport’s CEO:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

Finally, and reflecting their ability to shape both internal and external stakeholder perception, instantly positive interaction with the media was also revealed to be an important CM factor; particularly as a proactive mechanism for dampening inevitable future criticism:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

Notably, and reflecting the constraints and limits in optimising short-term performance when appointed shortly before major competition, another PD pointed to the importance of keeping the media onside if faced with an inevitably poor first set of results:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

5.3.1.3. Facilitating Shared Perceptions and Multi-Stakeholder Support

As well as enabling support from structurally and socially influential actors, all PDs revealed the need to promote broad understanding of their impending programme's focus and goals across all (or as many) corners the performance department's internal and external contexts. Disseminating pertinent (yet filtered) information via meetings, presentations, and media communication to governing body board(s), UK Sport, the BOA, external partners (e.g., Institutes of Sport), performance management and support staff, funded and potentially future-funded performers, and wider sport membership (e.g., lower-level/recreational coaches/performers), this process was key for increasing the chances of the CM programme being optimally received and propagated:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD6).

Within the performance department, the value of canvassing and engaging all upper echelon team management and support staff in programme design was particularly highlighted:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

Notably, facilitating shared perceptions and support from the broad performer and coaching group was also noted as worthwhile; even if the acquired input was not technically “valid”:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

Interestingly, generating multi-stakeholder support was not always addressed through overt dialogue; indeed, symbolic actions could also help to foster collective buy-in and support:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4).

Due to the “noise” and therefore distractions which they could generate in and around the performance department, facilitating positive first impressions across governing body boards (and, where pertinent, their sub-disciplines) was also particularly impactful:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

Reflecting the importance of government funding, and the consequential pressure exerted on performance departments to provide a “return” on this investment, proactive and politically-sensitive engagement with UK Sport was a further vital initial process:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD1)

5.3.1.4. Prioritising and Addressing Most Pressing Needs

Beyond optimising individual and group-wide support (and minimising detrimental conflict), interviewees also revealed the importance of instantly addressing the performance department's most pressing needs. This normally involved early optimisation of internal staffing structures and/or its members:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

Beyond system- and structural-level alterations, the need to address political matters was also raised; particularly the relationship between PD, the sport's governing body, and UK Sport:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

Indeed, due to the disruption which top-management/external conflicts could have on team performance (via their direct or indirect reverberations), smoothing out (as best as possible) any pre-existing political differences was a crucial early activity for most PDs:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD6)

5.3.1.5. Withholding Initial Action in Sub-Optimal Conditions

As well as targeting areas for immediate modification and improvement, it was notable that interviewees also reported a need to initially refrain from (or delay the delivery of) some actions due to their likely negative impact; particularly vital as opening decisions and actions could significantly (and often irreversibly) shape a programme's ultimate focus, nature, and success. Described by many PDs as "picking your battles", sensitivity to stakeholder perceptions, opinions, and power alongside an awareness of "the bigger picture" lay at the heart of best practice:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

Interestingly, beyond actively avoiding some inevitably damaging (or conflict-perpetuating) situations, another PD described the need for interpersonally- and politically-sensitive “on-the-spot” decision making to support attainment of long-term goals:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

5.3.1.6. *Facilitating Optimal Immediate Results*

Tying in with all of the above themes, PDs also reported the significance of facilitating optimal immediate results; particularly those who were appointed shortly before a major event:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

Significantly, while most PDs did not describe the facilitation of initially positive results as a major focus of their opening approach, it was commonly perceived that such outcomes did (or could) promote a speedier acceptance of and a greater thrust behind fledgling programmes (or, conversely, protect against prolonged uncertainty and/or conflict over the new direction):

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

Indeed, while initial focus was primarily placed on creating a system which could facilitate enduring, long-term success, optimising the potential for instant positive results was found to give the PD “ [REDACTED] ” (PD3) and facilitate multi-stakeholder support (or minimise resistance):

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

5.3.2. Management of a Holistic, Integrated, and Dynamic Culture Optimisation System

The second and most substantial element of optimal PD-led culture change in British Olympic sport performance teams was management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimisation system; built upon a two-way interaction and power-share with internal and external stakeholder groups (the components of which were *managing multi-stakeholder*

perceptions and expectations and *action-guiding multi-stakeholder perceptions and actions*; see Figure 5.1.). Exemplars of this process are now provided for each identified stakeholder group.

5.3.2.1. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Upper Echelon Team Management and Support Staff

Reflecting the task's scale, establishing and sustaining an empowered and "on message" support staffing at the performance department's upper echelons was considered a critical CM success factor; particularly as staff self-interest and self-protection was often a common challenge as the dust settled from the new PD's appointment:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

To overcome the programme-detracting influence of self-preservation, particularly prevalent in Olympic environments due to the sporadic nature of outcome feedback (i.e., infrequent competitions), an inclusive and teamwork-based management style was widely advocated:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

Notably, the value of a promoting a united approach was further reinforced by the inherently counterproductive interactions which characterised many Olympic sports team settings:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

With another interviewee acknowledging that “[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]” (PD2), and reflecting the power and influence which top echelon management and support staff held (via structural position and/or personality), opportunities were often sought to select compromised decisions and actions which met all parties needs:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

5.3.2.2. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Lower Echelon Support Staff

Akin to the preceding theme, similar interactions with lower echelon support staff were also considered vital for efficient and effective culture optimisation. Interestingly, PDs further revealed that two-way communication and power-sharing was also encouraged within the staff themselves:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD2)

Indicating how interactions with support staffing were not always such positive or smooth processes, however, another PD revealed the need to remain firm in one's negotiating stance to optimally manage the perceptions and expectations of a problematic coach:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD7)

5.3.2.3. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Performers

As those on which the PD's programme was ultimately focused, building and sustaining effective two-way relationships with performers was pivotal for both immediate and enduring programme success. However, with most sports only able to select a relatively

small number to compete at the Olympics, conflict and tension was a common threat or real factor; sometimes rising to extreme levels:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD5)

Additionally, the power of performers with long histories in their sport meant that top-down direction was (at least as the “routine” approach) neither workable nor effective:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

Accordingly, it was imperative that PDs (either directly or via established channels) provided a continuous stream of information on pertinent actions and decisions which respected athlete performance and general well-being, as well as optimising their role clarity (e.g., selection and funding standards) and providing a “managed” level of ownership:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

Notably, and reflecting the complexity of the Olympic sport performance environment, this two-way communication was often hampered by the interactions of external agencies; revealing that power was not something which resided within groups but rather was a product of the relative position they held in comparison to others:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

Interestingly, while a “safe” power share with performers was the preferred path for all PDs, directive and forceful action was again often required at pivotal points of bifurcation:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD3)

5.3.2.4. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Governing Body Board(s)

Reflecting the clear power held by the governing body boards, PDs revealed the importance of two-way relationships with those who oversaw the sport’s ultimate direction. Notably, the challenges of engaging in such a process were particularly pertinent in the lead up to the London Games:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

As the standard premier point of contact with the Board, the PD relationship with their sport's CEO(s) was crucial for preventing such interference impacting on performance; with optimal benefits found from establishing and maintaining a to and fro communication channel:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

Indeed, one PD recounted that the CEO-enforced cessation of such two-way interactions was a particularly significant marker in their programme's eventual termination:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

5.3.2.5. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with UK Sport

As the most significant actual or potential funder of Olympic sport programmes, the need for effective two-way interactions between PD and UK Sport was imperative if enduring high performance was to be actualised. Interestingly, one PD who felt that “[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]” rather than support agency revealed how this stakeholder’s continued evolution toward an active-directive agent had significantly changed the face of the PD role:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

With a more recently incumbent PD stating that “[REDACTED] [REDACTED]” (PD7), the challenge of tempering this body’s preoccupation with objective success over the sport-specific, process-based nuances of Olympic competition was a major hurdle for establishing and sustaining performance-focused success cultures:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

Indeed, the strict outcome orientation of UK Sport was also major personal drain on the PD (ironic in that the PD was a key individual who this agency was investing in to perform at their best and optimise the chances of medal success!):

[REDACTED]

■ (PD2)

As such, two-way interaction with UK Sport was portrayed as highly political process, with PDs focused on proactively conveying alignment with the agency's principles and practices, educating their representative(s) on the sport's nuances, explaining and justifying actions and decision making, promoting performance successes, integrating representatives in work and social activities, and rationalising outcomes against the bigger picture. Indeed, rather than the more transparent relationships which PDs held with their performance management team, the nature of interactions with UK were fundamentally more guarded:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

5.3.2.6. *Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the BOA*

As the body with responsibility for organising and delivering Team GB, the BOA was found to be another key stakeholder group who could influence culture change delivery both directly and, through the performance-irrelevant “noise” which it sometimes generated, indirectly:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD6)

As well as working to minimise the impact of such distraction on the staff and performers in the performance department, PDs also noted that a healthy direct relationship with the BOA was a key feature of the PD culture change process; a challenge again heightened ahead of a home Games where stakeholder self-interest and self-promotion was often at large:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

Similar to preceding quotes which exemplified the need to proactively acquire and sustain the support of UK Sport, the impact of not having an optimal two-way relationship with the BOA often only came to light at times of major significance:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

5.3.2.7. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with External Partners

With the dependency of peak athletic performance on available and quality medical/sport science support, national Institutes of Sport were the main external partners which PDs described as requiring two-way interactions with. Indeed, while in this case the PD held particular power as “the customer”, the need to positively engage with these stakeholders and create/sustain shared expectations was deemed valuable to optimise the provision of committed and tailored support:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD3)

Significantly, however, and echoing previous quotes which have purported the need for dark side leadership activities if an optimal programme is to be delivered, the same PD also discussed the difficulties with a member of Institute staff who was working to their own agenda:

[REDACTED]

Resonating with this point, another PD felt that they could have perhaps been more ruthless in their negotiations with the Institute with respect to the power which they held:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

For one particular sport, the need to effectively respect, engage with, and respond to partners who provided key resources but received no financial payment for these meant that particular attention had to be directed toward the quality of interpersonal relationships:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

5.3.2.8. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with the Media

While more of a concern for the PDs of higher profile sports, the challenge of media power and influence – particularly ahead of and during a home Games – was nonetheless well recognised by all PDs:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

Indeed, with some sections of the media pursuing their own and often sensationalist agendas, the threat of “the media pack mentality” was salient and could provide a major distraction to

both the PD and the performance department. Recognising that this “problem” could not be simply ignored, PDs noted the benefits of proactively addressing media needs (within limits) by providing a level of quality access to themselves and the sport’s performers; for example, via forums at training venues and self-organised events at major home competitions:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

As indicated by this PD, the merits of engaging with the media and developing useful two-way relationships was not primarily for the purpose of optimising the perceptions of specific journalists or reporters per se but rather to the stakeholders who their perception and opinion was disseminated to:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

Indeed, reflecting the geographical, operational and political challenges which characterised many sports, the ability to *use* the media to send rapid and repeated messages to particular individuals and groups was considered a particularly beneficial culture change mechanism:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD7)

5.3.2.9. Two-Way Interaction and Power-Share with Other Significant Influences

As a team operated within its own unique contexts (as shaped by the sport’s bespoke history, traditions, staffing), an array of other significant external groups were found to shape the culture change process; most commonly, the sport’s wider (i.e., non-performance) membership, influential ex-performers/coaches, and (an outcome-focused) general public. While such groups did not possess as direct a line to the performance department as others (e.g., UK Sport), or the same level of influence, the social complexity of the performance department (as governed by the multi-agency and -interaction of variously motivated internal/external stakeholders) meant that their perceptions and actions could nonetheless trigger eventual critical shifts in the way in which team culture was generated and sustained. For instance, one PD discussed how they used internal media channels to optimise the perceptions of the sport’s wider membership:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD1)

Additionally, being politically savvy over the impact of decisions and actions on those who had interests in performer training (e.g., owners/backers of specific training facilities/events) was highlighted by another PD as a particularly pertinent task:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7).

5.3.3. A Grounded Theory: Culture Change in Olympic Sport Performance Teams

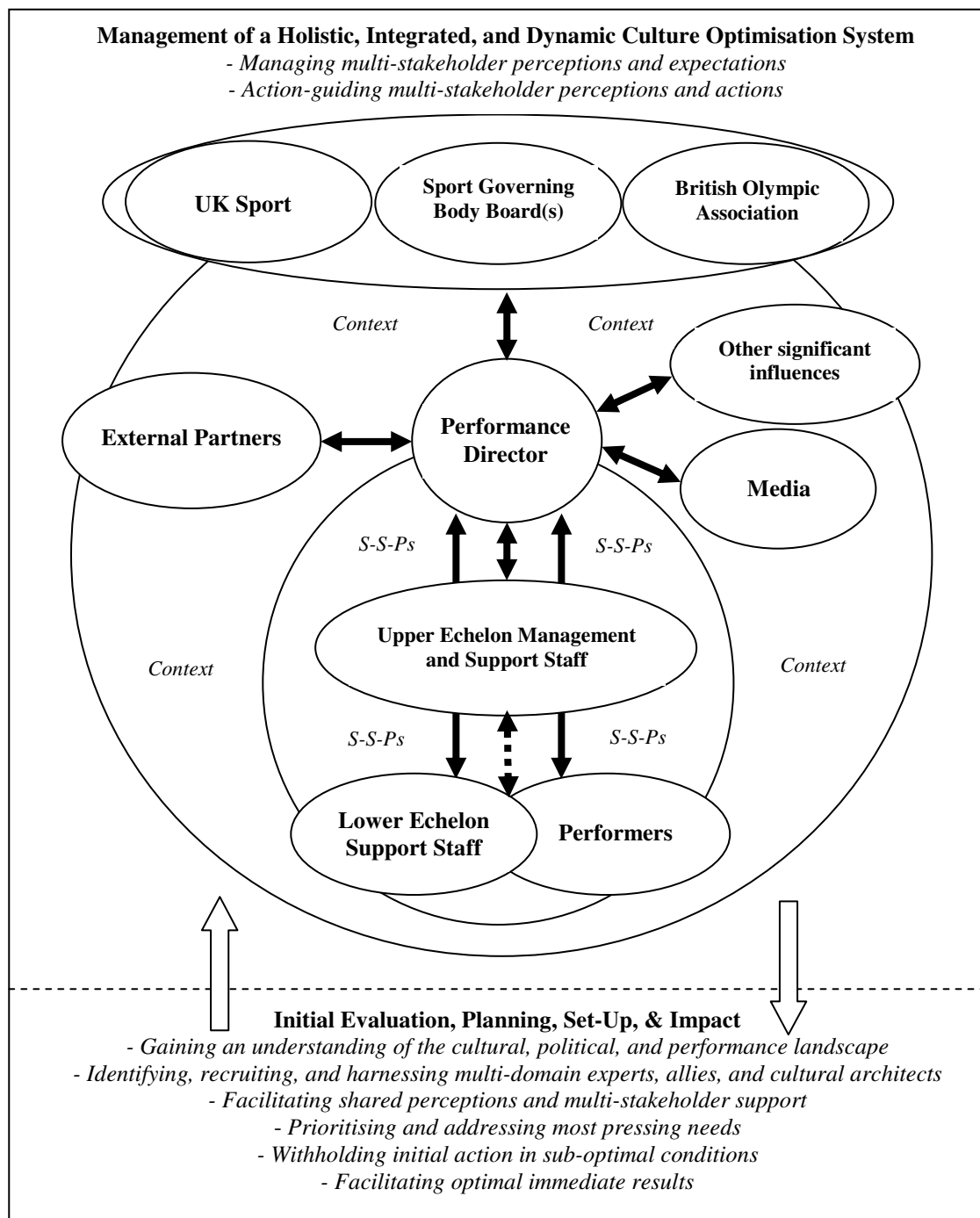
The grounded theory of PD-led culture change in Olympic sport performance teams is presented in Figure 5.1. Initially, to optimise the probability of delivering a programme which was consistent with, sensitive to, and exploitative of the sport’s historical, psychosocial, and competitive contexts, best practice was found to centre upon the acquisition and assimilation of information on the sport’s cultural, political, and performance landscapes. Reflecting the geographical, operational, and political challenges of leading a national sports team, and the prevalence of numerous and significant external agencies and pressures (e.g., governing body Boards, UK Sport, the BOA, external partners, the wider membership, media) this opening evaluation was paired with the need to: identify, recruit, and harness multi-domain experts, allies, and cultural architects; and facilitate shared perceptions and broad stakeholder support. To further optimise internal and external respect, trust, and confidence in the PD’s impending long-term programme (and minimise the prevalence and impact of the inevitable opposition and/or resistance which change courts), invaluable psychosocial momentum was also best generated through prioritising and addressing the existing system’s most pressing needs (i.e., delivering “quick wins”),

withholding from initial action in sub-optimal conditions (i.e., “picking your battles”), and facilitating optimal immediate results.

In terms of its main and enduring component (*management of a holistic, dynamic, and integrated culture optimization system*), the figure shows that culture change was reliant on establishing and upholding shared values, standards, and practices within the performance department *but also* on protecting this “cultural bubble” (cf. circle around team management, support staff, performers) from external noise. Due to the nonlinear and negotiated nature of social interactions, optimal change therefore involved the continuous attainment, integration, and management of (a) the oscillating perceptions and opinions of team management, support staff, and performers, *and* (b) the oscillating perceptions and opinions of groups/individuals who could indirectly strengthen or alter the developing and/or established team culture (i.e., governing body Board(s), UK Sport, the BOA, external partners, the media, other significant influences). Rather than a step-by-step, top-down, prescriptive process, the presented model is underpinned by the complexity and contested nature of Olympic performance team settings and therefore promotes a 360-degree perspective to the optimal establishment, propagation, and perpetuation of high performing values, beliefs, expectations, and behaviours.

Figure 5.1.

A Grounded Theory Model of Manager-Led Culture Change Best Practice in Olympic Sport Performance Teams¹¹



Note. S-S-Ps: Performance department systems, structures, and processes

¹¹ As per the tenets of grounded theory methodology (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008), this model is a representation of the analysed data from this specific study (NB. predicted interactions between non- team management groups are therefore not depicted; cf. future research directions in Chapter 10)

5.4. Discussion

5.4.1. *Convergence with Professional Sport Performance Team Manager-Led Culture*

Change

The presented model of optimal PD-led culture change in Olympic sport performance teams shows significant overlap with that delivered by PMs. Primarily, greatest equivalence with PM perceptions was found in the materialisation of a general two-pronged CM process (i.e., *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact; management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimization system*). Akin to the results of the PM study, this PD-led framework was also rooted in the contested power, agency, and interaction of internal and external stakeholders and therefore built on the continual attainment, negotiation, and configuration of multi-stakeholder perceptions. Again, such an approach promoted a tight fit between the established cultural bubble and the sport's stable and shifting macro (e.g., history and traditions), meso (e.g., funding), and micro (e.g., stakeholder perception) contexts.

Significantly, the results in this chapter provide support for Chapter 4's bespoke CM findings. Explicitly, the importance of *withholding initial action in sub-optimal conditions* is reinforced through its occurrence and perceived utility in PD-led culture change. Indeed, the ability to generate change readiness (e.g., harnessing experts, allies, and cultural architects; facilitating shared perceptions and multi-stakeholder support) *and* refrain from/delay actions in which immediate risks outweighed long-term rewards was an early critical success factor. As such, rather than administering a generic, prescriptive, step-by-step process, best practice was again characterised by the manager's ability to make decisions and select actions which were carefully measured against short-, intermediate, and long-term nested agendas.

Contradicting the predominantly linear frameworks of CM in organisational literature (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003; Price & Chahal, 2006), the findings in this chapter further align with the PM-based model in terms of their treatment of both change

and continuity (Graetz & Smith, 2010; Pettigrew et al., 2001). Indeed, the PD-led culture change process also had no designated “end point” and depicted the optimisation of team culture as a boundless pursuit. Accordingly, further support is provided for Brännmark and Benn’s (2012) identification of *stakeholder interest balance* as a requisite for sustaining change, with new values, standards, and practices constantly and consistently modified and reinforced (rather than being the “final steps” as in Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Schein, 2004).

Finally, the findings in this chapter add further weight to the role and significance of political- and power-based dynamics in elite team culture change. Again, the incorporation of a to and fro of power between PD and an array of internal and external stakeholders points to the context-specificity of elite team culture change and reveals that optimal management action is continually sensitive to and exploitative of the dynamic and layered interactions between multiple stakeholders with multiple interests and agendas.

5.4.2. Divergence From Professional Sport Performance Team Manager-Led Culture Change

While many similarities are found between this chapter’s results and those revealed from the PM study, it is important to recognise that a number of clear but subtle differences also appeared. Reflecting the context-specific nature of culture change, as accounted for in both models, these points of difference were underpinned by the bespoke cultural, political, and psychosocial conditions which surrounded change programme delivery.

