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Take a Walk on the Wild Side: Exploring, Identifying, and Developing Consultancy Expertise with Elite Performance Team Leaders

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Abstract

Objectives: Stemming from sport psychology's recent shift to examine the effective management of elite sports team organizations, the extensive, significant, and complex challenges faced by those with responsibility for team performance have been emphasized. Recognizing that most work in this budding area has been theoretical in nature, our contribution to this special issue consequently identifies and critically evaluates some implications for excellence in practitioners who support leaders of elite sport performance teams.

Method: Narrative review and commentary.

Results and Conclusions: To survive and succeed, leaders of elite teams must: (a) negotiate complex and contested socio-political dynamics both within and outside their performance department; (b) make impactful and consistent real-time decisions; and (c) continually reinforce and protect their programme. To provide an optimally impactful and valued service, sport psychologists must therefore be able to advise on a broad and politically-astute leadership style and, most critically for consultancy excellence: (a) work within a professional judgment and decision making model; (b) facilitate the leader's adaptive expertise and nested decision making; and (c) operate a proactive, forthright, and straight approach to ethical considerations. Based on these implications, we conclude by providing suggestions for the training and development of applied consultants.

Keywords: applied practice, complexity, covert, decision making, nested action

Take a Walk on the Wild Side: Exploring, Identifying, and Developing Consultancy Expertise with Elite Performance Team Leaders

Once upon a time in the recent past, sport psychology was often conceptualized and operationalized as the teaching, application, and promotion of mental skills with performers. In this simpler world, *mental skills training* (or MST) was the stock-in-trade of the sport psychologist, and expertise in sport psychology was related to the skills of defining, teaching, and facilitating the application of a bespoke subset of these skills for the performer's domain. Notably, however, things have moved on and the role of the sport psychologist is now seen to encompass a much wider and deeper remit. Indeed, we would query whether such a simple world actually ever existed, except as a starting point with comparatively naive participants or with un(der)-qualified consultants. Accordingly, the skills and techniques of sport psychology (and sport psychologists) have been extended in range across a plethora of performance environments and in depth to encompass a broader scope from the many sub-divisions of psychology (for a more comprehensive consideration of these evolutions, see Collins & Kamin, 2012).

As one such evolution, sport psychologists have recently broadened their research lens, and therefore capacity for applied impact, by moving to explore the organizational and management factors which aid (and hinder) optimal performance in elite sports teams. More specifically, since Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) defined the "twilight zone" (p. 428) between the chiefly individual-level, MST-focused endeavors of sport psychology and the macro-level, policy-focused work of sport management, two strands of study have developed: namely, that on the optimal management and functioning of entire elite sport organizations (e.g., Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012; Wagstaff, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2013) and that, more precisely, on the optimal management and functioning of these organizations' performance departments (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Cruickshank, Collins, &

Minten, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). While the merits of both research lines have been acknowledged (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2013), this paper focuses upon the leadership of the elite sport organization's performance department and, specifically, how this may be best supported by sport psychologists[1]. Indeed, given the regularity of team leader sackings around the world – with few in professional sport lasting longer than two seasons and those overseeing Olympic teams often replaced post-Games (cf. Bruinshoofd & ter Weel, 2003; Flores, Forrest, & Tena, 2012; Magnay, 2013; Zinser, 2008) – excellence in this area is a highly relevant and marketable skill. With this point in mind, we therefore adopt a discursive approach to firstly present a theoretically-underpinned overview of some key challenges faced by elite team leaders. The paper then moves to propose some evidence-based recommendations – as grounded in the aforementioned challenges, current literature, and our own applied experience – for the development and deployment of expertise in elite team leaders' supporting psychologists.

Part 1: The Challenge – What do we Need to Help Elite Performance Team Leaders do?