Considering the initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact phase first, PDs were found to engage with *gaining an understanding of the cultural, political, and performance landscape* as compared to the PMs and their parallel investigative processes of *evaluating fit with the club and Board* and *evaluating the performance department*. In this case, the lack of a parallel theme to the PMs’ *evaluating fit with the club and Board* perhaps reflects the fact

that there are fewer opportunities to become a PD than there are to become a PM (as dictated by the smaller population of PD roles and the typically longer life expectancy) and therefore an acceptance to work under prevailing conditions rather than finding prevailing conditions to work under. Returning to the CM process, part of the variation in the focus and nature of the initial investigation phase would also appear to be governed by differential constraints on the PMs and PDs for changing the composition of the groups which they oversee. Indeed, PDs cannot buy new performers and thereby must focus on developing systems which consistently produce high performing athletes/teams (hence the need to “gain an understanding” rather than “evaluate” against ideal types). Similarly, the PD emphasis on gaining awareness of the political landscape reflects greater complexity amongst the agencies which exert top-down influence on performance (i.e., governing body Board(s), UK Sport, and the BOA).

Of further note is the variation between PD efforts on *facilitating shared perceptions and multi-stakeholder support* and PM attention on *setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations*. Specifically, with the pressure to deliver results concentrated around a relatively small number of events for the PD (e.g., European championships, World championships, Olympic Games), as opposed to weekly matches in professional sport, more time could be devoted to facilitating a shared outlook and support than the equivalent task’s immediacy for PMs (reflected in the emphasis on *setting* rather than *facilitating* perceptions). Indeed, one PD (individual plus team sport) interviewed for this study reflected:

██
██
██
██ (PD1)

Potentially further accounting for the difference in the PDs’ *facilitating* and PMs’ *setting* of perceptions and expectation, the “one position removed” nature of the PD role (i.e., managing

from a different site/non-coaching responsibilities) paired with this domain's geographical, operational, and political challenges meant that delivering an immediate widespread impact (by addressing all performers/support staff at once) was rarely if ever an option. Another factor may also lie in support staff and performer expectancy. Specifically, with professional team support staff and performers usually working/interacting with their manager on a daily basis and Olympic team support staff/performers working/interacting with their PD on fewer (if any) occasions, it could be logically assumed that the natural performance structure of each domain generates different assumptions on a manager's role and therefore how these figures "take people with them". In short, and as conveyed by the two models, with PDs' physically, structurally, and socially further away from performers and (lower echelon) support staff than PMs, there is therefore a need for these individuals to deliver actions and decisions which allow them to (generally) lead "from above" rather than (generally) lead "from the front/behind". In this manner, the models also suggest that targets of change in Olympic sport tend to experience change *through* PD systems, structures, and processes, whereas targets of change in professional sport tend to experience change *with* PM systems, structures, and processes.

Interestingly, one element of the PD framework which shared no clear parallel with the PM model was *prioritising and addressing most pressing needs*. Perhaps reflecting the PD's primary focus on systems, structures, and external politics as opposed to PMs' focus on delivering instant results (as per the high sacking rate and opportunities for weekly appraisal), this feature was also conceivably a product of the need to "show" change in an environment where the most significant marker (i.e., results) was a largely infrequent source of feedback. Indeed, this greater allocation of attention and resources on improving systems, structures, and processes, plus the longer time frames in which such changes would bear fruit, may also account for the identification, recruitment, and harnessing of *domain experts* (as well as

social allies/cultural architects) and subtle difference between the PD's *facilitation* of optimal immediate results against the PM's more critical *need to deliver* optimal immediate results.

Regarding the main component of the PD-led culture change model (i.e., *management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimisation system*), two areas present notable divergence from the PM model discovered in Chapter 4. First, and as highlighted above, due to the geographical, operational, and political challenges of delivering Olympic performance team culture change, PDs worked *through* their upper echelon team management and support staff to a greater extent than the PMs. Second, and considering external stakeholders, the groups implicated in PD-led culture change clearly varied from those reported in Chapter 4, but more importantly, so did the nature of their connecting relationships. In particular, the heightened social and political complexity of the environment "above" the PD offered a key contrast with the PM model; requiring PDs to often place proportionally more attention, resources, and effort on managing upwards than PMs. Conversely, however, media scrutiny was markedly less for most (but not all) PDs and, as such, required less attention, resources, and effort. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to note that effective management and *use of* the media was a valuable change mechanism for both.

5.4.3. Limitations and The Next Step

Although the studies of this chapter and Chapter 4 possessed many strengths (e.g., a high level of access to high-level and hitherto elusive participants; methodological coherence: Holt & Tamminen, 2010; Suddaby, 2006; a focus on precise specification rather than general abstraction: du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012), some features of design limit the results. Primarily, as questions in the interview guide were not framed in specific time blocks, the credibility of data may have been mediated by inaccurate recall, hindsight bias, and self-preservation biases (Nestler, Blank, & von Collani, 2008; Coolican, 2004). In addition, by only interviewing the leaders of change, the extent to which the targets of change (i.e., team management/support

staff/performers) and influential external groups (e.g., CEO and Board) jointly perceived the reported CM processes (i.e., did managers deliver what they said?), viewed them as impactful (i.e., did they work?), and, most pertinently for elite sport, considered them to have supported consistent high performance (i.e., did it make a difference?) is uncertain. Retaining a pursuit for optimal theoretical and applied knowledge, Chapter 6 now describes a case study which explores elite team CM from a 360 degree perspective and explains its evolution and critical success factors through a framework which accounts for the complex and contested nature of multi-stakeholder change environments. Indeed, the need for such an approach was also spontaneously acknowledged by one of the interviewed PDs:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD2)

CHAPTER 6:

CULTURE CHANGE IN A PROFESSIONAL SPORT PERFORMANCE TEAM: EXPLORING SUCCESSFUL CHANGE THROUGH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES AND DECENTRED THEORY

6.1. Introduction

In Chapters 4 and 5 the first grounded theory models of elite sport performance team culture change were developed in specific relation to professional and Olympic sport settings. Notably, these models shared many common features in terms of their chronology, with both frameworks pointing to CM processes in which success was facilitated by a critical transition, integration, and impact phase adjoined to an incessant multi-directional management system. Indeed, rather than top-down imposition, culture change was found to have its foundations in the contested interests, power, and agency of internal and external stakeholders. Intriguingly, a two-way interaction and power-share between manager and key stakeholders was therefore necessitated in order to ensure that the process and content of change was at all times rooted to and exploitative of stakeholder-based micropolitics. By only interviewing the leaders of elite sport performance teams, however, Chapters 4 and 5 have offered an incomplete picture on the nuances and implications of this to and fro element; indeed, the constraints of single-voice accounts are clear when CM is depicted as a process of “tensions, backstage behaviours and conflicts” (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007, p. 672). Moreover, by exploring PM perceptions across a number of prior roles (therefore compromising data specificity) and not framing PM and PD interview questions against distinct critical moments and phases, the accurateness of the acquired data and usefulness of the presented models is, presumably, limited.

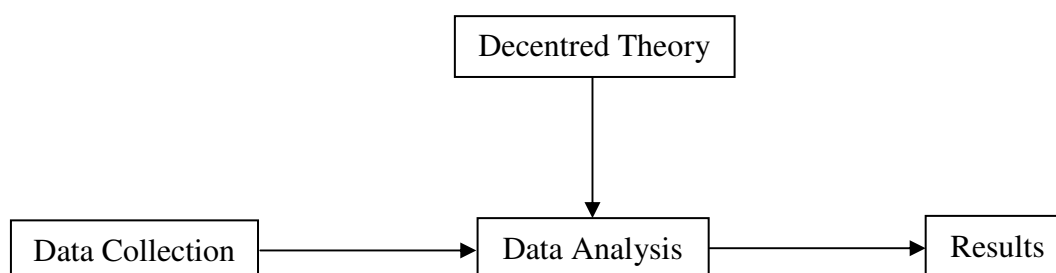
In light of these limits, the purposes of this study were to: (a) explore and substantiate success factors of time-locked, management-led change from a 360-degree perspective; (b) illuminate processes by which the two-way interaction and power share elements of the prior

presented models (cf. Chapters 4 and 5) were managed in a case of successful CM; and (c) operationalise and evaluate the utility of decentred theory as an explanatory framework for elite sport performance team CM research.

6.2. Rationalising the Importation of Decentred Theory

Recalling that the work programme of this thesis was structured in a way which met pragmatic conditions for an iterative process (both within and across studies) and focused on the evolution and accumulation of knowledge (cf. Chapter 3; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005), this chapter aimed to extend developing understanding of elite performance team culture change (i.e., the findings of Chapters 4 and 5) by examining CM through a pre-existing theoretical framework; namely, decentred theory. Significantly, however, rather than using this approach as a foundation for study (i.e., to guide data collection as well as analysis) – which could uncritically force sport-specific data into unsuitable concepts and categories, decentred theory was deployed only post hoc as an interpretive lens. Adhering to pragmatic principles (Giacobbi et al. 2005), this decision was primarily made with respect to the stage of inquiry; specifically, as Chapters 4 and 5 presented the first insights on elite team culture change and no multi-stakeholder work had been conducted (either in this thesis or in the literature), the evidence base was not sufficient to justify full assessment of the decentred approach. Nonetheless, and as shown in Figure 6.1, this framework was applied to: (a) corroborate and extend results from prior chapters; (b) offer alternative accounts of culture change best practice; and (c) support methodological decisions (in this case, data analysis procedures) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Figure 6.1

Graphic Representation of Decentred Theory Application

Recently embraced by sports policy researchers (Grix, 2010; Goodwin & Grix, 2011; Lindsey & Grattan, 2012) and further identified by sport psychology as an interpretive tool for elite team culture change (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b), decentred theory originates from work on the UK's shift from central governmental power in policy creation and delivery to governance through distributed networks (Bevir & Richards, 2009a, Bevir, 2003). Devised as an anti-foundational alternative to prior positivist-dominated literature, decentred theory is based on the assumption that governance arises dynamically via bottom-up processes rather than linearly via institutional or structural imposition (Bevir & Richards, 2009a, Bevir, 2003) and views social constructions (or, in the case of this thesis, high performing cultures) as “complex and continuous process of interpretation, conflict and activity that produces ever-changing patterns of rule” (Bevir & Richards, 2009a, p. 7). Offset from prior investigation under foundational epistemologies, the decentred approach reinstated individuals to the prevalent “agentless” accounts (Grix, 2010, p. 161) and portrays network members as divergent *situated agents*: i.e., not passive actors but instead individuals who act and reason in a novel manner within the contexts in which they operate (Bevir & Richards, 2009a). Rejecting top-down and uncontested conceptualisations of change, social reform is therefore depicted as a “chaotic picture of multiple actors, creating a contingent pattern of rule through their conflicting actions” (Bevir & Richards, 2009a, p. 7).

On examining decentred theory's underpinning tenets, a close match is found with the contexts and needs of elite team culture change study. Developmentally, decentred theory's move to investigate and explain *how* governance networks (i.e., parallel of high performing cultures) are constructed over their traits or outcomes (i.e., parallel of group dynamics work in sport psychology: cf. Chapter 2) or their links with central direction (i.e., parallel of sport psychology's leadership work: cf. Chapter 2) mirrors the evolution of the elite team culture change construct (cf. Bevir & Richards, 2009a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). With such networks usually "[operating] through interdependent relationships, with a view to trying to secure their individual goals by collaborating with each other" (Bevir & Richards, 2009a, p. 3), further conceptual similarity is found with the variously-motivated, multi-group make up of professional sport performance departments. Reflecting their pursuit of bespoke goals and possession of role- and person-specific needs, preferences, and opinions, the performance team's management, support staff, and performers can also therefore be viewed as situated agents. Notably, the "radical contingency" (Grix, 2010, p. 161) assumed to emerge from the interplay of these agents' diverse and conflicting beliefs aligns with recent literature which depicts the management of sports team performers as a personal, power-ridden, and contested pursuit (Potrac & Jones, 2009) and, more significantly, resonates with the social complexity illuminated in the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

While the pragmatic research philosophy prioritises research questions in determining study design, and thereby methodological and practical over ontological and epistemological issues (Bryant, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Morgan, 2007), it is still important to acknowledge the philosophical contexts against which decentred theory has been developed and further highlight the links with this chapter. Notably, although sport policy researchers have positioned decentred theory within an interpretivist or "hard" interpretivist epistemology (cf. Grix, 2010; Goodwin & Grix, 2011; Lindsey & Grattan, 2012), Bevir and

Richards (2009a) consistently state that “to decentre is to focus on the social construction of a practice” (p. 3); a perspective which explains culture changes as “*highly political processes of power*, which result in the elevation of specific forms of knowledge to the *rank of the true . . . for a specific context* [emphasis added]” (Gemignani & Peña, 2007, p. 279). Accepting that “researchers may use similar methods but from very different epistemological perspectives” (Krane & Baird, 2005, p. 89), decentred theory’s position at the “constructivism end” of the epistemological continuum (as described in Chapter 3; Giacobbi et al., 2005) suggests that it may therefore be suitable for purposes of elite team culture change study under a pragmatic approach. Indeed, pragmatists and constructivists’ reject foundationalism and instead direct focus toward social, consensus-based, and context-specific truths. Reflecting the questions and objectives driving this chapter (i.e., to explore multi-stakeholders’ views of successful CM), working from the “constructivism end” at this stage of the thesis therefore appears apt.

Although not applied in this chapter to guide data collection, it is also worthy to note that, from a methodological perspective, the suitability of decentred theory is substantiated by its prioritisation of methods which: (a) “do not pre-empt or curtail the richness and contingency of findings” (Durose, 2009, p. 39), (b) consider a range of agents beyond those who dominate in terms of structural position (Lindsey & Grattan, 2012), and (c) focus on how networks (e.g., performance teams) construct and reconstruct new ways of perceiving and behaving (Bevir & Richards, 2009a). Significantly, all of these features are accounted for by the interview guide and design of this study (see below). Analytically, and recalling that pre-existing theory can be used to build on programmes of research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), a decentred theory-informed approach to analysis is appropriate with respect to the position’s assumption on the power- and political-based enactment of networks. In summary, therefore, via its prioritisation of context, multi-stakeholder orientation, and sensitivity to the dynamic and contested elements of social change, decentred theory appears to be a

potentially useful framework through which elite sport performance team CM may be effectively explained and an approach which can promote the sophistication of sport-specific knowledge.

6.3. Method

6.3.1. Selection of an Exemplar Culture Change Programme: Leeds Carnegie 2008-2010

Following the professionalisation of Rugby Football Union in 1995, Leeds Carnegie (formerly Leeds Tykes and Leeds RUFC) were named champions of English Rugby Union's second tier professional league (now named *The RFU Championship*) for the first time in season 2000-2001 and consequently promoted (i.e., permitted entry) to the governing body's top division (now named the *Aviva Premiership*) for season 2001-2002. However, despite finishing fifth in their maiden season (therefore qualifying for the world's most prestigious club tournament, the *Heineken Cup*) and winning their first ever trophy in 2004-2005, the Club was relegated (i.e., demoted) back to the second tier at the end of 2005-2006 (as a result of finishing last in the Premiership standings) before consecutive promotion and relegation in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. Upon the Director of Rugby's departure at the end of this latter campaign, the Club appointed Andy Key and Neil Back (hereafter AK and NB) as Director of Rugby and Head Coach respectively. Arriving from Leicester Tigers, English rugby's most successful club, the team was promoted at the end of the management's first season before finishing tenth out of the Premiership's 12 teams in 2009-2010, thereby maintaining their status in the league and breaking the previous promotion-relegation cycle (for which AK received the Premiership's *Director of the Year* award). The Club was selected for the present study based upon AK and NB's confirmation that their programme focused explicitly on culture optimisation and that successful performance had been (a) recently experienced, and (b) delivered in the face of notable contextual challenges (i.e., history of successive promotion-relegation; significantly increased level of competition).

6.3.2. Participants

A sample critically implicated in professional sport performance team culture change was recruited (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). As well as enlisting AK and NB, one member of support staff (a specialist coach) and six first team squad players were recruited. As a further means for assessing the change process, players were purposefully sampled to reflect a differential experience of the change process. Two players (Player 1 and Player 2) were at the Club before AK and NB's appointment, two (Player 3 and Player 4) were recruited in the 2009 off-season, and two (Player 5 and Player 6) recruited in the 2010 off-season. Reflecting the reported need to manage upwards with respect to gaining the time, space, and resources from top-level management to facilitate optimal programme delivery (cf. Chapters 4 and 5), the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Gary Hetherington, was also recruited. Importantly, this feature of design also aligned with the consequent interpretation process as decentred theory asserts that the beliefs and actions of actors outside of the system in question must also be considered to provide a comprehensive picture of change (Bevir & Richards, 2009a). The specialist coach and CEO were both employed by the Club before AK and NB's arrival.

6.3.3. Procedure

All participants were approached on my behalf by AK and NB to gauge interest in taking part in the study. Upon confirmatory response (all accepted), letters were sent to each identified participant to provide further background information on the work and commitments of participation. To encourage critical evaluation by the players and specialist coach, particular emphasis was placed upon the confidential nature of their contribution and direct reassurance by management that the Club would not be permitted access to any of the recorded information. As naming the Club meant that there was no feasible way to conceal the identities of AK, NB, and the CEO, these participants were made explicitly aware that they would be accountable for their provided information. All participants subsequently

provided informed consent, with AK, NB, and the CEO agreeing to be named and all players agreeing to the description provided above¹².

Representing their joint responsibility for delivering change, AK and NB were interviewed simultaneously and first. Reflecting the retrospective nature of enquiry, they were initially requested to plot a timeline of the team's perceived performance against that required of a top-four Premiership side (the management team's programme goal). It was further requested that the emergent graph be split into phases representing distinct periods in the change process as demarcated by major and chronological events (cf. Ollis, MacPherson, & Collins, 2006). Deployed to address the limitations of Chapters 4 and 5 (cf. Chapter 5), this depiction was then employed as both an aid to recall and tool to frame questions (cf. interview guide in Appendix A) in specific time blocks (i.e., questions were asked in relation to the initial changes, transition between phases, and in-phase events). Cognisant of the intention to obtain data grounded in individual experience, however, other participants were initially asked to share their views on the timeline and provided opportunity to amend AK and NB's depiction to best represent their own beliefs, thereby tailoring their reference of questioning. Similarly, while a semi-structured guide was utilised, the interview was based upon a 'talk me through it' conversational approach and shaped by the content and natural flow of each discussion (Patton, 2002). After covering all identified phases, final questions were asked relating to the holistic process, nature and outcomes of the change¹³.

¹² It is acknowledged that participant confidentiality is standard research practice. To justify the decision to name the club and management/CEO, it would have arguably been impossible to conceal team identity (and therefore the identity of the management/CEO) if the context of the change-program was to be effectively depicted. From an ethical perspective, team management and the CEO were made explicitly aware during the negotiation of this study that their identities would be made known.

¹³ Due to the retrospective nature of this study and its focus on *how* culture was changed rather than *what* the new culture looked like, the reader is reminded that interviews were the only method of data collection used in this study (cf. comments on ethnography in Chapter 3). Additionally, this focus meant that components of culture were not explored; such as Schein's (2004) artifacts (i.e., tangible cultural elements), espoused values (i.e., overt norms which govern, or are intended to govern, group perception and action), and basic assumptions (i.e., the subconscious "maps" which guide individuals toward particular interpretations, perceptions, actions).

All interviews were audio recorded and conducted by myself in a private office at the Club's training ground, apart from that with the CEO which took place in a private room at the Club's stadium. To minimise current contextual factors interacting with retrospective perception and individuals discussing their interview with those still to participate, all interviews were conducted over 1 week (players over 3 consecutive days). Interviews with the players ranged from approximately 60 to 150 minutes, as governed by their length of service (i.e., interviews were longer for those who had been at the club the longest). The interview with the management lasted 250 minutes, specialist coach 300 minutes, and CEO 135 minutes. The shorter length of the CEO's interview reflected this figure's diluted picture of the culture change process, as dictated by his 'distance' from the performance department (see supporting footnote number 15). Institutional ethics committee approval was obtained for all procedures.

6.3.4. Inductive Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions

Aligning with previously deployed decentred analysis procedures (cf. Lindsey & Grattan, 2012, Davies, 2009), inductive content analyses were conducted on each participant's data. After reading and rereading the transcription, qualitative analysis software (QSR NVIVO 9) was used to transform raw data units into thematic hierarchies by recursively engaging in tag creation, category creation, and category organisation (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). To revise identified concepts based upon emerging analysis, the constant comparative method was employed and conceptual memos recorded detailing evolving ideas and key notes (Davis & Meyer, 2009). Reflecting the focus on team culture, all analysed players' interviews were then amalgamated to produce a set of perceptions indicative of the group as a whole.

6.3.5. Addressing Trustworthiness

Trust and rapport are key factors in shaping the process and outcomes of interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Accordingly, several approaches were employed to optimise these features with all participants (later corroborated by AK and NB), including: (a) investigation of all participants' careers to understand their bespoke history/current situation (it should be stressed that I had no pre-existing relationship with any participant prior to the research); (b) observation of two training sessions, the training complex, office environment, and a meeting delivered by AK and NB to Club coaches; and (c) knowledge of/empathy with the demands of professional team and culture change environments (cf. Chapter 3). Evidence of the level of developed trust and rapport is shown in the duration of the interviews and, in specific relation to AK and NB, the invitations to observe the aforementioned club coach meeting and provide a feedback presentation (to AK and NB only) after completion of the data analysis process. On-going interaction with AK also supports this assertion.

Member checks were also conducted, involving a 10-15 minute meeting with each participant to evaluate the accuracy of quotes considered for inclusion in a paper submitted for publication in an academic journal. Importantly, and in light of well publicised criticism on the *parallel perspective* on validity in qualitative study (cf. Sparkes & Smith, 2009), this procedure was not deployed to support credibility (the parallel of internal validity) but to evaluate the extent to which participants considered my interpretation of their data and the context of the results subsections in which their quotes appeared to be "accurate, balanced, fair, and respectful" (Sparkes & Smith, 2009, p. 495). No thematic categories were changed from this process and 2 of 34 exemplar quotes adjusted. Reflecting their responsibility for programme delivery, AK and NB were then provided with a full copy of results to comment on the paper's overall precision¹⁴. Both reported complete agreement with its depiction.

¹⁴ The rationale for reporting the full results to AK and NB only was borne from this thesis' focus on *management-led* change.

Trustworthiness of the analytical process was also addressed. Facilitated by QSR NVIVO's optimisation of transparency, the constant comparison method and conceptual memos challenging interpretation ensured that evolving meaning was continually re-evaluated and reasserted (cf. Davis & Meyer, 2009). To further optimise rigor, a reflexive journal was maintained (Patton, 2002). Promoting cognisance of my presumptions and assumptions, my supervisors also acted as "critical friends" by supporting in-depth critique and investigation of emerging interpretation, discoveries, and explanations (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999).

6.3.6. Recentred Analysis of Higher Order Themes

Once decentred accounts are obtained, an understanding of broader narratives, such as the culture change process, may then be achieved by providing a "recentred" (Bevir & Richards, 2009b, p. 139) account. By assessing the coherence of higher order themes across all groups (i.e., management, specialist coach, players, CEO), a triangulated, meso-level generalisation of the change process was therefore obtained. Importantly, such accounts are required to maintain a description of "contingent patterns of action in their specific contexts" and consider "power as something that flows up and down" (Bevir & Richards, 2009b, p. 139). Accordingly, the results are presented below with these qualifications in mind.

6.4. Results

6.4.1. Legitimising the Success of the CM Programme: Markers of Change

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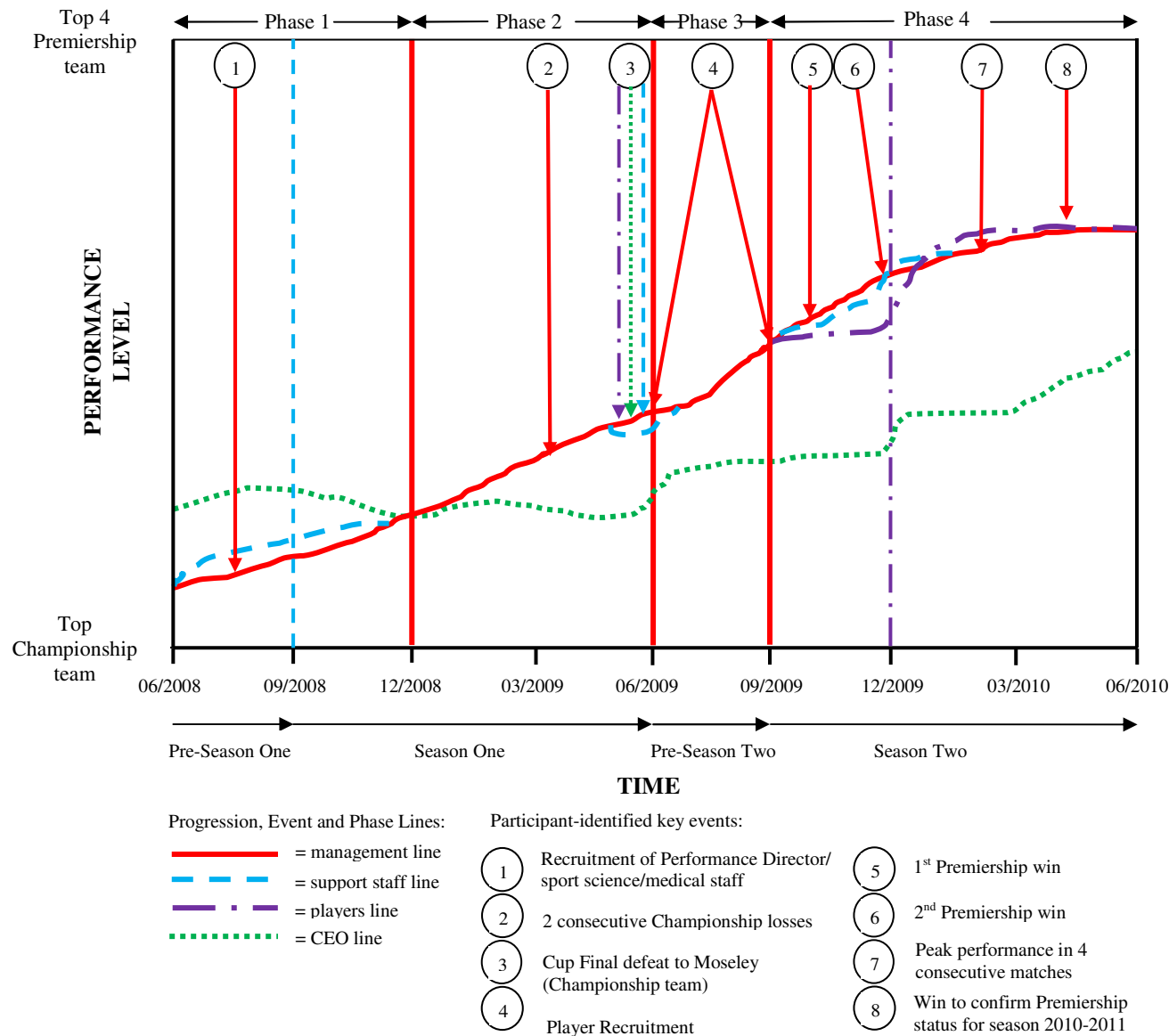
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Figure 6.2. Perceived Team Performance Level, Key Events, and Distinct Phases of the Change Process.



Note. Phases displayed at the top of the figure represent those perceived by AK/NB. Where no lines belonging to the players, support staff and CEO are present, this reflects agreement with AK/NB's perceptions. Lines belonging specifically to the players offer a 'best fit' representation of the whole group's perceptions.

Table 6.1
Higher-order Constructs of the Culture Change Program at Leeds Carnegie

Category	2 nd order themes			
	Management	Players	Support Staff	CEO
Objectives and planning	Establishing an understanding of the environment	N	Y	Y
	Long-term objectives	Y	Y	Y
	Planning for objective attainment	Y	Y	Y
Optimising the holistic performance environment	Establishing an open physical office environment	N	Y	N
	Supporting the performance development of all staff	Y	Y	Y (players only)
	Building a staff consistent with the intended culture	Y	Y	Y
	Optimising the motivation and well-being of all staff	Y	Y	Y (players only)
	Managing the CEO/Board's perceptions	N	Y	Y
	Promoting clarity	Y	Y	Y
Feedback systems to guide action	Player feedback	Y	Y	N
	Support staff feedback	Y	Y	N
	CEO/Board feedback	N	Y	Y
	External stakeholder feedback	N	Y	Y
	Team/Player performance analysis feedback	Y	Y	N
	Sport science feedback	Y	Y	Y
	Results feedback	Y	Y	Y
Reinforcement strategies	Consistency of discourse and action	Y	Y	Y
	Maintenance of systems, processes and procedures	Y	Y	Y
	Reward and protection systems	Y	Y	N
	Optimising external perceptions	Y	Y	Y
Leadership and interpersonal qualities	Displaying confidence in action	Y	Y	Y
	Assuming ultimate responsibility for direction	Y	Y	N
	Libertarian Paternalism	Y	Y	N
	Informal working style	Y	Y	Y
	Openness and honesty	Y	Y	Y
	Adaptive to environmental complexity	Y	Y	Y
	Role models for the culture	Y	Y	N
	Motivational/inspirational discourse and action	Y	Y	N
	Experience of high performance environments	Y	Y	Y
	Pragmatism	Y	Y	Y
	Understanding of their roles and responsibilities	N	Y	Y
	Innovative and comprehensive planners	Y	Y	Y
	Respectful of others	Y	Y	Y
Driven and competitive	Y	Y	Y	
Additions to constructs on leadership		Highly respected Performance-focused ruthlessness	Highly respected	Highly respected

Note. Y's in bold and italic font = themes perceived as having been delivered with sub-optimal efficacy.

←--→ denote sources which promoted a 'regulated' share of power between management and other group

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6.4.2. Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives on the CM Programme's Performance Impact

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6.4.3. Exemplar Critical Success Factors of the CM Programme

6.4.3.1. Initial Transition and Integration

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6.4.3.2. Holistic Culture Optimisation System

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6.4.4. Sub-Optimal Features of the CM Programme

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6.4.4.1. Informing Players of Performance-Based Decision Making and Action

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6.4.4.2. Facilitating Social Interaction

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6.4.4.3. Player Ownership Issues

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6.4.5. Managing and Exploiting the Power Flux

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6.5. Discussion

6.5.1. Insights on the Specific Case

This chapter examined culture change in a professional sport performance department and explored its delivery from a decentred perspective (Bevir & Richards, 2009a). Regarding the specific case, the creation and regulation of the high performing culture at Leeds Carnegie was discovered to have been achieved through a predominantly endogenous process rather than imposed top-down by team management. Clearly underpinning this approach was AK and NB's principle of group-wide ownership, acting as the focus of, frame around, and driver behind every action and decision within the change process. Accordingly, in efforts to ensure that the players and support staff adhered to and self-regulated the identified, context-specific cultural values, beliefs, expectations, and practices, a range of supporting systems, structures, and processes were introduced, refined, and consistently deployed. Most notably, successful change was undoubtedly facilitated through the adoption of a more professional approach to performance, with the appointment a Head of Performance and the associated restructuring of support staff a particularly critical success factor. Additionally, and in keeping with the new behavioural principles and standards, optimising role clarity and providing rationale behind management decision making and action were of further major impact in that these processes liberated the support staff and players by allowing them to work from a position of freedom and understanding. Finally, and once again, a detailed appreciation of the context-specific nature of CM was perceived as fundamental to successful delivery.

6.5.2. Integration with the Developed Models of Elite Team Culture Change

From a wider perspective, and as enabled by the instrumental nature of the case study (cf. Chapter 3; Stake, 2008), the findings from the chapter compliment and extend the results presented in Chapters 4 and 5 (particularly chapter 4 with respect this study’s undertaking in a professional sport performance team). Firstly, while *establishing an understanding of the environment, long term objectives, and planning for objective attainment* acted as the starting point, the examined programme did not represent strict, linear steps but instead an integrated, holistic, and dynamic process. This result also aligns with prior sport-specific knowledge in that it is the manner in which performance-optimising processes are packaged and deployed which acts as the catalyst for efficient culture change, not strictly the processes themselves (Schroeder, 2010). As such, significant overlap is found with the “two-pronged” models presented in Chapters 4 and 5 whereby the management’s initial activities provided the catalyst for efficient and effective change. More specifically, clear parallels were found between the purposes underpinning AK and NB’s opening approach and the processes which were included in the culture change model in Chapter 4; indeed, the quotes presented above indicate how AK and NB engaged in *evaluating the performance department, setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations, identifying and harnessing social allies and cultural architects, withholding initial action in sub-optimal conditions, and delivering instant results*. Additionally, AK and NB also reported in their own interview that a key focus before appointment mirrored elements of *evaluating fit with the Club and Board*:

██
██
██
██
██

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (AK)

As such, and reflecting the limitations of Chapter 4 (and 5) with respect to the development of a model based on manager perceptions only, this study has provided initial support for the usefulness and applicability of these initial processes.

More generally, and in terms of the integrated, dynamic, and holistic approach taken by AK and NB (a direct parallel to the major component of the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5), the importance of two-way interactions with all stakeholders was reinforced; most fundamentally with support staff and players. As indicated by the content on the perceived sub-optimal delivery of *optimising the motivation and well-being of all staff*, the challenges of dealing with a demanding, primarily self-interested and outcome-focused playing squad were again evident. Additionally, Table 6.1 shows that upward management activities were considered necessary and effective in supporting professional sport performance team CM. Furthermore, inherent within the quotes presented above (and contained in the *optimising the holistic performance environment* theme in Table 6.1), profitable interactions with the media was viewed as another valuable CM activity by players and staff alike. Certainly, the “extra-manager interactions” emanating from the media in the model presented in Chapter 4 were clearly present in this study; as shown by the quotes which pointed to AK and NB’s “message sending” through this external stakeholder group. Furthermore, and while explicit details are not provided above, the importance of engaging with other external agencies was also noted; particularly in exploiting University-based sport science support:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



█ (Player 2)

6.5.3. Further Contributions to Knowledge: The Decentred Perspective

As evident across all features of the results, the dynamic, contested, and power-based interactions suggested by decentred theory were apparent and supported as effective by the participants of this study. In particular, the findings indicate that successful CM was well supported by deployment of systems, structures, and processes which actively encouraged a to and fro of power between management and their support staff and players. Indeed, rather than seeking to control, avoid, or ignore the multiple and conflicting motivations and interests which characterise professional sport performance team settings, this approach was effective in that it offered internal stakeholders opportunities to continually contribute to the direction, functioning, and performance of the team *and*, by inference, generate and perpetuate a culture optimisation system which was at all times sensitive to and exploitative of critical individual and group-wide perceptions. As substantiated by the acquired multi-stakeholder perceptions, successful CM was supported by making a range of such contribution/feedback opportunities available and across a number of levels (i.e., formal/informal; short-term/long-term); namely: pre-season forums, player representation groups, annual performance reviews, integrated and regular support staff meetings, and an open door policy.

Through these bespoke results, and reflecting the dearth of culture change research in sport psychology and lack of robust theoretical accounts within other disciplines (cf. Chapter 2), this chapter also therefore provides initial support for decentred theory's applicability as a framework through which the dynamic, power-based interactions of culture change in elite sport performance teams may be explored and explained. Indeed, with a focus on developing contextually-specific understanding through multiple stakeholder perspectives, the theory's methodological value is evident. Analytically, through an emphasis on the contested agency

and radical contingency of distinctly motivated individuals/groups, the utility of a decentred approach in accounting for the complex and context-dependent nature of culture change is also apparent through the richness of the results. Finally, by considering power as a construct that flows between actors and groups and in all directions, the theory's worth in illuminating systems, processes, and procedures which facilitate a regulated ebb and flow of control and command between team management and key stakeholders is also clear.

6.5.4. Evaluating Research Quality

For evaluating the quality of this study, the reader is encouraged to consider an array of characterising traits which support interpretative rigor and applied usefulness of the results (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Regarding the use of case study methodology, the approach taken adhered to the responsibilities of case study researchers (cf. Stake, 2008) by using patterns of data to develop issues, triangulating through multi-stakeholder perceptions, and considering alternative explanations in analysis. To meet presentational criteria, research questions have been emphasised (cf. study purpose), the boundaries of the case set (cf. section 6.3.1.) and assertions developed about the case (cf. results and general discussion).

Beyond techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process, decentred theory's emphasis on inductive *then* recentred analyses aligns with this chapter's context and purposes and, of equal pertinence, the principles of working from the constructivist end of the philosophical continuum (i.e., consensus of multiple realities: Krane & Baird, 2005, Gemignani & Peña, 2007). Additionally, value may also be found in applying pertinent non-foundational criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (2005) for evaluating the processes and outcomes of social constructionist oriented investigation; expressly, evaluation is encouraged on this study's: *fairness* (the extent to which all participants' perspectives were represented in the results to ensure the topic was addressed with balance, as facilitated by recruitment of players who had been exposed to the programme for varying lengths of time and who had

been regular and irregular starters in the team); *catalytic authenticity* (the extent to which the study promoted action in participants; cf. feedback session delivered to management); and *tactical authenticity* (the extent to which the study facilitated the researcher's contribution to training participants in specific features of elite team culture change; cf. workshop described in Chapter 9).

With all players and specialist coach unconcerned about confidentiality, the likelihood of accurate interpretation was further optimised. Regarding the veracity of data provided by AK, NB and CEO, all three continually conveyed no concern about being named in the study (throughout data collection and member checking processes) or in the peer review publications which emanated from the data set; notably, these were also specifically approved by these individuals. Supporting my own belief in the accuracy of these individuals' perceptions, it is acknowledged that impression management is a mediating factor even in anonymous research and that the CEO's perception of team performance level (cf. Figure 6.2) does not portray programme success to the same extent as AK and NB, the specialist coach, and players. Additionally, the emergence of the same five higher order themes across all groups (including those whose anonymity has been protected) must be acknowledged.

Of course, in concluding it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Beyond issues of generalisability, data veracity may have been restricted to some extent by interactional effects such as poor recall, hindsight bias, and self-preservation bias; particularly as the identities of the club, management, and CEO were not concealed. Reflecting the retrospective nature of the investigation, not tracking the evolution of culture in real time also poses concerns over the accuracy of the perceived programme and the precise ebb and flow of power. Finally, the omission of additional external stakeholders (e.g., media) and triangulation with performance data analysis represent other notable

shortcomings. All of these features are addressed within the conclusions and recommendations provided in Chapter 10.

CHAPTER 7:
SHAPING ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXTS: THE UNDERPINNING MECHANISM
OF ELITE SPORT PERFORMANCE TEAM CULTURE CHANGE?

7.1. Introduction

Recognising that Chapters 4, 5, and 6 have offered insights on the chronology, nature, and power-share processes of elite sport performance team culture change, focus now shifts in Chapters 7 and 8 toward exploring *how* the models and approaches presented thus far were optimally delivered. Indeed, and as outlined in Chapter 2, generating understanding on the “how” of culture change is crucial if results are to be of optimal theoretical and applied value. It is also completely in accord with the pragmatic approach adopted throughout the thesis. In this particular chapter, attention is therefore directed from process to mechanism.

Indeed, beyond providing the basis for generating the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5, plus identifying the processes by which a to and fro of power was facilitated by the management of Leeds Carnegie in Chapter 6, the data collected for this thesis also revealed a range of devices which were used by management to aid change-targets’ acceptance of and adherence to new or refined values, beliefs, expectations, and practices. For instance, and as detailed in their respective chapters, all PMs and some PDs of higher profile sports discussed the benefits of working *through* the media. Additionally, data from most PDs also pointed to the significance of streamlining governance to manage the complexity of their environments and exert greater control over decision making processes and stakeholders’ contested agency (cf. Chapter 8); an approach which did not carry the same (if any tangible) relevance for PMs. However, one mechanism which fell out from the analyses conducted across Chapters 4 to 6 *did* appear to underpin culture change best practice across all environments and all levels of management addressed in the thesis; explicitly, the subtle shaping of environmental contexts. Consistent with the intention of this thesis to deliver a practical difference to all participants

under inquiry, this chapter therefore centres on explaining and exemplifying this unique and highly impactful mechanism¹⁸.

7.2. Shaping Environmental Contexts: Explaining the Mechanism

Reflecting the need for elite sport performance team management to embrace social complexity and a two-way stakeholder power-share *yet* deliver instant and enduring results (i.e., a controlled and predictable system), the establishment and regulation of optimal values, beliefs, expectations, and practices in performance departments was best achieved through the subtle engineering of environmental contexts. Indeed, beyond the overt identification (e.g., via team forums), refinement (e.g., via review processes), and reinforcement (e.g., via culture-consistent recruitment) of demanding cultural principles and standards, the saliency and significance of more covert, cunning, and discreet strategies was revealed.

Specifically, beyond facilitating a two-way power share and visibly negotiating and challenging decisions and actions of players and support staff (cf. Chapters 4, 5, and 6), the efficient and effective delivery of change was aided by managers' subtle creation of contexts in which change-targets (more so performers due to the support staff's usual co-role in programme implementation) would be more likely to "autonomously" select decisions and actions which continually optimised their abilities and, by virtue, team performance. Indeed, by shaping the contexts in which decisions were made rather than addressing decisions per se - and therefore minimising the potential for detrimental conflict and overly devolved power - this approach echoes Thaler and Sunstein's (2003) concept of *libertarian paternalism*; a method by which choices are contextualised in a way that increases the likelihood of individuals choosing those which are of optimal benefit to their well being (but not necessarily instantly rewarding). In the case of the management participants interviewed for this thesis, framing was not entirely focused on conferring optimal benefit to individuals as

¹⁸ To clarify, this mechanism was discovered from analyses of data which were considered but not used in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

such, but rather to the functioning and performance of the holistic department. The application of this mechanism across system, structural, physical, psychosocial, and operational levels is now exemplified.