To best contextualize the requirements for practitioner expertise in this area, and reflecting the major elite sport systems in Europe and beyond, we now present a synopsis of the challenges commonly faced by the managers[2] of professional sport performance teams and the performance directors[3] (hereafter PD) of Olympic sport performance teams. Ensuring integration with current theory, these challenges are rooted to the *multidirectional* orientation recently suggested and corroborated as critical in elite sports team leadership

[1] [1] In this paper, "sport psychologist" refers to a practitioner who is fully accredited/regulated by a recognised professional governing body, and who has the appropriate experience and expertise to perform at this level. We should point out that, just as only some can become high level athletes, so only some should work with them.

[2] Please note that "manager" is used as a general label for any figure with responsibility for a professional sport organization's performance department (therefore encompassing the range of titles used by different sporting systems: e.g., team manager, head coach, director of sport).

[3] The performance director is the figure responsible for an Olympic sport organization's performance department.

processes (cf. Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014a, 2014b). More explicitly, our consideration focuses on elite teams' internal power dynamics and external interactions/interferences, which consequently require leaders to acknowledge and address bottom-up (i.e., performer and support staff), top-down (i.e., Boards of Directors), and lateral influences (i.e., the media, fans/public). Additionally, these presented challenges are also rooted to the principles of decentred theory; a perspective recently applied in research on elite team leadership activity (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013). Specifically, this approach rejects the notion of unchallenged, top-down leadership processes and instead asserts that all individuals in a social system work to their own situated interests (which may or may not align with the leader) and therefore generate an inherently contingent, conflicting, and contested mode of interaction.[4]

Evidence for the relevance and significance of internal power dynamics and external interactions/interference is now offered through original data which we have gathered for our published and on-going work in elite team leadership processes. Additionally, and to convey the pervasiveness of these challenges, pertinent media reports are also included. While the majority of this evidence is set within our own British context, our experiences of working in elite team performance around the world, the perceptions of our international colleagues, and a regular perusal of global media reports suggest that these fundamental social challenges are common to elite sport systems across a host of different countries. Additionally, and despite variation in how these factors are specifically "played out" within and across professional and Olympic team environments (which must of course be considered for contextually-sensitive practice), their shared general nature provides a basis on which to explore the core requisites and features of practitioner expertise in high performance domains.

[4] Please note that this does not mean that conflict is always present in elite sport performance teams. Rather, as stakeholders continually work to meet their own personal needs and can act in novel and unpredictable ways, the team's culture and practices will reflect a composite of its members' varied ideals and interests rather than its leader's ideals and interests alone.

Contexts and Challenges of Elite Sport Performance Departments

Internal Power Dynamics. Distinct from top-down or flat organizational structures, power and control in elite sport performance departments commonly flow within and across their constituent groups (i.e., team management, support staff, performers: Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Indeed, given the potent mix of high egos, (extremely) high salaries, and high media prominence, many elite performers possess significantly greater authority over their team's direction, functioning, and performance than those at sub-elite levels. In this manner, and relative to the prevailing contexts, performance departments encounter a continually evolving blend of top-down, shared, and bottom-up influence (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Consider, for example, the following quote on the scale of modern "player power" from a professional football team manager interviewed for our grounded theory study on team manager-led culture change (Cruickshank et al., 2014b):

> [Player X] said "I don't want to come back [from holiday to start pre-season earlier than the date set by the previous manager]; just take the [two week's] wages [fine]." Rather than turn up for a week's training he's given £64,000 away! . . . . People die for £64,000! . . . But that was their mentality.

With many professional team performers earning more than £3.5 million *on average* per year (Harris, 2011), it is clear that the differential rewards for managers and performers has major implications for social functioning. For instance, the high investment and attention placed on performers by an organization, the media, and the fans/public can propagate scenarios where individuals may work against their team in continued pursuit of their own interests. One such high profile example was when Red Bull's Sebastian Vettel ignored team orders and overtook his teammate, Mark Webber, in the closing stages of the 2013 Malaysia Grand Prix:

> Had I understood the message, reflected on it, and thought about what the team wanted to do, I probably would have done the same . . . You could say that, indirectly