7.3. Shaping Environmental Contexts: Exemplifying the Mechanism

7.3.1. Shaping Performance Systems

Primarily deployed by PDs due to their structural and/or geographical distance from lower echelon staff and performers, the usefulness of shaping the systems in which support staff and performers operated was revealed. For example, this approach could be seen in the conscious manipulation of the performance system's overall focus and orientation:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD2)

With this quote effectively highlighting how the manager modified the context in which staff and performers made decisions as opposed to directly addressing, challenging, or confronting these decisions, another PD pointed to the value of deploying a similar approach for the sub-systems of the performance department:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

Deployed as a means to subtly raise standards via rewarding those who were high performing and not rewarding (or even exposing) those who were not, shaping systems in this way was considered an effective means for establishing and sustaining an environment in which continual development and improvement was sought after by performers and support staff. Importantly, and reinforcing the extent to which elite team settings can be compromised by self-interests, another PD further described how particular care had to be taken in deciding how to precisely shape reward systems:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD1)

Indeed, similar sentiment was offered by one PM:

[REDACTED]

(F4)

7.3.2. Shaping Performance Structures

Further enabling efficient and enduring change, PMs and PDs also reported how they subtly shaped a team's structural environment to achieve desired outcomes. For instance, one PD reflected on their efforts to covertly raise performance standards by establishing various training hubs which generated internal competition forces:

[REDACTED]

(PD7)

Again, by using the covert manipulation of contexts as a means to bypass the challenging and often troublesome interactions of power, politics, and personal interests, the efficiency of the change process was significantly enhanced. Of further example, another PD described how a similar intention to draw athletes to a specific training site was supported by modifying the circumstances against which their decision to relocate from home would be made:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

Beyond PDs’ efforts to attract performers and support staff to specific locations and facilities, one PM described how training structures were engineered in a way which subtly reinforced their desired “high performance mindset”:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU1)

As such, rather than constantly negotiate decisions and actions, this quote clearly emphasises how “natural” pivotal moments (i.e., on-field success) were created, after which the players would likely further (or start to) commit themselves to the new manager’s program.

Shaping staff structures acted as another subtle change mechanism. Indeed, through creating a squad in which there was competition for every position, players’ decision making and behaviour was further engineered to match that required of a high performing athlete. One clear example of this strategy was discovered in the Leeds’ management team’s efforts to initiate a shift from a culture where players would often drink heavily after away matches:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Specialist Coach)

In short, building a squad in which playing ability was evenly balanced in all positions meant that maintaining a place in the side required consistent adherence to performance-optimising perceptions and behaviour. Similarly, one PM discussed how a focus on recruiting more top-salary performers was used to develop young players' commitment to professional practices without the need for constant management appeals:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

As well as raising performance standards through competition for places, this quote further highlights the significance of harnessing influential players' social power to shape individual perception and behaviour (a point which is described in further detail in 7.3.4.).

7.3.3. Shaping the Physical Environment

Due to its potential to shape and constrain social interaction, manipulating physical space was another valuable mechanism for optimising stakeholder perceptions and behaviour. Indeed, manipulation of physical contexts was often used as a symbolic marker of a new way of working; such as changes to the presentation of pitches at the team's training facility:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F1)

Again offering a means by which change could be enacted without the need for continually politically-sensitive interactions, the open plan environment installed at Leeds Carnegie's on-site training complex provided another example of how behaviour could be modified through shaping physical surroundings:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (Specialist Coach)

As conveyed in this quote, the amalgamation and transfer of information between staff was effectively optimised without reliance on negotiation or verbal persuasion (and the support staff's conceptualisation as a team in its own right also reinforced). Indeed, the importance of operating within culture-consistent physical contexts was also acknowledged by one PD:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

Of further example from the Leeds Carnegie case study, and regarding the performer-specific environment, during the highly demanding pre-season period, novel and varied off-site activities were used (e.g., boxing, judo) to maintain optimal application (coincidentally, and highlighting how shaping contexts could impact upon a number of areas simultaneously, such new activities also acted as a leveller across skill levels, enabling an emphasis on work ethic which was then employed to model behaviour). In similar vein, performance data were also put on public display:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (Specialist Coach)

Notably, one PM noted how engineered physical contexts were also used to legitimise the new manager's program by reinforcing the link between new behavioural standards (referred to in this instance as "[REDACTED]") with on-field success:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

7.3.4. Shaping the Psychosocial Environment

As shown in the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5, a major feature of shaping psychosocial contexts involved the proactive and political management of key external stakeholders; thereby protecting team culture from performance-irrelevant distractions and,

particularly in the case of the media, reinforcing new and/or refined standards. In terms of the performance department, identifying and/or recruiting culture-compatible players and support staff (i.e., those who aligned with the manager's ideals) and removing those opposed to or exposed by the new program was a key feature of psychosocial engineering. Indeed, in all reported cases, change was largely driven via the harnessing of social allies, role models, and cultural architects (Railo, 1986):

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

As suggested here, managers recognised that player belief, expectation, and behaviour could (more often than not) be shaped by what individuals considered the social norms; with these norms in turn shaped by those with greatest social power. Indeed, as well as modelling key behaviours (e.g., optimal training effort), certain individuals were explicitly recruited and/or utilised for their ability to shape and govern group perception and behaviour. For example, one PM used influential players to monitor and lead on many basic discipline matters (e.g., timely arrival at meetings) to minimise the threat of, and opportunities for direct challenge of team management:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F4)

The role and impact of management *through* senior players was further reinforced by another senior player interviewed for the Leeds Carnegie case study in Chapter 6:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Player 2)

Of further example from this case study investigation, and recalling the management team’s use of a pre-season forum to identify goals, aspirations, and approach for the coming season, situations were subtly engineered whereby influential performers could also make “public” contributions to the program and its direction:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (AK)

In short, selecting and structuring groups around senior players with an expertise in the topic under consideration facilitated the development of a shared and accepted message.

Recognising that the motivation and well-being of every player was invariably linked to whether or not they were in the team - and that group-wide acceptance of and adherence to new principles diminished as the number of unhappy players increased - another manager discussed the importance of optimising the experience of non-selected players:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F4)

As suggested here, optimising the perceptions of non-selected players (especially those with significant social power) meant that training and performance standards of the whole squad could be subtly enhanced (via the interactional effects of these individuals' sustained effort), valuable peer learning encouraged, and counterproductive and destructive actions minimised.

This point was echoed in the perceptions of another PM:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1)

As conveyed in Chapter 6, a focus on supporting *every* performer rather just those who were currently in the team/squad was a also particular success factor in the Leeds Carnegie change programme, with individuals’ adherence to performance-elevating behaviours facilitated by: placing immediate emphasis on non-selected players after a squad was announced; providing an understanding of the reasoning behind non-selection; creating and administering tailored development programmes; ensuring playing time in other competitions; and consistently acknowledging these players’ contribution (both internally and externally through the media).

PDs also discussed the importance of subtly shaping psychosocial contexts. As these figures did not hold the same capacity to recruit and replace performers, internal competition was driven through alternative means; such as tactful decisions on when and who to provide exposure and public reward:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

Rather than verbally negotiate and challenge staff and performer perceptions and behaviours, this particular approach saw management instead subtly shape these individuals expectations by publicly highlighting the exemplary standards of others who were competing for selection; thereby making such standards the new “norm” (which would have to met by others if they wanted to optimise their chances of making the team). This focus on manipulating adherence

to high performing principles was further reinforced by another PD who described covertly playing staff/performers off against each other:

[REDACTED]

(PD7)

Interestingly, a unique approach for publicly yet subtly exposing performers who were not adhering to high performing principles was described by one PM:

[REDACTED] (RL2)

A further mechanism in establishing and sustaining a high performing culture was the optimisation of performers' holistic life experience. For example, in the Leeds Carnegie case study, management arranged visits to local hospitals, young offenders' prisons, and coal pits to "ground" the players and promote reflection on the choices they made in the performance environment. Players' time away from the Club was also optimised wherever possible for the same purposes, reflecting a management agenda to ensure regular refreshment and regeneration of the players:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Player 6)

This focus on creating conditions which would then support performers' commitment to the high performing standards when in the team environment was also echoed by one PM:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F4)

A final interesting approach in psychosocial engineering was described by a PD who revealed how a tailored shared language was used to increase the likelihood of support staff and performers consistently engaging in behaviours which would lead to the attainment of peak performance and without the need for repeated overt appeals for change:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD7)

7.3.5. Shaping the Operational Environment

With high performing cultures portrayed as those in which individuals made day-to-day and moment-to-moment decisions which support the continued search for and attainment of peak performance (cf. Chapter 1), the relevance and impact of shaping the processes which support staff and performers engaged with on a daily and weekly basis was revealed by the participants of this thesis. For example, engineering training in a way which subtly facilitated and reinforced alignment with specific behavioural standards was considered important:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

Intriguingly, and pointing to the role and significance of dark side leadership skills (cf. Chapter 8), another manager also revealed how training content could also be used as a covert way to facilitate the removal of players who did not (or would not) fit with the manager's approach:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F2)

As such, rather than confront the choices of these influential yet resistant players (i.e., not to engage with the new manager's program), this manager instead altered the context in which these players operated and exposed their inability to match the standards of younger players and a new style of play; thereby allowing these players to make the "independent" (and less disruptive) choice to leave. Importantly, due to the power which these senior players carried, successful engagement with this agenda also required this manager to "[REDACTED]" when asked about such players by the media: "[REDACTED]" Interestingly, another PM described how those with particular potential to disrupt or derail the programme were subtly nullified through the use of peer (rather than management) review:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

Additionally, the same manager also noted how peer review processes were shaped in a way which would ensure the accuracy and therefore robustness of shared perceptions:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

Another notable covert mechanism in manipulating psychosocial contexts was the use of objective evidence to “persuasively” justify new methods and practices. Indeed, rather than basing action on subjective opinion alone, objective performance data was often subtly used to encourage (but not demand) players to consistently engage in optimal behaviours:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(AK)

Significantly, this view was corroborated by one of the Leeds players who noted that while some players detested training with heart rate monitors, this monitoring was nonetheless a

“ [REDACTED] ” (Player 2). Additionally, during the competitive season, technical and tactical proficiencies were governed by analysis of match statistics against individual and team KPIs. Deployed as part of a pragmatic and evidence-based approach to performance development, its worth in protecting against potential player detraction was highly valuable:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Player 2)

Finally, a PD also revealed how coach performance was subtly improved through exposing these individuals to novel environments (as well as overtly discussing their shortcomings):

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD2)

7.4. Discussion

While a range of devices were found across the conducted analyses in Chapters 4 to 6 (e.g., working through the media, streamlining governance, using critical “tipping points”), this chapter has described a unique and highly impactful mechanism which underpinned *all*

participant accounts of elite sport performance team culture change best practice. Explicitly, to circumvent the significant and incessant challenges of power, politics, and self-interest, managers focused on driving and sustaining change through subtly shaping the environments in which support staff and performers made performance-impacting decisions. As described above, this approach centred on the covert engineering of performance systems and structures alongside physical, psychosocial, and operational contexts. In this manner, and rather than constantly negotiate action and decisions (which could consume all of the manager’s time and energy), circumstances were created whereby support staff and performers would (a) make their own choices regarding the uptake of performance-optimising or –impairing behaviour, *but* (b) be more likely to consistently make choices which reflected the former and ultimately support enduring optimal performance.

Interestingly, a key principle in the application of many of these mechanisms was an appreciation of the impact of what change-targets perceived to be the “social norm”. Indeed, situations were regularly engineered which challenged individuals to reconsider what they viewed as standard or acceptable behaviour within the group. For example, take the views of one PM whose whole programme was based on harnessing the power of group consensus:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

Significantly, the use of mechanisms which prompted a reconfiguration of prior internalised values, beliefs, and standards through changing member perceptions on what was “normal” was also recognised as impactful by performers; particularly when paired with the influence of key cultural architects:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Player 2)

Providing a particularly effective metaphor for this process, PD7 described culture change in this light as a process of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. While the quotes presented above convey how PDs primarily used such mechanisms at a system and structural level and PMs at the psychosocial and operational level (reflecting the variations in their roles and distance from the “front line”), this approach of adjusting the perceived social norms was

evident across all managers' practices. In short, rather than engaging in action and discourse focused purely on generating agreement over what was *right*, optimal impact was also largely conferred by covertly engineering what was perceived to be *normal* (Zou et al., 2009).

CHAPTER 8

OPERATING THE MODELS OF ELITE SPORT PERFORMANCE TEAM CULTURE CHANGE: CRUCIAL LEADERSHIP STYLES AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS

8.1. Introduction

Extending on Chapter 7, the purpose of this chapter is to further illuminate *how* the models of elite sport performance team culture change are best operated. Specifically, focus centres on crucial leadership styles and management skills by which the frameworks developed in Chapters 4 and 5 were managed to enable a consistent search for and attainment of peak performance. Interestingly, with PMs and PDs asked to describe “any personal attributes and skills that [they] believed [*sic*] were important for carrying out the changes” in an open-ended question (cf. Appendix A), the responses to which were discussed in a largely prompt-free conversation, the extent to which interviewees provided a clear lack of data on current popular leadership approaches, for example transformational leadership (cf. Arthur, Hardy, & Woodman, 2012; Callow et al., 2009), was striking. As such, with information acquired on what managers viewed to be particularly important (rather than all) attributes and skills for culture change delivery, this chapter therefore describes the most crucial leadership styles (distributed leadership and dark side leadership) and management skills (micropolitics, complexity adapting behaviour, and context-specific expertise) which were implicated across all interviewee accounts. Similar to Chapter 7, themes are taken from the analyses of data which were considered but not used in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. These findings provide critical initial insights on how the frameworks developed by this thesis are best operated (i.e., Figures 4.1 and 5.1).

8.2. Leadership Styles

8.2.1. Distributed Leadership

Reflecting the extensive and demanding nature of managerial roles, all interviewees reported that culture optimisation could not be led and governed by the manager alone. In conjunction with processes to enhance support staff and performer ownership, these groups, or rather key members of these groups, were therefore permitted scope to actively manage aspects of the program:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F3)

Unsurprisingly due to the scale of the environment, establishing and using a distributed/team-based model of management was also particularly pertinent for PDs:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD7)

Importantly, as well as spreading the workload, such an approach for leading the performance department was also valuable for optimising the process and outcome of PD decision making:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD2)

As well as distributing leadership amongst support staff and thereby focusing on “[REDACTED]” (F4) rather than smaller issues, PMs also revealed the need for a similar approach with performers; encouraging those with greatest social power in particular:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F3)

8.2.2. Dark Side Leadership

8.2.2.1. Demonstrating and Retaining Ultimate Authority

Common across PD and PM perceptions, the use of dark side attributes (i.e., socially undesirable personality traits: Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005) was often a

contextually apt and highly effective approach for driving and sustaining change. Indeed, while the previous section described the importance of distributing leadership, one PM summarised that optimal culture change relied on “ [REDACTED] ” (F4); which was considered especially important with respect to the challenges which could arise from the necessary yet dangerous two-way power-share process (i.e., if power was *too* devolved):

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F4)

Notably, two PMs who largely withheld from such dark side activities in their first jobs reflected that acts of dominance over transformational behaviours (e.g., individual consideration or intellectual stimulation: Callow et al., 2009) would have notably enhanced their chances of success:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

As shown by a quote in Chapter 4 from a PM who fined a player for drinking the night before training, autocratic behaviour was often central to ensuring the robustness of new behavioural standards and, significantly, the manager’s ultimate control of the team environment:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F1)

In cases where such principles and rules were clearly abused, the danger of which was always present due to the high-ego, high-status nature of the playing squad, another manager (who's "[REDACTED]") revealed the need to engage in practices which would prevent public contests from triggering detrimental shifts in social functioning:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F4)

Highlighting the lengths to which some managers went to in order to ensure program control, another interviewee also reported spying on players outside of the performance department:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F2).

While normally delivered in a more discreet fashion due to the heightened complexity in top-management and support staff structures, demonstrating and retaining ultimate authority was also applied by PDs; for example, in streamlining governance:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

8.2.2.2. Performance-Focused Ruthlessness

Beyond the need to demonstrate and retain ultimate authority, possessing and using a performance-focused ruthlessness to protect the defining principles of the manager’s system was also found to be a crucial mode of leading and managing successful change:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD4)

As well as performers, interviewees also revealed the importance of, when required, adopting a similar approach with support staff; even if it was against their innate preferences:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD5)

Indeed, the need for such an approach was further echoed by another PD:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD3)

For PMs, the importance of possessing and using such behaviour was evidently reinforced by the pressure to deliver immediate and enduring results:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F2)

As the reader may have noted, this quote – on face value – appears to contradict the approach used by the management of Leeds Carnegie in which the motivation/well-being of all players was continually monitored and addressed, including at competitive matches (cf. Chapter 6). However, accounting for this apparent disparity, it is important to acknowledge the cultural differences between football, in which management typically prioritise the starting team, and rugby, in which management typically prioritise the squad. Additionally, detailed inspection of this quote also reveals that the manager was still focused on supporting those who were not selected for matches but to a lesser degree in the immediate lead-up to a competitive game.

Further reflecting the magnitude of the culture change task and the impracticality of micro-managing all group members' day-to-day perceptions and expectations, another PM reflected upon the need to take a more uncompromising approach in future jobs:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F1)

While the above quotes describe how performance-focused ruthlessness supported decision making with ongoing issues, arguably the most impactful application was found in its pairing with more prophetic judgments:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU2)

Clearly, this particular deployment of performance-focused ruthlessness was of course rarely an option for Olympic PDs with respect to their inability to simply recruit/replace performers.

8.3. Management Skills

8.3.1. Micropolitical Abilities

As culture change was a contested and resource-governed task (in that managers circumvented varied and conflicting personal interests while working under constraints such as funding), micropolitical abilities were key to optimal delivery. Defined as the use of formal and informal power to further or protect ones' interests (cf. Potrac & Jones, 2009, p. 255), framing interactions within a manipulated reality and undertaking significant face work was central for acquiring program-facilitating time, space, and support from key stakeholders. One PD provided a particularly effective example of such processes in action when attempting to create and establish a new athlete support package:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD1)

Highlighting the lengths which managers (in particularly PDs) had to go to in order to avoid the inevitable and often performance-irrelevant politics which surrounded (and plagued) the performance department, the ability to politick was therefore a key success factor. Indeed, another PD discussed how the power of significant others could also be used to help smooth the introduction and establishment of new, contextually controversial systems:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD3)

Significantly, as well as using the power of UK Sport to shape performer opinion, this quote also alludes to the importance of achieving “multiple hits” through the same political action;

specifically, in the example above, conveying overt alignment with UK Sport’s clear outcome orientation. Indeed, upward politicking was particularly crucial for role survival:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

Further emphasising commonalities across the PM and PD culture change approach, PMs’ engagement in activities which protected against the occurrence and impact of external “noise” in the performance department was also acknowledged:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL1)

Significantly, another PM reflected on how their political shortcomings may have contributed to their eventual sacking:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F3)

In similar vein, one PD recognised that disagreements with top management required a more tactful approach than the “up front” conversations which could (at times) be held with support staff and performers:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD5)

Due to the detrimental introspection and rumination which negative media coverage could prompt in both internal and external stakeholder groups, managers also noted the need for political sensitivity in interviews and press conferences; particularly in the early phases of a program when the previous incumbent had achieved notable success:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F1)

Internally, similar micropolitical activities were also evident in managers’ interactions with performers, particularly in “selling” new standards and ways of working:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RU1)

Additionally, particular caution had to be taken when appointing staff in support areas which had previously not existed (and therefore had not placed demands on performers):

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD5)

When directive leadership was required, another manager also noted the utility of pairing such action with overt recognition of others' opinions; particularly cultural architects:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (RL2)

However, and in conjunction with earlier descriptions of conscious manipulation, another interviewee noted the need to engage in dark side strategies when these cultural architects did not have the knowledge or skills to effectively contribute to decision making processes:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F2)

8.3.2. Complexity Adapting Behaviour

Inherent across the analyses of all studies in this thesis, optimal culture change was also dependent on complexity adapting behaviour (Ashmos, Duchon, & McDaniel, 2000); as manifested in the *action-guiding multi-stakeholder perceptions and actions* elements of the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5 (cf. arrowed lines directed to the PM/PD in Figures 4.1 and 5.1). Referring to the ability to embrace and adjust to environmental complexity, this attribute ensured that designed and deployed systems, structures, and processes were continually aligned with key stakeholder perceptions and the needs of the team:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD5)

Of further example, one PM also highlighted the need to continually monitor and modify the team's cultural architects to ensure similar sensitivity to system evolution:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL2)

Interestingly, interviewees revealed that complexity was also actively *injected* into systems:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD3)

Notably, injecting complexity was also deemed to be particularly effective at critical points in the change process; in the case of Leeds Carnegie, at a pre-season player forum after success had been achieved in the management's first season:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (AK)

8.3.3. *Context-Specific Expertise*

Beyond managerial competence (e.g., knowing *what* processes to introduce or refine), knowledge of *when* and *why* specific action should be taken and *how* optimal impact will be conferred lay at the heart of peak culture change practice. Indeed, the complexity inherent in elite sport environments dictated the need for such declarative proficiency which ensured that a short- and long-term focus on performance was sustained at all times:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD3)

Similarly, the situation-specific challenge generated by a number of individuals interacting in ever-evolving environmental contexts was also manifest in efforts to engage key stakeholders in more macro-level decisions aimed at facilitating the vision's actualisation:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

As such, the picture painted by the present sample was one whereby the dynamic, resource-demanding nature of managing an elite performance department relies on moment-to-moment expertise rather than the ability to deliver prescriptive, generic response patterns. Indeed, one PD noted how such a top-down approach is rarely viable:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD3)

This sensitivity to prevailing conditions yet balanced against well-established long-term plans was pivotal for selecting optimally effective responses in the face of continuously shifting dynamics. Indeed, an awareness of timing appeared particularly crucial; as exemplified in one PM's interaction with two influential players recruited by the manager but who had failed to win regular spots in his team:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F2)

Indeed, expertise in knowing when and when not to engage in certain activities and discourse was also supported by the PD sample:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (PD6)

Further conveying the importance of contextual sensitivity, another manager pointed to the significance of being able to test potential courses of action in real time against concurrent agendas and short, intermediate, and long-term goals:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (F4)

As noted above, effective moment-to-moment decision making was also shaped by an appreciation of *who* management action would impact in specific episodes; particularly significant when dealing with publicly broadcast media:

[REDACTED]

(RU1)

Notably the same interviewee noted that leadership styles were also selected on the basis of their relevance to the target group, the context of the situation, and locating the specific episode against other operating agendas:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RU1)

In terms of the systems, structures, and processes used to generate and sustain optimal performance, the ability of managers to critically evaluate the benefits of various approaches over others for their own specific setting was deemed crucial:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD1)

Indeed, the direct transfer of supposedly “gold standard” practices was rarely an option:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (RL1)

Accordingly, the critical message espoused by these two final quotes was that optimal culture change practice was dependent on delivering a programme which was contextually sensitive to the specific team and, of equal significance, which did not bow to any pressure to follow or even copy the approaches successfully used by other, normally high profile figures.

8.4. Discussion

Following discussion of a central underpinning mechanism of elite sport performance team culture change in Chapter 7, this chapter has illuminated some of the key leadership and management attributes required for best practice. More specifically, these were identified as distributed leadership, dark side leadership, micropolitical abilities, complexity adapting behaviour, and context-specific expertise. These findings are significant for two reasons: first, and conveying overlap with the principles of contingency theories of leadership (Seyranian, 2009; von Krogh, Nonaka, & Rechsteiner, 2012), they point to the importance of a manager possessing a *range* of leadership and management skills which are deployed to

meet the specific context and which support pre-determined short, medium, and long-term agendas. Second, they suggest that optimal culture change delivery is dependent on more than the possession of managerial or leadership “competence”.

Taking the first of these insights, the management interviewees of this thesis revealed that the leadership of culture change could not be adequately characterised through one type of behavioural repertoire. Indeed, while current “hot” approaches to leadership continue to receive notable exposure in academic literature, such as transformational leadership (Arthur et al., 2012), the findings from this thesis suggest that these frameworks are but a small part of picture. More specifically, driven by the extending nature of the PM/PD role and the dynamic and contested nature of elite sport performance settings, a spectrum of behavioural qualities and expertise-based skill sets were required. Indeed, as much PM and PD work centred on creating and sustaining conditions which could continuously propagate and renew desired high performing principles (cf. Chapter 7) as well as directly engaging with overt stakeholder interactions, there was a clear need for behaviours and skills which could thereby: establish various command centres (i.e., distributed leadership), act as decisive protection mechanisms (i.e., dark side leadership), embrace and respond to critical shifts in system functioning (i.e., complexity adapting behaviour), enable optimal political positioning (i.e., micropolitics), and, arguably most importantly, aid decision making processes which were locked into short, intermediate, and long term agendas (i.e., context-specific expertise).

Reflecting further on the use dark side attributes, particularly as deployment of such traits has sometimes been discouraged by organisational researchers, (e.g., Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012), utilising dark traits in the right place at the right time appears crucial for program success and role survival. Moreover, it seems that a level of Machiavellianism is also needed if a manager is to have peak impact when working through manipulated contexts (as per the mechanisms described in Chapter 7). As such, countering

organisational scholars prioritisation of positive employee emotions (e.g., Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012) alongside sport psychology’s historical focus on socially desirable leader traits and recent use of positive psychology as a lens for elite-level enquiry (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2013), these findings align with latest coaching and performance management trends which point to the pervasiveness of “dark arts” and suggest that elite sport performance team settings are not necessarily “nice” places (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Potrac & Jones, 2009). Agreement is therefore found with Fletcher and Arnold (2011, p. 237) who consider that viewing PDs only in terms of socially desirable qualities (e.g., openness, charisma) presents a “somewhat simplistic picture.” Of particular note, the possession of *performance-focused ruthlessness* - in which the emotional investment of stakeholders was sharply overlooked as part of a “no compromise” approach – was notable as it revealed that there was often a point where control and command decisions were required to maintain a strict focus on performance (even against a dependency for two-way interaction and power share processes). An insightful reflection by one PD exemplifies this point:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

Regarding the second key insight, the findings reported in this chapter further point to the limits of competency-based models in detailing the full managerial skill set required for delivering culture change in elite sport performance teams. For example, in their inquiry into the best practice of Olympic sport PDs, Fletcher and Arnold (2011, p.223) presented four areas of competence, namely: *operations*, *people*, *culture* and *vision*. Operations entailed “financial management, strategic competition and training planning, athlete selection for competition, and upholding rules and regulations”; people involved “staff management, lines of communication, and feedback mechanisms”; culture was represented by “establishing role awareness, and organisational and team atmosphere”; and, finally, vision, or “the team’s ultimate aspiration” (p. 228) incorporated “vision development, influences on the vision, and sharing the vision”. While providing much needed insight into the nuances of Olympic team management and the required dimensions of proficiency to succeed in the role, the results presented in this thesis suggest that factors such as history, tradition, systems, structures and interpersonal relationships will all interact to dictate/limit the options and directions available to the elite team managers in their efforts to deliver sustained peak performance (Bevir & Richards, 2009a; Cilliers, 2000). In short, what is required by elite sport performance team management is better described as adaptive expertise (Fazey, Fazey, & Fazey, 2005; Tozer, Fazey, & Fazey, 2007) than competence per se.

As such, the competency construct limits conceptual understanding of how exactly such competencies are differentially blended and applied; a feature which has recently become a focus in coaching (Abraham & Collins, 2011) and support science (Martindale & Collins, 2007). Indeed, as shown in this thesis, the relative importance and operationalisation of managerial competency varies substantially across contextually distinct phases and episodes of the applied culture change challenge. Significantly, participants also recognised the value of expertise over competence in the staff in which they employed:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

In short, and as the names suggest, possessing context-specific expertise demarcates those who are ‘experts’ from those who are ‘competent’ (cf. professional judgment and decision making in Abraham & Collins, 2011; Martindale & Collins, 2007). Indeed, the ability to make impactful and coherent decisions “on the go” was crucial if culture change practice was to deliver instant and enduring success.

CHAPTER 9:

IMPLICATIONS: THE THEORY, PRACTICE, AND TRAINING OF ELITE SPORT PERFORMANCE TEAM CULTURE CHANGE

9.1. Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, a work programme investigating the CM process of creating and sustaining high performing cultures in elite sport performance teams was proposed to carry three potentially significant implications. Specifically, these were bespoke knowledge development both *of* and *for* elite sport performance team culture change, alongside insight *through* which broader organisational theory and practice may be critically informed. Reflecting the specific objectives and planned outcomes of this thesis (cf. Chapter 1), this chapter primarily describes the theoretical implications relating to how culture change is driven and sustained in elite sport performance teams (the *of*) and the practical implications relating to how such change can be delivered in applied contexts (the *for*)¹⁹. While not an explicit intention of this thesis, discussion in these areas also offers an implicit contrast with and point of reference for organisational-based theory and practice. Finally, implications for training and developing culture change skills in elite sport performance team managers are reported with reference to a workshop delivered for the Rugby Football Union's Elite Coach Development programme.

9.2. Theoretical Implications: Initial Understanding Of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change

9.2.1. General Implications: Grounding Theory in Context

In their broadest sense, and aligning with the work of du Gay & Vikkelsø (2012), both of the grounded theory models developed in this thesis point toward the importance of culture change frameworks which are built on precise specification and detailed description. Indeed,

¹⁹ Reflecting the objectives of this thesis (cf. Chapter 1), presented theoretical and applied implications are those which are common to culture change in both professional and Olympic sport settings unless otherwise stated.

as a tangible applied act, the results depicted processes which were: (a) *context-dependent* (i.e., dependent on the initial and continued adherence of variously motivated internal and external stakeholders); (b) *context-shaped* (i.e., shaped by the needs and interests of variously motivated internal and external stakeholders); and (c) *context-specific* (i.e., specific to events of manager takeover at specific teams and against specific contexts).

Considering the context-dependency of these models, as culture change is focused on optimising pan-individual values, beliefs, expectations and practices (cf. Chapter 1), initial success was dependent on harnessing stakeholders' perceived need for change, or generating an expectation that change was necessary or beneficial. Indeed, as the task required *people* to change, cumulative and key stakeholder agreement (e.g., socially powerful performers) was critical for programme success and ensuring that the manager was not a lone voice. As such, if a dysfunctional or suboptimal culture is to be rapidly optimised, change is dependent upon support staff and performer acceptance that the current culture is either no longer functional for goal attainment, or that a new culture is more appealing and/or potentially rewarding. As reported in Chapters 4 and 5, the incoming manager's successful negotiation of this "one-shot" challenge was deemed crucial for facilitating long-term team success and personal role survival.

As a context-shaped task, culture change was found to be a highly contested process. Indeed, only "playing the power card" ("I say, you/we do") was considered to deliver, in the long term, little else but a performer backlash and underperformance of the team. Alongside the significance which internal and external stakeholders placed on performance outcomes, the complex, power-ridden, pressurised, and unpredictable settings in which managers operated meant that programmes could not be solely delivered by top-down methods. In this case, awareness of the likely reaction of stakeholders (and influential group members) to

events within the change process was critical for generating initial momentum and, of equal importance, maintaining the programme's direction and continued evolution.

With reference to context-specificity, the findings of this thesis also revealed that the establishment and propagation of new and/or refined values, beliefs, and practices occurred relative to the bespoke circumstances (both historical and current) of each team environment. In this fashion, previously successful culture change approaches (either those delivered by the manager or observed in others' programmes) offered no guarantee when applied in a different setting. Accordingly, with a host of contextual factors shaping and constraining the decisions and actions available to managers (at least if a programme was to remain optimally sensitive to, and exploitative of, internal and external stakeholder interests and perceptions), efficient and enduring solutions were those which were continually tailored to the unique team situation.

Many theoretical implications arise from these context-related characteristics of elite sport performance team culture change. First, the need to avoid abstraction in the treatment of sport-specific change theory appears critical. Indeed, while the two frameworks developed in this thesis share many general features – most specifically, the multi-directional, two-way interactions with internal *and* external stakeholders – these models are also somewhat distinct due to the bespoke challenges of professional and Olympic domains. Rather than developing universal but vague models (as may have occurred under a positivist approach), this thesis instead reinforces the significance of generating and applying theoretical perspectives which embrace the peculiarities of specific settings. Indeed, although the developed models in this thesis are abstract representations – to the extent that they are based on concepts which have been raised through data analyses procedures – my pragmatic philosophy ensured that these frameworks were taken to a level whereby findings were applicable to the specific participants of each individual study only (i.e., no attempt was made to amalgamate PM and

PD models). Contrasting with the intended universality of many organisational CM models, the results of this thesis therefore raise concerns over generic approaches to change, both in elite sport and business; in short, context *must* be prioritised.

9.2.2. Specific Implications: Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change Theory

9.2.2.1. The Chronology and Nature of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change

Beyond context-related implications and against the delimitations highlighted earlier, the findings of this thesis also offer – as was its key purpose – more specific insights into elite sport performance team culture change. First, the activity was depicted as a “two pronged” process involving an initial transition/integration phase (focused on creating conditions which promoted efficient and effective delivery), and management of a holistic culture optimisation system (focused on two-way interactions with variously-motivated internal/external stakeholders). In this case, best practice was dependent on quickly building foundations which encouraged stakeholder support of the manager and their programme. In this manner, optimal culture change was propelled by this finite opening process (or launch vehicle) which generated a critical level of momentum (via acquired time, space, and support) for establishing and then continually consolidating the new and/or refined values, beliefs, expectations, and practices. Contrasting with the propensity of organisational models to work towards a final step, the implication of these findings are that change (at least in elite sport performance teams) requires a simultaneous engagement with and blending of its critical processes (e.g., setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectation; facilitating optimal immediate results) rather than adhering to a bounded series of progressive steps culminating in a final act of reinforcement.

Regarding the main culture optimisation system, this component of both models was built on a number of key principles. Primarily, the non-linear and dynamic features of these frameworks are dominant and in stark contrast to planned organisational change models (cf.

By, 2005). Additionally, and contrasting with the leader-centric models in organisational and sport psychology research (cf. Chapter 2), the results also suggest that top-down perspectives are conceptually inappropriate for elite sport performance team culture change. Indeed, the 360-degree nature of these models suggest that scholars need to consider top-down, bottom-up *and* sideways influences in culture change research. Certainly, the two-way, power-share based interactions which underpinned both models (and enabled successful change at Leeds Carnegie) demonstrated that social complexity needs to be addressed in accounts of middle manager-led change. From this perspective, control was therefore not (evidently) centrally held but instead actively shared and (if conditions permitted) highly devolved, resulting in models where power flowed up, down, across, and outside the performance department. The implications for elite sport performance team culture change theory are therefore twofold: first, targets of change need to be considered as co-creators rather than passive recipients of change; second, performance department-level culture change is enacted against wider organisational and social contexts; not as an isolated vacuum.

Indeed, as conveyed in the PM and PD frameworks, protecting against and harnessing external stakeholder agency and power was a main tenet of best practice. In particular, these grounded theories pointed to the importance of delivering programmes which were sensitive to and exploitative of groups/individuals who could, at any time, trigger critical shifts in system functioning and performance (e.g., a Board or funding agency's withdrawal of resources; the media's agenda to sensationalise a critical/emotive event; new directions of external service providers). As such, conceptualising change as a process in which managers aimed to create a "cultural bubble" (and prevent this from popping!) encourages a theoretical focus on forces which are both internal and external to the elite sport organisation's performance department.

9.2.2.2. The Underpinning Mechanism of Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change

Reflecting the power- and political-based challenges of elite sport performance team culture change, the findings reported in Chapter 7 also carry notable theoretical implications. Specifically, as well as the overt negotiation of support staff and performer perceptions and actions, these findings point to the significant impact which more covert agendas can confer. Indeed, beyond visible stakeholder interaction (e.g., verbally engaging with groups; publicly identifying team values, standards, expectations, and practices), efficient and effective culture change was largely delivered “under the radar” by shaping decision making contexts rather than decisions themselves (a far less politically charged activity!). The critical and bespoke implication here is that while culture change is a concrete applied process, attention must be *equally* directed to the work which managers do “in the shadows” to facilitate stakeholder adherence to principles and standards which promote the continued search for and attainment of peak performance (i.e., the principles of a high performing culture)

9.2.2.3. Leading and Managing Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change

Finally, from a leadership and management perspective, a clear implication presented by this thesis is that culture change in elite sport performance teams requires a broad skill set. Notably, while carrying particular weight in sport psychology, the managers interviewed for this thesis provided comparatively little data on the relevance or importance of transformational leadership (Callow et al., 2009). Instead, these figures pointed to the primary significance of distributed, dark side, political, adaptive, and expertise-based leadership and management skills. Interestingly, the perceived importance of being able to engage in effective micropolitical action mirrors recent trends in coaching literature (cf. Potrac & Jones, 2009). Furthermore, the discovery that dark side attributes (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005) were especially useful also prompts a shift toward understanding a leadership style which has, to date, been treated in a primarily negative manner in academic or applied literature. In particular, the timely deployment of a

performance-focused ruthlessness implies that, even in highly devolved systems, command and control must ultimately be centrally held.

Due to its dynamic nature, culture change was also found to be a test of professional judgement and decision making (cf. Abraham & Collins, 2011; Martindale & Collins, 2007). For example, consider a PM faced with initial resistance from socially powerful performers: making the right choice between coaxing these performers toward adherence, selecting and supporting less experienced performers, or recruiting new performers who epitomise the new culture (or some permutation of all three) could significantly shape long-term achievement (or a quick-fire sacking). Similarly, if instant results are delivered, should the manager seek to raise expectations through the media in order to acquire more resources from the Board? Or downplay the occurrence to buffer the impact of inevitable future mixed or poor results? In both cases, a plethora of factors will (or at least should) influence the decision made (e.g., short-term needs, intermediate- and long-term goals, who the decision impacts, when optimal impact can be conferred, etc.). As the correctness of such decision-making is never instantly accessible, the scale of the culture change challenge is, therefore, escalated even further. In contrast to sport (e.g., Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Myers, Feltz, Maier, Wolfe & Reckase, 2006; Santos, Mesquita, Graça, & Rosado, 2010) and organisational work (Edgar & Lockwood, 2011; Davis, 2011; Gehring, 2007; Gillard & Price, 2005; Jokinen, 2005) which has focused on managerial competence, these results imply that theoretical perspectives are instead needed which play close attention to how these competencies are enacted through adaptive expertise (Fazey et al., 2005; Tozer et al., 2007) as choices and their outcomes will rarely, if ever, be black and white.

9.3. Applied Implications: Initial Understanding *For* Elite Sport Performance Team

Culture Change

9.3.1. Applied Implications for Elite Sport Performance Team Managers

As this thesis offers the first investigation of culture change in elite sport performance teams, a number of practical lessons are indicated for incoming managers. First, the research programme has reinforced claims that a change strategy must be consistently “plugged into” the internal and external contexts and structures which surround a specific social group and that this interdependency is at all times upheld (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004). As such, no two high performing cultures will look precisely the same (MacPherson & Howard, 2011). The leaders of change must therefore find a specific solution for the specific problem in their specific context and refrain from deviating for the sake of change alone. Within this decision making process, and akin to the work of Scott et al. (2003), careful consideration must also be made on the extent to which the team requires a change *in* culture (i.e., doing what’s already being done but better) or a change *of* culture (i.e., introducing new principles, standards, and practices); although both may often be required. Regardless, the first step is for the manager (plus consultant) to evaluate what changes are required.

Shifting from content to process, and reflecting their permeation in all aspects of both models, the need to adopt a 360-degree perspective, engage with all key internal and external stakeholders, and operate power- and political-based agendas is clear. Initially, this approach should be engaged in conjunction with the period of *initial evaluation, planning, set-up and impact*. More specifically, the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5 conveyed that incoming managers should initially seek to²⁰:

- Evaluate the conditions and contexts within and around the performance department;

²⁰ For the precise activities which constitute the initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact phase in professional and Olympic team environments, please return to the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

- Identity, recruit, and harness individuals who can to proactively and influentially support and disseminate a new program's principles and standards (e.g., social allies, cultural architects, discipline experts);
- Generate shared perceptions across multiple levels and multiple stakeholder groups;
- Facilitate “early wins” which accelerate stakeholder acceptance of, and/or adherence to, and/or support of the CM programme (e.g., delivering instant results, addressing most pressing needs).

Indeed, whatever the programme's precise objectives and implementation strategy, managers are advised to engage with these processes to generate the psychosocial momentum required for optimally efficient and effective change. However, when “solutions” are identified, this does not mean that they should be immediately and uncritically deployed; specifically, if the existing culture and social milieu is (perceived to be) unreceptive to required changes in the first instance, managers should probably *not* carry on regardless. While likely needing paired with political impression management (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2008; Wayne & Liden, 1995) and issue selling (Dutton et al., 2001) activities for top management and a focus on optimising short-term results (due to the inherent/often illogical assumption that change is always needed and beneficial: Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004), refraining from action focused on long-term development may therefore often be the best option; at least until conditions prevail in which the changes will be optimally accepted and embraced by the “front-line”.

Returning to the need for a 360-degree approach and operation of power and political based agendas, implications also arise in regards to the importance of managers focusing on supporting activities beyond the performance department. Certainly, to ensure that a change programme is sensitive to, and exploitative of, wider social contexts, it seems imperative that managers devote time, energy, and resources into proactively managing the perceptions and

expectations of key external stakeholders. Rather than an unnecessary distraction (albeit it often is perceived as such), “managing upwards” therefore needs to be considered as a core task of elite sport performance team management. As described within this thesis, such activity is crucial for: (a) ensuring that programmes are at all times plugged into the perceptions, expectations, and opinions of those with ultimate power over organisational strategy and resource allocation; (b) buying the time, space, and support required to deliver innovative changes focused on long-term development; and (c) minimising the impact of inevitable “noise” from top-management politics on the performance department. Indeed, failing to *continually* engage in such action was identified by the participants of this thesis as a fundamental CM oversight. Additionally, regularly managing the perceptions and expectations of other key external stakeholder groups on which the programme is dependent on and/or shaped by (e.g., external partners, the media) is further advised. Similar to the interactions with top-management structures, such a focus is valuable for establishing and/or sustaining a critical level of coherence across the agendas of all groups whose agency could trigger potentially major shifts in the functioning/performance of the performance department. Furthermore, proposed benefits also include key protection from performance-irrelevant pressures and distractions (e.g., negative media coverage) and the opportunity to subtly reinforce the evolving team culture through “flanking attacks” (i.e., sending indirect messages to specific targets via external stakeholders). Indeed, reflecting the connectedness of all external stakeholders to the performance department, using these groups to “naturally” spread ideas through their inevitable social interactions appears highly valuable in that it provides managers with an opportunity to simultaneously manage and/or modify the perceptions and expectations of a range of stakeholders. In particular, and grounded in the data used in this thesis, working *through* the media is encouraged:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Leeds Carnegie Player 2)

Accordingly, acting through internal (e.g., newsletters, blogs) and (where available) external outlets (e.g., websites, written press, radio, television) is strongly advised for reinforcing the social construction and regulation of team values and principles. Indeed, this advice mirrors developments in organisational literature whereby researchers have begun to explore how organisations can *actively* shape their media portrayal (Zavyalova et al., 2012).