> [I got payback] . . . . I never had support from [Webber] . . . . [and] there was more than one occasion in the past where he could have helped the team and he didn't . . . . [If you think I was sanctioned for ignoring team orders] maybe it is a bit of dreamland that you [i.e., the media] all live in. What do you expect to happen? (Weaver, 2013)

In a similar vein, many high profile Olympic athletes receive substantial sponsorship fees on top of significant prize money (Goodley, 2012) and, in some cases, do not technically have to comply with, or meet the standards set by the national governing body of their sport to be selected to compete at the Olympics by their National Olympic Committee (e.g., the BOA). Thus, and once again, conventional social hierarchies seldom prevail in these environments. As a particular example of the power held by high status Olympians, it is notable that many British athletes have recently succeeded in their rejection of UK Athletics' preference for them to relocate to Loughborough as part of the drive for programme centralization (Riach, 2012).

Beyond rejecting or resisting management preferences, decisions, and actions, elite athletes also often play an *active-disruptive* role in pursuit of their own interests and agendas. At the extreme end of this agency, take the player-driven revolt which led to the sacking of the New Zealand Rugby League Coach in 2008 (Mascord, 2008) or the French national football team's refusal to train during the 2010 World Cup after a teammate had been expelled from the squad; as explained by goalkeeper Hugo Lloris:

> We acted as a team. To strike was the decision of a squad who felt lonely, who believed that no-one had stood up for them and who had a message to convey. We went too far. It was a very awkward decision, a big mistake. It was completely stupid. But there were so many problems (Brookfield, 2010).

As well as the significant interplay of "player power" through groups, active disruption from individuals is also well acknowledged in elite sports teams. For example, a former English

Premiership football player has recently detailed the strategies used by himself and his peers to engineer transfers to another team; including feigning injury, undermining the manager, fighting with team mates, withholding effort in matches, and complaining to support staff:

> At one club, I was sitting in the physio room and let it drop that I wanted to join another club. I added that I was so confident of a deal happening that I insisted I would be playing for that club the following week. Lo and behold, the manager called me in the following day and asked me to explain myself. (Savage, 2013)

As shown here, and beyond eliciting direct confrontation or resistance, the divergent agendas and subversive actions of elite performers are also manifested though more discreet channels – in this case, by sending "messages" through individuals and groups who are expected and/or keen to display loyalty to the manager by reporting back on performance-relevant information. However, while support staff members are (generally) closer to managers and PDs than performers – at least on a structural and operational level – these groups are also (partly) driven by their own personal agendas, such as adherence to the practices, standards, and ethics of their profession (e.g., psychology), their own personal progression, and their opinion on how the team should be prepared and managed (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012). Of course, these features are usually most evident (at least publicly) when the team is not delivering results and/or lacking clear leadership:

> [After I was appointed as PD], it was clear that there were steps forward that could be taken if the communication and the trust were better improved . . . . Even *within* the programme there were staff having little meetings behind other people's backs. It wasn't a cohesive, happy environment. (Olympic sport PD interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014a)

External Interactions and Interferences. Beyond the unique and challenging power dynamics inside elite sport organizations' performance departments, another key factor which

leaders need to negotiate is the interactions with, and interference from, a variety of external stakeholders. Principally, given their ultimate authority over the direction and functioning of a performance department, organizations' Boards of Directors (or oligarch owners in the case of many professional sports teams) represent one such group. However, and complicating the relationship between team management and their employer, directors (or oligarch owners) are rarely experts in elite performance (cf. Gilmore & Gilson, 2007):

> Board members very often haven't got a ******* clue about techniques and tactics. They just come to the game and watch [matches] as a [fan] . . . . [If you want to sign a player just tell them]: "He's a good defender" . . . that's all they need to ******* know! (Professional rugby team manager interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014b)