Driven by the identified two-way relationship between managers and stakeholders, a focus on actively promoting a to and fro of power is also encouraged. Indeed, reflecting the varied and often conflicting motivations and interests within and across stakeholder groups, best practice is proposed to involve an approach in which power is shared across internal and external environments. In this manner, elite sport performance team managers are therefore advised to primarily work from a position of negotiation rather than imposition, or at least *be seen* to work from this position (cf. micropolitical implications below). As such, engaging in open dialogue with stakeholders and proactively deploying formal and informal systems and processes by which individual/group interests can be channelled is recommended. Certainly, whether or not these opinions are actually acted upon, *not* providing chances for stakeholders to “have their say” has been identified as another basic CM error. Accommodating such two-way relationships thereby allows for unavoidable conflict and challenge to be coherently and consistently managed and, critically, a means by which the inevitable “behind the back” and “whispered” conversations which prevail in elite sports teams can be minimised or reframed.

Due to the broad and demanding nature of the elite sport performance team manager role, particularly in the need to constantly address multi-stakeholder perceptions, one of the most fascinating applied implications from this thesis centres upon optimising performer and

support staff decision making via the subtle shaping of environmental contexts. Recognising the anxiety-elevating nature of management turnover, the multiple and varied motivations in elite sports teams, and the necessary power share between managers and their support staff and performers, instant and enduring success is proposed to be best achieved by manipulating contexts in a way which “naturally” promotes, *but does not enforce*, the consistent uptake of performance-optimising behaviours. Built on the assumption that performance departments continually construct, proliferate, and reconstruct team-level values, beliefs, expectations, and practices, the value of such engineering lies in its ability to covertly shape “group”-generated and -governed beliefs, expectations and practices. Significantly, beyond working to minimise the extent to which managers must attend to two-way power share processes (due to lowering levels of disparity within and across group perceptions), this mechanism also acts to minimise the need to deploy top-down imposition; meaning that, when required, autocratic behaviours can deliver a more significant impact in protecting fundamental cultural principles.

Indeed, the ability to draw upon dark side attributes (cf. Hogan & Hogan, 2001) has been found in this thesis to be vital in driving optimally effective change. While clearly not desirable as a habitual pattern (cf. Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), working to demonstrate and retain ultimate control and applying a performance-focused ruthlessness *in the right place at the right time* is promoted. Providing further reinforcement of the practical-level truths found in this study (Giacobbi et al., 2005), this implication also resonates with perceptions of highly successful managers; for example, Sir Alex Ferguson (manager of Manchester United FC for 26 years) has acknowledged that “you can’t ever lose control – not when you are dealing with thirty top professionals who are all millionaires If anyone steps out of my control, that’s them dead” (Elberse & Dye, 2012). As well as distributing leadership to trusted “lieutenants” or cultural architects (another means of retaining central control, albeit discretely, by working through these individuals) managers are also strongly advised to engage in the micropolitics

of change. Acknowledging the outcome-obsessed climate of contemporary professional and Olympic sport settings, such activities appear fundamental for protecting both personal and programme credibility.

9.3.2. Applied Implications for Elite Sport Organisations' Top Management Structures

In association with the applied implications for elite sport performance managers, this thesis also provides some important recommendations for the top management structures in elite performance sport (i.e., Boards of Directors, UK Sport, BOA). First, as optimal benefits are conferred when performance team cultures are plugged into, sensitive to, and exploitative of surrounding organisational and social contexts, it is vital that managers are appointed who fit with the history, traditions, strategy, and goals of the organisation. Considerations should therefore be made *beyond* the manager's level of previous success; such as their professional philosophies and personal values. Of particular pertinence for professional sport settings, in which managerial abilities are often inappropriately conflated with prior abilities as a performer (cf. Kelly, 2008), top management structures should also be wary when considering potential appointments who have no formal management training or experience. While these figures may possess many of the competencies required of a team manager (e.g., an understanding of technical and tactical performance factors, the ability to effectively engage with the media), the results in this thesis show that optimal culture change delivery heavily relies on adaptive expertise (i.e., the ability to make moment-to-moment decisions which are coherent with short, intermediate, and long term agendas). Additionally, the need to appoint managers who can embrace and adapt to shifting dynamics and contexts also seems to be vital for optimising the likelihood that programmes will deliver instant and enduring high performance.

Reflecting the critical nature of the initial culture change transition/integration phase, Boards of Directors are also advised to consider how optimal time, space, and support can be

provided to the manager, particularly if the appointment itself does not naturally generate the necessary psychosocial momentum via which new or refined values, standards, and practices can be established. For example, top management could undertake greater engagement with the media to send messages to the support staff, performers, and fans/public to share the load in instantly setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perspectives *and* to present a unified front (rather than letting the manager publicly “go it alone” and waiting to see how events unfold; indeed, it is somewhat surprising and counterintuitive that those with ultimate responsibility for the organisation’s performance are predominantly most vocal when a CM programme is perceived to be struggling). A further and linked implication is the need for top management structures to themselves provide time, space, and support to the new manager. Indeed, top management are encouraged to carefully consider their long-term strategies and its level of coherence with their short-term decision making over the new manager’s programme. The results of this thesis have shown the significant and often negative impact which top-down pressures to conform (i.e., to the best practice of others) and distractions at the strategic and political levels of organisational management have on PM and PD efforts to optimise sport performance. Notably, Sam (2012) has recently reflected on the constraints placed on sporting organisations by outcome-oriented government funding structures to copy best practice rather than develop innovative approaches. Additionally, with the management participants in this thesis reporting that high performing cultures can take many years to establish, the wisdom in quickly sacking a manager in the face of mixed initial results is questionable; particularly if the manager is “on message” with wider organisational strategy, performance (*not* necessarily outcome) trends suggest that progress is being made *against the big picture*, systems and processes are being applied and developed which enable consistent and enduring high performance, and the perceptions of key stakeholders convey belief in the likelihood of success being achieved.

9.3.3. Applied Implications for Sport Psychologists

To support sport psychologists in their provision of culture change-based services for managers of elite sport performance teams (and potentially advice for sport organisation's top management: Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), a number of practical implications are identified. As practitioners will be employed to support delivery of the implications described for elite sport performance team managers (cf. section 9.3.1.), these therefore also apply to sport psychologists (i.e., those are the processes, mechanisms, leadership styles, and management skills on which practitioners should primarily focus their advice). Accordingly, this section therefore considers finer aspects of service provision.

Reflecting the nature of the task and results of this thesis, applied sport psychologists should primarily support elite sport performance team managers' awareness of and expertise in handling the 360-degree social enactment of culture change. Specifically, as well as aiding managers' undertaking of the principles presented within the *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact* phase and engagement in two-way interactions with the internal and external stakeholders involved in the change process, practitioners should also help clients to identify means by which a programme (and the manager) can be protected from external stakeholder challenge. Indeed, sport psychologists are advised to work with the manager on two agendas: the first, providing advice on the processes, mechanisms, and leadership styles/management skills by which high performing cultures may be created and sustained (as detailed above); the second, providing advice on processes, mechanisms, and leadership styles/management skills by which role survival can be optimised (in effect, helping to buy time to make the changes).

In this manner, and as the aim is to create high performing cultures and not just high performing managers, practitioners should consider the extent to which they focus on providing services and resources focused on optimising the manager's leadership behaviours.

Indeed, due to the mediating role of results on performer perception (Callow et al., 2009) and the relative stability of personality traits (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), it seems ill-advised to place such intervention at heart of practice. Instead, optimal effectiveness is proposed to arrive from a focus on how the manager can promote members' generation and regulation of compatible beliefs and expectations (though the two agendas described above).

For meeting this objective, the culture change services of sport psychologists will primarily work through decision making support. Indeed, as highlighted throughout this thesis and particularly in Chapter 8, culture change is largely a test of managers' professional judgement and decision making around some key guiding principles rather than the ability to map out and then rigidly follow a series of steps. As such, the impact of sport psychologists will likely be optimised through their awareness and understanding of the factors which underpin successful culture change and their ability to support decision making processes. In particular, best practice is proposed to arise from assisting the manager in making choices which are carefully considered against:

- The 360-degree enactment of culture change and full range of stakeholders implicated in a current and/or future specific moment or phase of the programme;
- The connectedness within and across internal and external stakeholder groups (i.e., sending messages/delivering flanking attacks to multiple targets simultaneously);
- The power and agency of internal and external individuals/groups (i.e., micropolitical action);
- The programme's short, intermediate, and long term aims and plans (i.e., to ensure nested, coherent, and consistent decision making and action);
- Any developments which require these short, intermediate, and long term aims and plans to be adjusted; and
- The overt and covert construction of cultural values, standards, and practices.

As such, helping managers to assess the declarative underpinnings of various options is forwarded as a keystone of optimal support. As an example, ahead of a planned request to obtain additional funding for sport science support, the sport psychologist could help the manager to identify means by which relevant powerbrokers can be alerted to this matter and its implications before it is explicitly discussed in a Board meeting. Regarding the media, equipping managers with pre-planned responses to the inevitable interrogation of their program may also be vital. If faced with initial mixed/poor results, helping to divert or deflect the media agenda (and the focus of top-management, support staff, and performers) toward external, unstable, and temporary causes may be vital in keeping a fledgling program on track (Weiner, 1985). Importantly, such decision making support is also grounded in the data collected for this thesis:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (PD4)

Following this point, it is recommended that, unlike the traditional approach in business to contract out CM experts and change agents (Sorge & van Witteloostuijn, 2004), the sport psychologist operates as a consultant and decision making tool rather than visible deliverer of any formal systems, structures, or processes in the team setting. Indeed, the importance of the manager delivering the programme (as per the need to demonstrate and retain ultimate authority: cf. Chapter 8) was reinforced by another participant of this thesis:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (F2)

Finally, and if comprehensive support is to be provided, sport psychologists also need to become familiar with the ways in which the external stakeholders/organisations implicated in culture change delivery operate. In this respect, awareness of the organisational structure of the sport, the role and function of external partners or funding agencies (such as UK Sport), and – particularly when working in professional sport environments – the nature of the media’s involvement are crucial. Indeed, media savvy and contact details of a good PR advisor are essential features of the culture change consultant’s armoury. At the very least, practitioners must be able to recognise when such support is needed, and act to encourage the manager to seek help before all are sacked!

9.4. Implications for Management Training: A Workshop-Based Resource

To further meet the final objective of this thesis (cf. Chapter 1), the aforementioned implications were recently packaged and deployed in a workshop-based training resource for current and aspirant team managers on the Rugby Football Union’s Elite Coach Development programme. Guided by the implications for applied sport psychologists, it was decided that a one-day workshop format would provide the most effective vehicle for intervention. More specifically, by adopting this approach the opportunity to present the theoretical framework on which the applied implications were based and then allow participants to put lessons into action (rather than a lecture or presentation) was deemed important for enhancing attendees’ applied knowledge and abilities (as per my pragmatic research philosophy). The workshop programme is outline presented in Appendix C.

As detailed in Appendix C, the training event opened with an introduction to the culture change construct and the professional sport-specific model as developed in Chapter 4. Employed to familiarise participants with the theory on which the training was to be based, this opening presentation provided a definition of culture change, a concise summary of its practical relevance and importance, and then “built” the main culture optimisation system (as per Figure 4.1); the latter involving a process of progressively identifying: (a) the internal and external stakeholders implicated in culture change; (b) the dynamic and contested agency of these stakeholders and the need for a two-way interaction and power-share approach; (c) the role of context in governing social interactions and managerial decision making and action; and (d) the unique function of the media in terms of their ability to interact with *all* implicated stakeholder groups. After presentation of this background information, three areas for action were identified on which the rest of the workshop was focused; more specifically: off-field multi-directional management, on-field decision making, and managing the media.

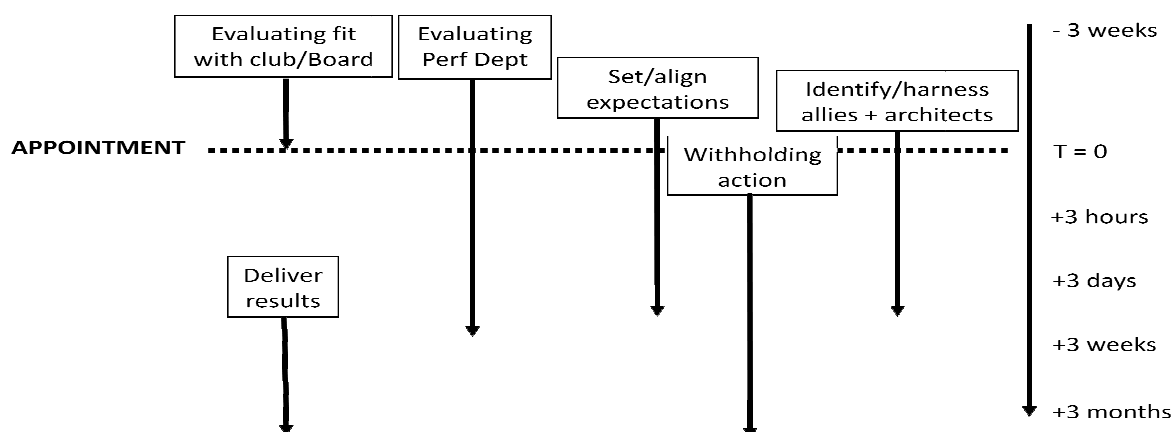
As this resource was delivered in one day, the choice to focus on these specific areas was also shaped by the practicalities of the workshop itself. Channelling attention onto these constituent blocks was therefore considered against perceptions of the “gatekeeper” through which the event was organised in terms of their relevance and importance for the participants (thereby ensuring that the workshop, as well as the implications it delivered, was grounded in the practical concerns of the target population). Accordingly, the block focused on off-field multi-directional management was delivered by myself and focused on the implications from this thesis with the on-field decision making and media blocks representing areas of specialist expertise which were delivered by area experts (the former by my supervisor, Professor Dave Collins, and the latter by Richard Warburton, Chief Press Officer for the UK Government’s Home Affairs Department and former Chief Performance Press Officer for UK Athletics). More explicitly, shaping on-field decision making was included to meet attendees’ needs for

guidance on approaches which could deliver sustainable cultural and performance change (as many were “hands on” coaches) and managing the media included as it was a particularly critical mechanism of successful change in professional sport environments (cf. Chapter 4). Additionally, and recognising the variability across professional rugby teams in terms of their media profile and exposure, the media block also acted a general metaphor for *alternative means* of sending messages (e.g., through club websites, blogs, Twitter).

In delivering my own block, implications were delivered through a focus on three key applied implications from this thesis: specifically, the initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact phase; the 360-degree, multi-directional enactment of culture change; and the dark side of system leadership. In this manner, key messages were delivered across the process, mechanisms, and leadership of culture change best practice. Presenting the themes of the initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact as a “set-up checklist” for an optimal culture change programme, a schematic representation of this checklist “in action” was presented (based on collected and analysed data in Chapter 4) to reaffirm its status as a contextually-specific *process*. This schematic is presented in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1.

Schematic of the Enactment of the Initial Evaluation, Planning, Set-up, and Impact Phase of Professional Sport Performance Team Culture Change.



Using this schematic as a tool by which to discuss managerial decision making and action in opening culture change phases, particular stress was placed on the point that optimal programmes were initiated weeks before (rather than at the time of) appointment. As such, discussion was facilitated on the activities and messages which could be deployed to optimise the critical integration/transition phase (as underpinned by the 360-degree, multi-directional grounded theory framework). To provide participants with exemplars of best practice, short videos were provided showing such activities and messages in action (principally *setting and aligning multi-stakeholder perceptions and expectations* and *identifying and harnessing social allies and cultural architects*), as delivered by current high profile international/non-UK based club rugby managers and UK-based club football managers (see later comments on rationale behind not using English club rugby managers). Following the illumination of this vital opening programme phase, participants were then provided with exemplar quotes from Chapter 4 to describe the apparent underpinning mechanism of elite sport performance team culture change (i.e., the subtle engineering of environmental contexts) and the usefulness of *carefully deployed dark side leadership* (i.e., *demonstrating and retaining ultimate authority*²¹ and *performance-focused ruthlessness*). As such, this presentation therefore provided participants with a practical-level awareness of the importance of: (a) adopting a 360-degree perspective; (b) actively shaping the conditions in which change is delivered (rather than responding to them); (c) considering and deploying layered messages and flanking attacks (i.e., working through multiple stakeholder groups); (d) considering how change can be facilitated through covert as well as overt agendas (i.e., shaping environmental contexts); (e) demonstrating and retaining ultimate control over the performance department; and, underpinning all of the above, (f) an appreciation of the relative timing and consequences of

²¹ Please note that some themes derived from the analysis in Chapter 4 were rephrased for the workshop to optimise understanding and rapport through attaching such constructs to fit participants' common language.

moment-to-moment decisions against short, intermediate, and long terms intentions and plans.

To marry these learning outcomes and provide participants with further understanding on how these principles could be combined, the second section of this block explored the CM programme of a recently appointed football manager through his engagement with the media (specifically, that being undertaken by Harry Redknapp at English Premiership football team Queens Park Rangers). In support of this video footage, participants were also provided with a document which detailed the (hypothesised) nested planning on which this manager's actions and delivered messages were apparently based. This document is provided in Appendix C. To consolidate the learning outcomes delivered from the first section of this block, participants were encouraged to reflect on the declarative underpinnings of the manager's action: i.e., *what* the manager was doing, *who* messages were for, and *why* he was doing it, *why* for them, and *why* at that particular moment in the change programme. Once participants had rotated around all three topic areas (i.e., off-field multidirectional management, on-field decision making, managing the media), the event concluded with a hypothetical training scenario. This exercise is explained in full in Appendix C and required participants to put into action the major learning points of the three training blocks.

As a first culture change resource for elite sport performance team manager training, some important implications for future service provision are provided. First, the use of case-study based training appears critical; in this way, the real life complexities and challenges of culture change are highlighted as well as the context-related features of programme delivery. As such, training resources should continue to use concepts derived from this thesis within contextually-specific discussions and exercises. Additionally, and regardless of the extent to which clubs receive mass media attention, the utility of including a media element to training is supported by its ability to also direct attention to alternative forms of sending messages to

target stakeholders. Furthermore, it is advised that future workshops also consider structuring content around examples from environments which participants are less familiar. In this way, facilitators can direct the participants to the declarative underpinnings of managers' decision making and action without the influence of mediating factors (e.g., participants knowing the manager, inter-participant competition). Finally, opportunities to integrate cultural change and media management principles *alongside* an on-field focus on decision making/behaviour change was also encouraged as this provides a crucial thread between these features of team management and the area on which elite sport ultimately depends: competitive results.

9.5. Evaluating the Quality and Impact of the Implications

Recalling the intention of this thesis to develop valuable applied knowledge under the pragmatic research philosophy (cf. Chapter 3), the final section of this chapter considers the extent to which the findings and implications have achieved a level of community agreement and therefore status as provisional practical-level truths (i.e., those which are functional for the context in which research was engaged: Giacobbi et al., 2005). Reflecting their relevance to the topic, this community includes elite sport performance team managers, sport psychology academics and consultants, and organisational CM academics and consultants.

First, dialogue on the findings and implications of this thesis has been facilitated in the organisational CM, sport psychology, and sport coaching communities via the acceptance and publication of five articles in peer-reviewed journals plus two co-authored book chapters across all of these disciplines (see Appendix B). In particular, the *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching* was targeted for publication of a paper based on the Leeds Carnegie case study as this outlet publishes its lead articles (of which this case study will be) alongside critical open reviews from a number of academic and applied subject area specialists. As such, through this process, a notable level of community agreement has been evidenced and, of equal importance, areas in which this initial and provisional knowledge can

be extended and refined to optimise both research endeavours and applied practice. Of further note, it is significant that I have also received a number of spontaneous emails from both organisational and sport psychology consultants who have offered highly positive feedback on the content and implications of these publications, provided insights into their own research and applied work in high performance businesses and sport organisations, and inquired about opportunities for potential future collaboration.

As noted in Chapter 3, further community-based dialogue has been facilitated through the acceptance and delivery of three oral presentations at national and regional conferences of the British Psychology Society's Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology (see Appendix B). As well as delivering the findings and implications of the studies described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, active efforts have also been made to engage with, and source feedback from, the sport psychologists who have observed these presentations. These individuals have provided positive feedback on both the theoretical and applied value of the culture change construct and my findings. Notably, I have also received a number of follow-up emails after these presentations from individuals to share their perceptions and experiences as related to the findings and implications which I presented at these events. As noted in Chapter 3, one of these presentations also led to a request from the editor of the Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology's consultancy-oriented publication (the *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*) for an invited submission.

Significantly, the relevance and importance of the products of the work programme undertaken for this thesis has also been reinforced through media coverage. Specifically, a leading journalist for the US-based Boston Globe approached me to discuss the paper which was published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* and the findings from my linked research activities. While not a member of the sport psychology or organisational CM community, the consequent coverage provided by the journalist in this outlet (cf. Appendix

B) is a notable marker of the general “stickiness” of the culture change construct and the findings from my work to date (i.e., a construct and findings which are understood, remembered, and elicit changes to opinion, behaviour, or values: Heath & Heath, 2010).

Finally, although arguably most significantly with respect to the adopted pragmatic research perspective, initial feedback from current and aspirant elite sport performance team managers provides a critical marker of research quality. As well as acquired responses to and insights on the models developed in Chapters 4 and 5 from highly experienced managers (cf. data analysis sections), the perceptions of the participants of the workshop provide a valuable gauge on the usefulness of the findings and implications of this thesis. Notably, through the Rugby Football Union’s own independent evaluation process, 100% of the 20 attendees considered the workshop to be relevant to their current and/or future practice and 90% considered it to apply well to their current/future role. Beyond these encouraging statistics, further markers of quality and impact were found in attendees’ short qualitative feedback notes on the event’s relevance, applicability, and impact on personal reflection (all critical markers of quality under the pragmatic philosophy: Buman et al., 2005; Giacobbi et al., 2005). For example, one participant highlighted the value of being exposed to culture change “
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]” Additionally, one invited participant from a professional football club also provided valuable feedback with regards to a similar workshop’s potential usefulness for football managers, noting that it was “
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]” As noted in Chapter 3, the action research project of which this workshop was the first step will provide the opportunity to modify and refine the initial and fallible knowledge developed by this thesis (Bryant, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005).

CHAPTER 10:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1. Introduction

While the management of change has received major attention in business literature, there is a lack of theoretical and applied knowledge on this process as delivered in elite sports team organisations; especially within the department responsible for these organisations' core product: on-field performance. Given the extreme pressures placed on the managers of elite sport performance teams to deliver instant and enduring success, as evidenced by the regular and often rapid dismissals of such individuals (e.g., League Managers Association, 2010), the focus of this thesis was on the development of bespoke understanding on how managers can successfully establish and sustain high performing cultures which are robust to the challenges of elite sport settings and facilitate the continued pursuit and attainment of peak performance:

To meet this overall purpose, the objectives of this thesis were sevenfold:

1. To explore perceptions of culture change across pertinent performance management levels in a British elite sport context (specifically professional and Olympic sport environments), develop models of best practice, and evaluate their congruence with/divergence from current business-based knowledge.
2. To explore the generality of culture change 'best practice' across British professional and Olympic sport performance team environments.
3. To analyse and explain successful elite sport performance team culture change through multiple stakeholder perspectives.
4. To examine the power of an imported theoretical lens for explaining culture change in an elite sport performance team.
5. To identify common mechanisms of elite sport performance team culture change.

6. To identify common leadership/management skills for delivering elite sport performance team culture change.
7. To prescribe effective guidance for management seeking to efficiently establish and sustain high performing cultures in their team environments.

As described in Chapter 2, guidance on how to meet these objectives was significantly constrained by the methodological limitations of organisational CM literature, the theoretical ambivalence of organisational CM research, the unique power-based features of elite sport performance teams and the lack of parallel constructs in applied sport psychology. As such, with concern over the appropriateness of directly transferring theory, concepts, and practices from organisational literature and sport psychology offering similarly few implications for guiding culture change study, it was identified that the thesis needed to employ a philosophy (pragmatism) and strategies (grounded theory methodology/case study methodology) which allowed for the generation of contextually-specific, theoretically appropriate, and practically meaningful knowledge. The findings obtained from this approach are now summarised.

10.2. Summary of Findings

The study described in Chapter 4 employed grounded theory methodology to develop the first model of manager-led culture change best practice in professional sport performance teams (Objective 1). Using qualitative interviews as the data collection method, perceptions were acquired from eight managers with varied experiences of working at the highest levels of UK professional football, rugby union, and rugby league (i.e., early sackings versus long-term successes versus a mix of sackings and successes). Exploring the *process* of optimal change, as supported by participants' perceptions of previously successful approaches, views on best practice, and reflections on key mistakes/lessons, the study consequently developed a framework which illuminated the chronology and nature of optimal culture change delivery in professional sport performance teams. Specifically, this model was made up of two co-

initiated and co-dependent elements: the first, a finite phase of *initial evaluation, planning, and impact* (which laid the foundations/provided the catalyst for efficient and enduring change); and the second, an enduring *holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimisation system*. This model was rooted to the power and contested agency of internal (i.e., support staff and performers) and external (i.e., the Board, fans, media, other significant influences) stakeholders, with successful operation dependent on two-way interaction and power-share relationships from which the manager constantly acquired, negotiated, and configured multi-group interests. In this manner, the “cultural bubble” which encapsulated the performance department was at all times sensitive to, and exploitative of, wider organisational and social contexts. Notably, beyond working to optimise the media’s perception of the manager, the model also pointed to the significance of individuals working *through* this group as a key mechanism of change in this environment. While some of these findings resonated with the organisational change literature, the incorporation of power- and political-based dynamics in a non-linear and boundless model provided a stark contrast to the previously leader-centric, sequential prescriptions from this field (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003; Price & Chahal, 2006). At this stage, however, it was unknown to what extent this specific model and its defining components were common to other UK-based elite sport performance environments; specifically, Olympic sport performance teams.

Accordingly, to address this limitation, Chapter 5 reported an investigation of culture change best practice as perceived by the PDs of Olympic sport performance teams. Focused on an environment in which these management figures deliver programmes on a larger scale (operationally and/or geographically), the study utilised the exact same methodology as that deployed for Chapter 4 with the final participant group again being drawn from a variety of backgrounds (i.e., individual sports, team sports, individual-plus-team sports) and providing a sample which had experienced variable success (short to long term role survival). Further

based on these individuals' perceptions of successfully delivered approaches, views on best practice, and reflections on key mistakes/lessons, a domain-specific model was consequently developed which depicted the chronology and nature of optimal culture change practice in this performance setting. Mirroring the findings from Chapter 4, this framework was also represented as a general two-pronged process which was underpinned by two fundamental components (i.e., *initial evaluation, planning, set-up, and impact; management of a holistic, integrated, and dynamic culture optimisation system*). Moreover, this model was sensitive to, and exploitative of, wider organisational and social contexts via similar two-way interaction and power share relationships with key internal (i.e., upper echelon/lower echelon support staff, performers) and external (i.e., the governing body Board, UK Sport, BOA, external partners media, other significant influences) stakeholders; again portraying a process aimed at attaining, negotiating, and configuring the often challenging and conflicting perceptions of these powerful groups. In this manner, this study reinforced the similarities and distinctions between elite sport performance team culture change and organisational CM frameworks as highlighted in Chapter 4. Notably, while media scrutiny was markedly less for most (but not all) PDs, which therefore required less attention, resources, and effort than the case of PMs, management and *use of* internal (e.g., websites, newsletters, blogs) and external (e.g., written press, television, radio) media was a similarly valuable change mechanism.

Notwithstanding these comparisons, subtle yet important differences were also found across the PM and PD models; reinforcing the significance of contextually-grounded CM study (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012). These points of demarcation were most notably evidenced by the PDs' greater focus on:

- gaining a comprehensive understanding of the performance environment in the first instance, rather than rapidly evaluating against ideal types (due to the PD's relative inability to quickly replace performers and the PM's need to deliver instant results);
- upward management (due to the heightened complexity both within and across the agencies who could exert top-down influence on PDs' programmes);
- politically-sensitive discourse/action to ensure continued widespread buy-in (due to the PD propensity to manage upwards and deliver change *through* support staff, systems, structures, process/"lead from above", rather than the PM propensity to deliver change *with* support staff, systems, structures, and processes/"lead from the front/behind"); and
- identifying alternative (i.e., non-results based) means to deliver "visible" change (due to the relative infrequency of competition).

While the focus on manager perceptions was the logical starting point for this thesis, in that the focal construct (i.e., culture change) was conceptualised as a manager-led activity, the studies reported in Chapters 4 and 5 were limited by the decision not to frame questions of the interview guide within specific time blocks, which may have impacted on the accuracy of recall and left the interview open to mediation by hindsight and self-preservation biases (Nestler et al., 2008; Coolican, 2004). Additionally, by only interviewing team managers' perspectives, the extent to which the discussed CM approaches were jointly perceived and considered impactful (for optimising team functioning and performance) by support staff/performers (i.e., the targets of change) and influential external stakeholders (e.g., the Board) was uncertain.

To address these shortcomings, Chapter 6 explored multi-stakeholder perspectives as part of a case study on a successfully delivered change programme at English Rugby Union's Leeds Carnegie between 2008 and 2010. Adopting a 360-degree approach – as suggested by

the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5 – perceptions of team management, support staff, performers, and the CEO were acquired through the same interview guide as used in Chapters 4 and 5 but this time paired with a visual depiction of the programme’s key phases/events to contextualise questioning (as initially designed by the team management then refined by each participant to fit their subjective experiences). Sustaining an iterative approach to knowledge development (as per the principles of the pragmatic research philosophy: Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005), this chapter also advanced understanding of the complex and contested nature of the grounded theory models. Specifically, decentred theory was used as an interpretative lens to corroborate and extend developing results, provide an alternative account of culture change best practice, and aid methodological decisions (i.e., data analysis procedures) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

From this approach, findings revealed that change was delivered endogenously rather than imposed by the management team, as underpinned by the programme-leaders’ principle of support staff/performer ownership. Focused on supporting group-generated and regulated values, standards, and practices, the success of the programme, support staff and performers were provided with clearly delineated roles and liberated to take the lead on many aspects of team functioning and performance. Beyond the success factors of this specific case, findings aligned with the two-pronged models presented in Chapters 4 and 5 in that the management team’s initial activities (which mirrored the processes detailed in the professional sport based culture framework developed in Chapter 4) provided the starting point and catalyst for the integrated, holistic, and dynamic change process (which was also built on similar two-way interaction and power-share relationships with internal and external stakeholders). From the “decentred perspective”, the dynamic, contested, and power-based interactions suggested by this framework were evident in the results. Moreover, and extending the results of Chapters 4 and 5, the findings also revealed that programme success was facilitated by the deployment

of systems, structures, and processes which actively promoted a to and fro of power between team management and their support staff/players and CEO; thereby affording these groups opportunities to have their interests and opinions met, negotiated, or at least discussed. From its facilitation of these results (as per its focus on developing contextually-specific knowledge through multi-stakeholder perspectives, emphasis on the radical contingency of individuals, and consideration of power as a construct which flows in all directions), initial support for decentred theory's utility in elite sport team culture change inquiry was therefore provided.

While Chapters 4, 5, and 6 identified key processes of elite sport performance team culture change, they did not provide detailed coverage as to *how* these processes were best delivered. Accordingly, and in a shift from processes to mechanisms, Chapter 7 described a mechanism which appeared to underpin successful change across all levels of management in professional and Olympic settings. Explicitly, to circumvent the contested agency of internal stakeholders and minimise the extent to which performance managers engaged with (time and energy consuming) two-way interaction and power share processes, best practice was enabled by a subtle engineering of environmental contexts. Via this approach, rather than constantly and overtly (i.e., verbally) negotiating values, perceptions and behaviours, managers also shaped systems and structures alongside physical, psychosocial, and operational contexts in a manner which liberated support staff and performers to make their choice of whether to adhere to the high performing principles espoused by the manager/team *but* also covertly guided them to select those choices which would ultimately lead to the pursuit and attainment of consistent high performance. Notably, a key principle behind the success of this type of approach was in manipulating what change-targets perceived to be socially “normal” rather than “right”.

Building on this consideration of how the processes of culture change best practice were delivered, Chapter 8 illuminated some particularly fundamental leadership styles and

management skills on which best practice was dependent. Similarly based on analysed data from Chapters 4, 5, and 6, optimal culture change delivery chiefly required distributed and dark side leadership styles, micropolitical abilities, complexity-adapting behaviour, and context-specific expertise. Notably, these results pointed to the significance of a manager possessing a *range* of leadership and management skills (rather than one type of behavioural repertoire, such as transformational leadership) which are deployed specifically to the given context and considered against short, medium, and long-term agendas. Indeed, these findings revealed a pressing need for attributes which enabled command centres across the staff and performers (i.e., distributed leadership), critical protection of the programme and its underpinning values (i.e., dark side leadership), political sensitivity (i.e., micropolitics), responses to evolving contexts and events (i.e., complexity-adapting behaviour), and decision making linked to nested plans (i.e., coherent short, medium, and long term intentions). As well as providing valuable initial insights on the elite sport performance team culture change skill set, these results also challenge the orthodoxy of managerial and leadership “competence” in academic and applied environments and instead point to the relevance and importance of adaptive expertise (Fazey et al., 2005; Tozer et al., 2007).

Finally, this thesis has also provided some valuable insights on how the implications from the research findings may be packaged and delivered in an applied training resource for current and aspirant elite sport performance team managers. Specifically, and as described in Chapter 9, workshop-based training would appear to be best supported through the use of real life, case-study based approaches with respect to their ability to maintain the context-specific nature of culture change best practice (and therefore simultaneously warn against uncritical application of personal or others’ prior successful approaches). Moreover, the incorporation of a media element was highly worthwhile with respect to the importance of working *through* this group in professional sport performance team settings (cf. Chapter 4) and for its ability to

elicit reflection on the part of trainees as to more general alternative and covert means of sending messages to target stakeholders. Lastly, locating the applied cases in sports which are not the primary interest of participants was also found to be useful. Expressly, this approach encouraged participants to critically consider the underpinning rationale behind managers' decision making and action by minimising the interaction of personal interests or detailed knowledge (actual *or* perceived) on the actual outcomes of these decisions and actions.

10.3. Specific Recommendations: Future Research in Elite Sport Performance Team Culture Change

Adhering to the pragmatic research philosophy's principle that knowledge (or ways of knowing) is a regenerative process with the products of research, and therefore the outcomes of this thesis, essentially instrumental, provisional, and fallible in nature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Morgan, 2007), numerous lines of future research are merited.

First, as substantive theories such as those reported in Chapters 4 and 5 are intricately linked to the contexts in which investigation is based and therefore limited by their specificity to particular a time, place, and user (rather than conceptual broadness: Bryant, 2009), there is a need to examine the extent to which the results presented in this thesis are theoretically and practically applicable to other elite sport performance team environments and, possibly, CM programmes delivered by middle managers in organisational settings. While this thesis has developed models of best practice, a worthy contrast and contribution would also be provided through detailed exploration of unsuccessful practice. Importantly, such work would provide valuable insights as to the potential for the models developed in this thesis to be raised to a more formal level in the future or, of equal importance, the ceiling at which decontextualised frameworks begin to lose their applied usefulness.

Following this point, and adhering to recommendations that "application is essential for substantiation of [a theory or model's] worth" (Pryor, Humphreys, Taneja, & Toombs,

2011, p. 209), the intended action-research study emanating from the workshop described in Chapter 9 also takes initial priority. Importantly, steps have already been taken to begin the process of examining the impact of this intervention as perceived by a sample of attendees, primarily via a series of interviews aimed to promote reflection on and improvements to these individuals' practice (Tinning, 1992). Importantly, such work will provide opportunities for researchers to reflect on the practical utility of the offered guidance and invaluable insight on some of the "real-time" challenges faced by those aiming to optimise team culture.

Indeed, while this thesis is characterised by many strengths, particularly in the level of access acquired to high level (and often elusive) research participants and a focus on precise specification rather than general abstraction (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012), the work programme was limited by the lack of real-time inquiry (albeit the studies conducted in this thesis were the logical starting points for opening study in this bespoke area). Now that initial models of best practice have been developed, alongside understanding of their critical success factors, mechanisms, and supporting leadership and management attributes, attention should begin to shift toward tracking culture change programmes in real time; an approach which has been relatively ignored in organisational studies. In undertaking such an approach, two avenues for advancing knowledge seem warranted: the first, an action-research approach whereby the researcher/consultant assumes an active role in supporting the manager's delivery of change; consequently "taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action" (Coughlan and Coughlan, 2002, p. 220); and the second, if practitioner help is not sought but access nonetheless granted, ethnographic study could be effectively utilised to observe, record and reflect upon an unfolding program of change. Following ethnographic directives in applied sport psychology (Krane & Baird, 2005), culture change may therefore be examined via a mix of observation (participant/non-participant), field notes, research logs, reflexive journals, focus groups, texts and documents (e.g., media coverage), visual data (e.g., training/match

videos), questionnaires, and interviews. Reflecting the context-specific nature of culture change delivery, this method of investigation will logically offer the most accurate depiction of the nuances behind a programme's initiation, evolution, regulation and in some cases, termination. Significantly, through this triangulation of methods and outcome markers (i.e., perceptions, processes, and performance: Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b), action-research and ethnography avenues would also enhance confidence in determining the extent to which team culture had actually been changed or not and, therefore, substantiate the primary perception-based findings from this thesis.

From the findings of this thesis, it is also vital that such inquiry, where possible, seeks to examine multi-stakeholder perspectives. Indeed, this approach is invaluable for enhancing the completeness of management action, triangulating the effectiveness of this action, and illuminating the socially complex and dynamic nature of elite sport performance team culture change. Moreover, to develop greater understanding in how two way interactions and power-share relationships and best managed, studies should continue to recruit stakeholder groups examined in this thesis (i.e., team managers, support staff, performers, Board members) and also extend focus to consider the perceptions of other key individuals/groups, such as the media in professional/high profile sports and UK Sport in Olympic sport. Importantly, work of this nature should also seek to illuminate pertinent interactions which occur exclusively between non-performance team management groups (i.e., without or beyond the involvement of the performance team management). Indeed, although the models presented in Chapters 4 and 5 revolved around the performance team manager (reflecting my focus on team manager-led change), some of the data collected for this thesis logically alluded to the role and impact of "extra-manager" interactions. As such, future research should explore the extent to which similar to and fro relationships prevail within and across non-performance team management groups and consider how the values, practices, and standards of the performance team are

continually constructed and reinforced by those on the periphery of the system. As indicated by the two frameworks developed in this thesis, working through the media would appear to provide a particular valuable means by which such constructions can be framed by team managers. In this manner, study which traces a manager's action, their linked messages to the media, the consequent interpretation and interaction of stakeholders, and the impact of this interpretation and interaction back onto the performance department represents a highly intriguing approach (especially for unearthing the critical success factors behind the proposed use of layered messages and flanking attacks). To optimise the theoretical and applied contribution of all forms of multi-stakeholder work, researchers should continue to carefully consider the role and benefits of client confidentiality against the purposes of inquiry.

As well as continuing to explore the processes of optimal culture change delivery, as perceived by multiple stakeholders where possible, future research should also continue to explore *how* these processes are best delivered. Specifically, and as guided by the findings of this thesis, further consideration of the identified key underpinning mechanism of successful change (i.e., the subtle shaping of environmental contexts) is warranted, particularly in the early phases of a manager's tenure when attempting to efficiently and effectively optimise the values, standards, and practices ingrained by the prior regime. Additionally, as indicated by its relevance and importance to PMs and PDs of high profile sports and as noted above, analysis on how change-managers interact with the media to support the social construction of their desired values, beliefs and expectations in group members will likely provide a valuable contribution to the literature (cf. McGannon, Hoffman, Metz & Schinke, 2011). Moreover, comprehensive work on the leadership and management attributes required for elite sport performance team culture change is also needed, particularly the extent to which dark side leadership (a previously sensitive subject in academic and applied spheres) is implicated in optimal program delivery. Indeed, sport policy researchers (cf. Goodwin &

Grix, 2011; Grix, 2010) have recently argued for a modified decentred theory which embraces individual agency and contingent beliefs but also the role of hierarchical control mechanisms; in other words, an approach which accounts for bottom-up and top-down influence. Accordingly, with *demonstrating and retaining ultimate authority* a key leadership theme identified in this thesis, in-depth investigation of how this power is demonstrated and retained to optimally interact with the clear power of internal and external stakeholders is merited.

In terms of the application of pre-existing theoretical frameworks to help corroborate and extend the results of this thesis, the support provided in Chapter 6 for decentred theory's utility justifies a more complete examination of this perspective's value for continued culture change inquiry in elite sport performance teams. As noted above, such investigation should carefully consider the theory's ability to account for instances of top-down imposition and integrate these findings with developments in sport policy (cf. Goodwin & Grix, 2011; Grix, 2010). Beyond decentred theory, future research should also examine the extent to which a range of other paradigms can accurately account for culture change in elite performance team environments, such as stakeholder theory (Kihl et al., 2010) and network theory (Rowley, 1997). However, reflecting its recent application by business scholars to explain manager-led change processes (Theodoridis & Bennison, 2009) and identification by sports researchers as a parsimonious approach for explaining the incessant planning, acting and monitoring of coaching (Bowes & Jones, 2006), one approach worthy of particular attention is complexity theory. Indeed, with CM widely regarded as a highly dynamic and nonlinear process (Graetz & Smith, 2010; Smith, 2004) which takes place in uncontrolled internal and external environments (By, 2005; Higgs and Rowland, 2010), alongside the discovery of *complexity adapting behaviour* as a defining feature of leading and managing elite sport performance team culture change (cf. Chapter 8), such inquiry is warranted.