As one of elite sport's most challenging features, the necessary division of expertise between sport and business matters (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013; Gilmore & Gilson, 2007) is, however, often overlooked or blurred by Boards. It regularly seems that, compared to the complexities of their business world, directors perceive the sport challenges to be easier; a human trait related to our ability to see the complexities in what we know, but to ignore, fail to acknowledge, or just downright dismiss the complexities in someone else's world (cf. Owen & Davidson, 2009)! Indeed, borne from the apparent "simplicities" of competitive sport and the opportunities for *anyone* to have (and air) an opinion on performance – as fuelled by the regularity of fixtures/events and their coverage by the mass media – elite team managers are constantly under scrutiny:

> You have to have a sense of perspective and often owners and boards don't have [it] . . . . We've lost the first two games of the season [and Board members are already saying]: "Oh, we're going to get relegated". Whoosh, [they go] right to the future . . . . For team managers to sustain] a sense of perspective under [this] pressure is not easy .

> . . . [as] the result is in the paper, it's on the news, and it's on the television.
>
> (Professional rugby team manager interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014b)

While this quote is a British-based view, inspection of the current sacking rate of professional sports team managers around the world conveys the ubiquitous nature of Board-level short-termism. As a recent example, when Maurice Cheeks became head coach of Detroit Pistons, the organization's President asserted that "the leadership and player development qualities he brings . . . blends nicely with the roster we are building for the future . . . . [and he has] mentored some of the top young players in the NBA." Yet, after only 50 games (roughly half a season), Cheeks was sacked and the organization's owner stated: "Our record does not reflect our talent and we simply need a change . . . . This is a young team and we knew there would be growing pains, but we can be patient only as long as there is progress. (Both, 2014)

Of course, while most professional sports teams usually compete on a weekly basis, Olympic teams perform less frequently. As such, with the pressure surrounding PDs (for most sports) concentrated around a few competitive events (with differences in the pressure often related to the volume of media coverage), the reaction of top-management structures to underperformance is more sporadic but often more severe:

> We went to the Olympics and didn't do particularly well . . . and [the Board members] wanted to know why . . . . They had a big inquiry . . . . but unless you're [among the athletes and support staff you can't really determine] what went wrong . . . . A lot of the time [inquiries are led] by the people who are funding the programmes [and they inevitably just fire the leader]. But I say a lot of the time it's the [athletes] who didn't take responsibility . . . but it's difficult to say that because nobody wants to blame the [athletes]. (Olympic sport PD interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014a)

While pointing to the challenges of top-management teams who are transfixed by outcome over process (rather than outcome *plus* process), the preceding quote also alludes to a critical

paradox in elite sport organizational dynamics; expressly, that of team management needing to defend their performance programme from Board interrogation but *without* compromising their credibility *or* their relationships with often self-interested and/or fragile performers. Problematically, this quandary is often worsened by the glare of a highly critical media and public audience as well as when those "above" (i.e., the Board) and "below" (i.e., the athletes) interact directly over performance issues. For instance, after his sacking by Chelsea FC, Luiz Felipe Scolari noted: "some things are known, like the relations with the owner, who has the relationship with some players before the coach" (Murrells, 2012).

Top-management challenges in Olympic sport are at times further complicated by the involvement of external funding agencies, even though recent changes in several countries have purportedly unified the agency with which the PD must negotiate! For example, the management and support roles played by the Australian Institute of Sport or High Performance Sport New Zealand. In a British context, the growing role of UK Sport in Olympic performance systems causes many issues for PDs. Indeed, the strict and incessant outcome-orientation of this group is often a significant drain on the PD; ironic in that the PD is the individual whom this agency needs to perform at their best to optimize medal return! For example, take one PD's reflections on their UK Sport representative's negative assessment of the team not securing a medal at the 2008 Beijing Games, despite a significant increase in finalists from Athens four years earlier:

> It shouldn't be like that, these people [i.e., UK Sport representatives] need to understand [the complexities and challenges of performance] and they don't . . . . If there's no medal they think it was no good, and that was really frustrating. I was actually quite buzzing [after significantly increasing our number of finalists in Beijing] . . . what a stepping stone for London! . . . Then I come home and deal with

> some of these ***** and you're just deflated (Olympic sport PD interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014a)

As another example of the challenges of UK Sport, the pressure exerted by this agency to hit targets and employ an abundance of mechanisms and markers in an attempt to "control" outcome can also significantly interact with the perceptions and motivations of performers:

> Funding is an interesting aspect . . . . because [UK Sport] don't allow you to define a team, they talk about *athlete places* on world class funding . . . . Sometimes it can interfere with the process of [performance] review[s] because athletes will clinically strive to be on funding as opposed to striving to be the best that they can be: "I met the criteria to be on funding, I'm getting my money" . . . . It clouds the performance discussion [so that when modifications are proposed they can respond by saying] . . . . "Well, do I have to do [proposed modification] because I'm on the programme?" "No, you have to do that because you want to get better." "What happens if I don't do that? Will I come off funding?" "No you'll go slower!" (Olympic sport PD interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014a)

Beyond those operating at the strategic, policy, and administrative levels of elite sport organizations, and as suggested above, performance department leaders must also effectively manage the major challenge of a powerful media. Indeed, and emphasizing the inherent social complexity of elite sports teams and the dangers of performers' perceived (and actual) importance, the media's selective and manipulated lens can in turn trigger key modifications to the functioning of performance departments. For example, Roy Hodgson, current manager of the English football team, has openly recognized this threat to traditional social order:

> [Consider the club as a church], which is often embodied in the manager. . . . Once you get difficult players, backed up often by a sympathetic media who are happy to see the church get moved around, then it becomes very difficult. You're taking the

> power from where it should be, in the hands of someone who represents the club, the fans, the owners and the team. You're giving it to someone who may have very personal, egotistical reasons for wanting to change things. (Williams, 2012, para. 3)

Problematically, and revisiting our prior example of professional football players' attempting to initiate transfers to other teams, the media can also be *proactively* harnessed to support the realization of powerful individuals' agendas:

> When I wanted to put pressure on one manager, I arranged for a camera crew to meet me at the training ground when I knew everyone was enjoying a day off. I wanted to give the impression I was being forced to train on my own. (Savage, 2013)

Beyond the media, elite sport performance team leaders must also meet the challenges presented by fans and, more so for Olympic PDs, the general public. Certainly, these groups carry significant weight in shaping leaders' programmes, especially in professional sport:

> Your perception might be different from perceptions [of those with longer histories of involvement with the club] and . . . you've got to accept there are traditions. If you coached at [team] you would have to coach the team to play in a certain way because . . . . they're expected to play that [way] and . . . there's a demand from the spectators for you to play that certain way. (Professional rugby team manager interviewed for Cruickshank et al., 2014b)

Finally, and further alluding to the complexity within and around the elite sport performance department, a variety of other significant stakeholders are also implicated in the processes of successful leadership. Playing a lesser yet significant role in the endless construction of team values, norms, practices, and expectations, these groups are bespoke to each environment and may include, among others, national Olympic committees, service providers (e.g., institutes of sport, facility owners), sponsors, the local community, a sport's wider (non-performance) membership, and potential investors (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2014a, 2014b). Notably, and yet

again, it is those with greatest media profile and/or social standing who have the greatest opportunity to provide a distraction or interference to the leader's programme. For example, David Campese was a particularly outspoken critic of Robbie Deans' tenure as head coach of the Australian national rugby union team:

> Deans has destroyed Australian rugby and I want him to go . . . . We've got a team at the moment that can't catch and can't pass. Wallaby teams in the past were never like this. Anyone who knows anything about Australian rugby knows what it's famous for – loops, angles, switches, counter-attack, creative play. Where's all that gone? . . . He's the worst thing that has ever happened to Australian rugby. (Cleary, 2012)