As described by Anderson (1999), complexity in organisational research is considered a structural variable characterising both the environment and organisation itself. In this case, Cilliers (2000) has highlighted that organisations are complex systems in that they consist of a large number of dynamically interacting elements (e.g., people, processes, history, context) whose interactions are nonlinear and produce emergent patterns of behaviour (Smith, 2004). As such, the behaviour of the system (i.e., organisational functioning/performance) cannot be predicted from the inspection of its components but, instead, by the nature of the interaction of these elements (e.g., history, change processes, manager-staff relationships). Moreover, history and environmental context shapes the nature of these interactions, unpredictable events are expected, apparently minor events may have large consequences (and vice-versa), and control is distributed throughout. Notably, all of these features have been implicated in the findings presented in this thesis.

As such, future research of elite sport performance team culture change may benefit from a qualitative exploration of how complexity is managed during programme delivery. In this manner, direction can be taken from Theodoridis and Bennison (2009) who have applied complexity theory to qualitatively explore retail business location strategy. In this particular study, interviewed managers were found to hold different perceptions and understandings of complexity which were manifested in their contrasting strategic decision making processes; specifically, some remained fixed on predetermined company policy (complexity *absorbing*) and others embraced spontaneous opportunities presented by dynamic internal and external environments (complexity *adapting*). Notably, this study also revealed that understanding complexity was a time dependent task, with the allocation of time to environmental scanning determined by the manager's motivation to deal with it. Recalling that time is an increasingly rare commodity for elite sport performance team managers, how complexity is approached in these pressurised environments may hold some power in explaining differential success and

survival. Indeed, the value of using complexity theory as an interpretive lens is reinforced by the discovery in this thesis that culture change success in Olympic sport performance teams was facilitated through the effective management of the political complexity which pervaded within and across various internal and external environments (e.g., streamlining governance).

Finally, in conjunction with research-generated knowledge, another body of work also must consider pertinent professional issues for sport psychologists supporting culture change in elite sport performance teams. Specifically, what ethical concerns arise when advising on dark side practices (especially those which expose certain support staff members and performers)? How should sport psychologists' support evolve over time? How are culture change-specific decision making skills best enhanced in elite team managers? And what, therefore, are the implications for the training and continued professional development of applied practitioners? To meet these needs, personal accounts and critical reflections on elite team culture change consultancy will offer valuable contributions in the continued evolution of practice and the bodies responsible overseeing and advancing professional sport psychology.

10.4. General Recommendations: A Forewarning for Research in the “Twilight Zone”

In concluding this thesis, it is important to reconsider the wider context in which this research programme was located and the implications it carries for broader sport psychology research. Through bringing the change management construct to the elite sport performance team domain, defining its focus (i.e., the establishment and maintenance of a high performing cultures), and providing initial knowledge on its delivery, this thesis has made a significant and novel contribution to sport psychology literature. Indeed, with the discipline's new focus on the organisational systems and structures surrounding teams and consideration of socially aggregate constructs, this thesis has illuminated one vital area of the “twilight zone” (i.e., the gap generated by sport management's roots in off-field administration/policy areas and sport

psychology's roots in on-field sport performance) outlined by Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009). Clearly, the agenda of this thesis was positioned closer to the "sport performance end" of this continuum in that it centred on a process which aimed to enhance the day-to-day functioning of the on-field performance team rather than the off-field organisation, or both; the latter of which has been recently been attempted by other researchers working at the organisation end of the continuum (Wagstaff et al., 2012a; Wagstaff et al., 2013). As this "all-in" approach to studying elite sport organisations (i.e., not distinguishing between administration and performance) is receiving notable exposure in high impact journals (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2012a; Wagstaff et al., 2013), the results of this research provide a timely warning over the directions in which this organisational agenda may be taking sport psychology. More specifically, it appears that the findings from much conducted work in this novel area are suffering from a similar "lost specification" to that which has plagued organisational CM (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2012). To exemplify this concern, take the specific case of the *organisational stressor* construct.

In a recent issue of the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, Arnold and Fletcher (2012) presented a synthesis and resultant taxonomy of the organisational stressors faced by sport performers which, the authors' assert, "provides the most accurate, comprehensive, and parsimonious classification of organisational stressors to date . . . [which is also] valid, generalisable, and applicable to a large number of sport performers of various ages, genders, nationalities, sports, and standards" (p. 397). While the scale of their meta-interpretation was impressive, Arnold and Fletcher's claims of the accuracy, validity, and power of their results are, it would seem, less so. Specifically, while these authors note that organisational stressors have been previously defined as "environmental demands . . . associated primarily and directly with the organisation within which an individual is operating" (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006, p. 329), Arnold and Fletcher extend this definition to: "any environmental

demands . . . primarily associated with the organisation within which a performer was operating, *but often related in some secondary sense with competitive or personal aspects of performers' lives*" [emphasis added] (p. 398). This extension is supported with reference to Fletcher et al.'s (2012, p. 11) call for "innovative investigative approaches that develop less biased and more encompassing taxonomic classifications of . . . organisational stressors". While Fletcher et al. do call for a more complete understanding of organisational stressors, it is difficult to see how this equates to broadening the construct's definition to "secondary" stimuli. As "meta interpretation is 'an interpretation' rather than 'the interpretation' of . . . multiple truths" (Weed, 2008, p. 17), this definition is of course not "wrong" (Arnold and Fletcher do explicitly state that their synthesis and taxonomy "represents our interpretation", p. 419). When considering this decision against Arnold and Fletcher's "comprehensive" results, however, it is questionable.

Significantly, Arnold and Fletcher (2012) are not the first to apply an overly liberal interpretation to the classification of organisational stress. As one example, consider Arnold and Fletcher's report of one performer's concerns with whales as an environmental hazard in ocean sailing (a theme taken from Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009). This is, of course, a particular example; however, to illustrate the point, how did the original authors or Arnold and Fletcher interpret this as an *organisational* stressor? Reflecting the principles of an interpretivist paradigm (which underpinned the authors' meta-interpretation method), the performer should have expressed some organisational issue (e.g., selection of a "dangerous" location or the absence of any special measures to address this) in their original statement. If stress is a transactional phenomenon and based on individual interpretation (as Arnold and Fletcher state), then researchers should offer a clear indication of their line of reasoning when grouping such self-reported concern into an "organisational" category. Arnold and Fletcher continuing this trend of "broader" classification is, therefore, a useful if unintentional

highlight which suggests the need for a more critical consideration of some studies completed to date.

Given their even broader operational definition, Arnold and Fletcher (2012) perhaps predictably generated an unparalleled pool of stressors including a host of “new” themes. More ominously, however, many elements and themes seem to have tenuous links to sports organisations (even in a secondary sense) or, in some cases, no discernible link at all. For example, take the “organisational” stressors of: spectators, the media, upsets due to foreign cuisine, unfamiliar weather conditions and, as noted earlier, the threat of hitting whales. Notably, a number of stressors categorised by Arnold and Fletcher as “organisational” mirror those interpreted by other researchers as “competitive” or “personal” (e.g., Arnold and Fletcher placed parental expectations as an organisational stressor while McKay, Niven, Lavalley, and White, 2008, categorised a similar theme as a competitive source of strain). By employing an all-inclusive definition and not exploring contextual differences, Arnold and Fletcher therefore reduce a diverse array of stimuli to a conceptually unsuitable construct; or more colloquially, fit numerous square pegs into a widened round hole. Indeed, while all of these factors may have some relationship or even genesis in organisational constructs (e.g., the organisation overlooking or ignoring these factors), this needs to flow explicitly from the methodology employed (the context applied) and the way in which data are interpreted. In its simplest terms, just because a sports organisation could act to address a particular issue but doesn't, does not necessarily make this an organisational stressor.

Of final note, while the orientation of Arnold and Fletcher's (2012) study necessitated a comparison of findings with organisational-based knowledge, the authors' integration of *all* stressor categories with this domain (including those more related to sports leadership, team, and performance issues) makes an implicit assumption that business and sport organisations are parallel environments. Of course, as sport performers tend to operate within some kind of

organisational structure, these individuals may be considered employees or members of that organisation. However, while prior work has shown similarities between principles in sport psychology and business (Fletcher, 2010) and that aspects of knowledge transfer may be fitting at an holistic organisation-level (Wagstaff et al., 2012b), the direct and uncritical application of business-based constructs for sport *performance* issues is not; a view supported by recent theorising (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b) and justified in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.

While the organisational stressor construct is clearly a specific case, work in this area nonetheless (and importantly) draws attention to wider issues over the direction of continued study in the sport management-sport psychology twilight zone. Specifically, while adopting a holistic organisational perspective has generated new knowledge in sport psychology, there appears to be some confusion over what *performance* issues organisational sport psychology does, and does not, account for. By exaggerating the role of organisations to the extent that they can provide an explanation of every phenomenon which occurs within their boundaries (as in organisational stressor inquiry), this approach is at odds with the reported significance of contextual specificity in the theoretical and applied implications of this thesis. Indeed, by taking a step away from the site of sport performance (i.e., pitch, track, etc), organisational-wide investigation inevitably sacrifices a level of specificity and peculiarity on which *optimal* recommendations for specialist sub-units (e.g., performance departments) are dependent. In the case of Arnold and Fletcher's stressor taxonomy, *any* stressor could be organisational simply because an organisation doesn't address it. Similarly, further evidence of a propensity to generalise over contextualise is found in recent guidance for elite sport organisations to enhance the emotion-based abilities of *all* its members (including performers; Wagstaff et al., 2012a) and the elucidation of elite team managers' *general* competencies (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Although the findings from such works are clearly not "wrong", the question for sport

psychology as an *applied* discipline is what tangible difference are these advances making to actual sporting performance? From a practitioner's perspective, the answer at present would seem to be somewhat uncertain. Paired with the benefits found in this thesis from prioritising rather than controlling for the unique contextual features of elite sport performance teams, it therefore is vital that the scope and limits of organisational sport psychology are re-evaluated to protect against a further and detrimental blurring of the boundaries between organisational and performance factors. In the meantime, future research of manager-led culture change in elite sport performance teams should continue to operate and profit from a contextually-grounded, practically-oriented approach.

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APPENDIX A

- A.1. Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form (PM and PD Studies)
- A.2. Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form (Leeds Carnegie Case Study)
- A.3. Interview Guide

A.1. Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form (PM and PD Studies)

Culture Change In Elite Sport

Managers and performance directors in elite sport face a significant challenge when coming into a new club or governing body. The pressure to achieve success is intense and changing nothing is normally not an option. This research therefore aims to look at these figures and the process of changing the culture of a club or governing body in order to achieve performance success.

As a result of this pressure, the life-expectancy in these positions is getting shorter and we will be looking to publish articles in academic journals which offer guidance and raise awareness of the challenges faced by managers and performance directors in elite sport.

In order for us to be able to do this, we require approximately 2 hours to interview you about your experience of delivering changes in elite sport. For your information, discussion will focus on the 7 questions found on the attached sheet. If applicable, you will also be encouraged to compare and contrast your experiences across different clubs or governing bodies, which you will be asked to specify at the start of the interview (up to a maximum of three clubs/governing bodies).

The interviews will be recorded by two dictaphones and all recorded information will be kept confidential by the researcher and transferred immediately onto a secure computer. We will also discuss how you will be described in our articles in order to ensure that you remain anonymous.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time.

If you wish to know the findings of the research please indicate your contact details here:

.....

Participant Declaration (to be signed on day of interview):

I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider this information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I agree to take part in the study.

Signed
Print

Date:

Signed (Researcher).....
Print.....

Date:

A.2. Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form (Leeds Carnegie Case Study)

Culture Change In Elite Sport

Management in elite sport face a significant challenge when coming into a new club. The pressure to achieve success is intense and changing nothing is normally not an option. Accordingly, we are currently conducting a number of studies in British professional team sports. This particular project aims to look at the culture changes which have occurred at Leeds Carnegie RUFC over the last two seasons, from both the management and the player perspective.

In order to get an accurate and comprehensive picture of your views, we would like approximately 2 hours of your time to interview you about your perceptions and experiences of the changes which have taken place at Leeds Carnegie RUFC since June 2008. Our aim is to explore the full story of the successful progress shown by the club over this period.

The interviews will be recorded by two dictaphones and all recorded information will be kept confidential by the researcher and transferred immediately onto a secure computer. The Club and managers will be identified by name, as it would be almost impossible to disguise this. If you are a player, however, we will discuss how you will be described in our articles in order to ensure that you remain anonymous.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time.

If you wish to know the findings of the research please indicate your contact details here:

.....

Participant Declaration (to be signed on day of interview):

I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider this information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I agree to take part in the study.

Signed

Date:

Print.....

Signed (Researcher).....

Date:

Print.....

A.3. Interview Guide

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me what you were trying to achieve through the culture changes you have carried out?
2. Can you tell me about any important steps taken before initiating the changes?
3. Could you tell me what you feel the key processes or actions were for initiating the changes?
4. Could you tell me about any processes or actions that you believe were important for driving through the changes?
5. Can you tell me about any personal attributes and skills that you believe were important for carrying out the changes?
6. Could you tell me if you think any processes or actions were important for evaluating the impact of the changes?
7. How would you reflect on the processes and actions you have employed to create changes?

APPENDIX B

B.1. Research Programme Outputs

B.1. Research Programme Outputs

Peer-Review Journal Publications

- Cruickshank, A. & Collins, D. (2012). Culture change in elite sport performance teams: Examining and advancing effectiveness in the new era. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 24, 338-355.
- Cruickshank, A., & Collins, D. (2012). Change management: The case of the elite sport performance team. *Journal of Change Management*, 12, 209-229.
- Collins, D., & Cruickshank, A. (2012). 'Multidirectional management': Exploring the challenges of performance in the World Class Programme environment. *Reflective Practice*, 13, 455-469
- Cruickshank, A., Collins, D., & Minten, S. (in press). Culture change in a professional sports team: Shaping environmental contexts and regulating power. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*.
- Cruickshank, A., & Collins, D. (in press). Culture change in elite sport performance teams: An important and unique construct. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*.

Book Chapters

- Collins, D., & Cruickshank, A. (2013). Preparing Team GB for London 2012. In V. Girginov (Ed.), *Handbook of London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Volume 1: Making the Games* (pp. 114-130). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Collins, D., Trower, J., & Cruickshank, A. (in press). Coaching high performance athletes and the high performance team. In P. Sotiriadou & V. De Bosscher (Eds.), *Managing high performance sport*. Routledge.

Conference Presentations

- Cruickshank, A., & Collins, D. (2012, October). *Culture change in professional teams: Delivering an organisational construct in performance environments*. Paper presented at the Sport and Exercise Psychology in Action Conference of the British Psychological Society, Portsmouth.
- Cruickshank, A., & Collins, D. (2012, April). *Knock-knock. Who's there? UK Sport, a Board of Directors, support staff, performers and the mass media: Delivering culture change in British Olympic teams*. Paper presented at the Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology Biennial Conference of the British Psychological Society, London.
- Cruickshank, A., & Collins, D. (2010, December). *How many psychologists does it take to change a sports team? How the sport psychologist might facilitate culture change in an elite performance environment*. Paper presented at the Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology Biennial Conference of the British Psychological Society, London.

Media Coverage

- Neyfakh, L. (2012). How to change a culture. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/09/22/how-change-culture/HitMpC95xPFidEjE12cx9J/story.html>

APPENDIX C

C.1. Workshop Programme Outline

C.2. Harry Redknapp Case Study Example

C.3. Hypothetical Case Study Training Scenario

WORKSHOP: CREATING SUCCESS CULTURES IN ELITE TEAMS

Programme & Outcome

09:00-09:30: Arrival

09:30-09:40: Introduction, background information and session structure (DC)

09:40-10:00: Introduction to the model – the overall structure (AC)

10:05-12:20: 2 x 65 minute block rotation – 5 minute comfort/coffee break:

- **Block 1: On-field decision making (DC)**
 - Influences on decision making – fast action and slow deliberation
 - Shaping decisions via psycho-motor, psycho-behavioural, psycho-social/organisational, and structural/political means
 - Integration with other management/media links
- **Block 2: Off-field multi-directional management (AC)**
 - The set-up: pre-job recce, harnessing allies and self-protection
 - Working from multiple angles: deploying “flanking attacks”
 - Dark leadership: working in the shadows and B³ management

12:20-13:00: Lunch

13:00-13:50:

- **Block 3: Managing and using the media (RW)**
 - Managing the relationship with regional and national outlets
 - Using controlled outlets: internal and social media
 - Framing and using media opportunities to send your message

14:00: Introduction to the afternoon (DC)

14:10-15:10: Applying the Tools (DC/AC/RW):

- Hypothetical case study training scenario
- Delivering change across nested phases
- Handling on-spot interviews

15:10-15:30: Groups report back

15:30-15:45: Feedback on spot interviews (DC/RW)

15:45-16:00: Evaluation, follow-up and close (DC/AC/RW)

C.2. Harry Redknapp Case Study Example

SEASON 2012/2013											
Nov-Dec 2012: Short-term Results & Transfer Window Set-Up					January 2013: Modify Squad & Generate Momentum			Feb-May 2012: Keep Momentum			
Goal 1				Goal 2		Goal 3	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3		
Set/align expectations				Identify/harness allies/architects		Deliver instant results	Recruit/sell players	Manage expectations	Generate momentum		Optimise/Sustain confidence
Supporting Activities	<i>Players</i>	<i>Fans</i>	<i>Board</i>	<i>Media</i>	- Appoint trusted staff	- Training focus on tactics/shape	
	Deliver private and public kick up the arse (timed with key moments) - (Mainly) work ethic/commitment based team selection	Generate 'rational optimism' (set against scale of challenge and timed with key moments)	Reinforce need to recruit/sell in January (timed with key moments)	Keep them onside; use to send messages to players, fans, and Board	- Optimise well-being and perceptions of significant players (i.e., senior players, star players, etc)	- Focus on preparation					

What he's doing:

- Working on multiple levels with multiple stakeholders
- Setting up the changes: proactively creating conditions rather than reactively responding to them
- Deploying flanking attacks (hitting same target with the same message through different means)
- Changing contexts as well as changing people
- Using B³ management
- Making in-the-moment decisions against a short, medium, and long-term plan

C.3. Hypothetical Case Study Training Scenario

CULTURE CHANGE WORKSHOP **APPLYING THE TOOLS: HYPOTHETICAL CASE STUDY**

Stop the press! It's June 2013 and a management role at Twickenham Tigers has become available, a mid-table Championship club with a past history of periodic bobbing between first and second tiers. Having been in the Championship for the past four seasons, the previous head coach (who had been in charge for five years and held popularity with players, staff, fans and media alike) has just left to take up a role at a Premiership club.

The TTs have an average home gate of 3,000 (reaching up to 6,000 for big matches) and are owned by a locally-based entrepreneur who used to attend matches as a kid. Having bought the club 6 months ago after the prior owner of 20 years ran into financial problems, this handover had been met with much optimism by the fans; encouraged by a promise of greater investment in the team. Indeed, many stories in the media had circulated on the new owner's 5-year plan to establish the club as a mid-to-top end Premiership side who frequently qualify for the Heineken Cup. With no experience of running a professional club, however, more than a little scepticism surrounded these goals in the rugby community. Additionally, the decision of two of the TT's better players to sign for a team who finished one place below them in the season gone had also tempered the fans initial buoyancy.

On the field, the TTs were well known for their solid yet unspectacular style of play, based on discipline, work ethic and grinding out results. During the past four years, however, the academy had begun to produce players who could play in a more creative, expansive, and dynamic system. In fact, coinciding with their most consistent league finishes in modern times (comfortably 6th/5th/6th/4th), six graduates had recently established themselves in the first XV and another four as replacements (albeit to the disgruntlement of some senior players who had now started to fall down the pecking order). Additionally, after the former captain (a "fans' favourite" who had been at the club for 10 years) retired due to injury mid-way during the last season, the most talented academy graduate was named captain (at the age of 23) based on his often inspirational fly-half performances in the past two seasons. The retired captain, who held notable power in all corners of the playing and support staff, had also been appointed by the previous management as a forwards coach. As a vociferous supporter of the club's values and traditions, his coaching philosophy inevitably matched the "substance over style" culture on which the club had been based for the last 20 years.

After much success in your current job at a top-end National League 1 club, where you had overseen a youthful side with a reputation for its adventurous approach, you apply for, are offered, and then accept the TT's role – congratulations!!! You are hired by the Board with a specific remit to deliver a top-2 finish within the next two years *and* a more entertaining "product": in other words, a successful team built on a culture of "substance **and** style". Having just secured a deal with a higher-profile main sponsor, the Board have committed to fund salaries which are competitive with the top Championship teams until 2015 at least.

DELIVERING THE CULTURE CHANGE: YOUR TASK

Using the model, techniques, and tools discussed in the morning session, your group's task is to develop an effective and efficient culture change strategy. This strategy should outline and explain your decision making and actions:

- 3 weeks before your appointment...
- in your first 3 hours in the job...
- in your first 3 days in the job...
- in your first 3 weeks in the job...
- in your first 3 months in the job...

For each of the above phases, think about:

- **what** you are going to do;
- **where** you are going to do it;
- **who** you are going to do it with;
- **how** you are going to do it;
- and **WHY** this way over the alternatives

Oh yes, by the way - there will be calls for a spokesman to talk to the media on camera. So, at ANY time, make sure you are all "on message" and ready to speak.

YOUR TIME STARTS NOW - GOOD LUCK!!