Summary and Implications for Practitioner Expertise

As illuminated by the preceding overview, elite sport performance teams are socially complex and dynamic systems which rapidly generate and proliferate a plethora of significant and multifaceted challenges. Indeed, given the interaction of a range of powerful stakeholder groups, each with their own bespoke interests, agendas, and opinions (and often exaggerated by a selective and sensationalist media), establishing and then maintaining control over one's environment is an intimidating task for elite team leadership. Notably, and in contrast to the positive psychology lens used for study on the functioning of holistic elite sport organizations (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2012; Wagstaff, et al., 2013), initial work has shown that performance departments (at least) are usually politically-charged and highly contested settings (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2013). Moreover, the inherent threat of elite teams spiralling out of control when leaders fail to manage these challenging dynamics is also well-documented. For example, take an independent inquiry's report on Australia's swimming team at the 2012 Olympics:

> Situations were left to bleed with not enough follow through for fear of disrupting preparation for competition. Although few situations were truly grave in nature, they

> compounded in significance as no one reigned in control. There were enough culturally toxic incidents across . . . . to warrant a strong, collective leadership response. No such collective action was taken. (Magnay, 2013, para. 3)

Given the aforementioned contexts and challenges, a crucial implication for elite team leaders (and supporting practitioners) is the apparent need to possess a broad and politically-astute behavioral/managerial skill set. More specifically, and supported by recommendations for elite team scholars and practitioners to look beyond purely "bright and positive", pan-situational leadership theories, such as the transformational perspective (e.g., Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), the complexity of elite team settings requires a leadership approach which both embraces and manages two-way interactions, political contests, and the relentless pressure to deliver results in the short and long term. In this way, practitioners need to develop and support leaders who can do far more than apply one type of behavioral repertoire. Notably, the current (at least at the time of writing) Chelsea FC manager, Jose Mourinho, has recently revealed:

> As a manager, you are always a leader, but sometimes you can be a different kind of leader. [When I was first manager of Chelsea] I was a confrontational leader because I felt . . . the guys desperately needed to make the jump from potential to reality, and I think they needed the kind of leader I was. (Carson, 2013)

Furthermore, as internal and external stakeholders in elite team environments *always* have an opinion and the potential to pursue/actualize this opinion (or simply work against that of the management), a leader's skill in deciding what approach to take, when to deploy it, where to deploy it, who to deploy it with, and why one way instead of others on a *day-to-day*, *hour-to-hour*, *minute-to-minute* basis is further critical for personal survival and success. As such, it is on a need for elite sports team leaders to (a) negotiate the complex, dynamic, and context-specific interactions of powerful stakeholders, (b) make impactful real-time decisions, and (c)

continually reinforce and protect their programme that our following consideration of expertise in their supporting practitioners now focuses. In doing so, we highlight the key role which a "high-expertise" sport psychologist can play in helping the leader (and the team) to meet these challenges. After all, as an '"emotion expert" (cf. Gruber & Moskoswitz, 2014), the sport psychologist would seem a sensible choice for advice in this highly charged setting.

Part 2: Meeting the Challenge: How Can We Support Elite Performance Team Leaders?

Through the synopsis provided above, we hope that the multiple, varied, and complex challenges of elite sport performance team environments are obvious and well exemplified. In such an environment, and with leaders who require support beyond that available from their staff, the sport psychologist should therefore be working within a *professional judgment and decision making* model (Martindale & Collins, 2005, 2007) since it is only such an approach which enables the complexity or "shades of grey" of action to be addressed. For example, the 360-degree nature of the management challenge described in Part 1 involves an inherent balance of attention to a "pros and cons" trade off; in short, there will usually be a number of options available and the psychologist can play a crucial support role to the team leader as critical friend, neutral sounding board, and adviser on the emotional and psychosocial elements. Accordingly, a manager/PD and, therefore, also the psychologist will need to follow a constant process of "test and adjust" to ensure that the emphasis is kept optimum towards targeted goals. Indeed, and as we have already alluded to, the optimum blend for impact may well change weekly or even, in the white heat of major competition such as an Olympics or in a media-dense sport such as soccer, daily. In this way, maintaining an optimum balance for the policy-action cycle will certainly require the sport psychologist to possess a broad expertise, a strong ability to read/react to context, and strong interpersonal skills.

To enable this flexibility, coupled with the need to address the wide range of possible options, the sport psychologist therefore needs a set of specific and potentially new skills in order to work effectively. For a start, consider Schön's (1991) position on the necessity for truly effective practitioners to proactively experiment with various options. Given the development of a prerequisite trust and knowledge, the psychologist can then support a manager/PD in his/her ability to perform artistically and experiment rigorously. As one simple yet hard to achieve example, the effective psychologist must provide a sounding board and an almost virtual environment through which the manager/PD can explore the consequences and merits of different approaches. Furthermore, the psychologist must also be able to assist the manager's/PD's need to identify and develop the systems that can most effectively cope with the "swampy lowlands" of practice (Abraham & Collins, 2011; Schön, 1987). The point here is that the challenges of elite team leadership are so complex and the goalposts often so shifting and ephemeral that an incessant revision and tweaking is necessary (cf. the need for a "fox-like" style cited below). Accordingly, it is necessary that professional preparation and peer supervision encourages practitioners to continually reflect on and in action, develop a commitment to auditing one's decisions and actions, and maintain a simultaneous focus on short, medium, and long term agendas.

To be clear, the ultimate decisions and actions are the team leader's; significantly, however, s/he needs strong, insightful, and confidential advice/support so that the process and outcome can be optimal. For example, team selection is a common challenge across many sports, made even more extreme when this has to be done with an intact but closely knit group such as an Olympic squad or touring team. Suitably skilled and knowledgeable psychologists can proactively aid with the design of communication systems to which all team members commit. They can also advise on the implications of certain options (e.g. choice of substitutes) and, reactively, help to calm the strong tides of passion in non-selected

players which can threaten team efficacy. Crucially, with sufficient skill, all of this can be achieved while working within the practitioner's Code of Conduct, especially when care is taken to publicly and openly present and clarify the psychologist's role and modus operandi.

As highlighted by Martindale and Collins (2013), this role, and the evolution of expertise in fulfilling it, is further complicated by the "greyness" of decisions and the lack of objective clarity (even with 20:20 hindsight) about what was actually the "right" choice. As such, and following the recommendations of Yates and Tschirhart (2006), practitioners can use a consistent triangulation to debrief actions and build expertise for the future. Thus, for example, consider the challenge of changing team culture in attitudes towards punctuality. Manager/PD and psychologist can critically consider the quality of outcome (are players now more punctual), the logic and consistency of the actions taken (how well did we plan the stages of the change against what happened), and a more detailed consideration of how well each step was executed (e.g. how well did that team meeting go?). In fact, by the use of such methods, psychologists can help managers/PDs (and vice versa) to evaluate the impact of various options much earlier in the process, enabling the "roll with the changes" style of management and leadership which Teltock's (2005) seminal work describes as fox-like. By setting waymark outcomes (e.g. "by December, I would expect to see…"), and using pre-set case conferences (i.e., focused discussion around a critical challenge or goal), the leadership team, facilitated by the psychologist and making well informed use of objective (e.g. match analysis) and subjective (e.g. player perceptions, team gossip) data, can make goal-directed adjustments to interventions as they evolve. Indeed, this "ear to the ground" style of management is essential in the dynamic performance environment (cf. Burke, 2011); both doing and facilitating it is another key component in the psychologist's armoury.

Of course, this requires an extremely comprehensive and insightful evaluation of the presenting conditions, coupled with an open-mindedness and lack of arrogance sufficient to

negate the tendency to stick doggedly to one's original solution, even in the face of data to the contrary (i.e., leaders which Tetlock labels as "hedgehogs"). Such "fast foot work" is classically best accomplished under cover, with the manager/PD (and psychologist) presenting an almost swan like serenity as other parts work like the clappers to maintain progress! This is yet another example of how the expert psychologist can advise and support the team leader. The willingness to change direction, the timing of and method through which the changes are made, and how this is communicated to all relevant stakeholders are all elements of which the emotion expert (especially an experienced and well informed one) can advise. Indeed, in this regard the psychologist may positively interact with the team/group media officer to ensure that publicly disseminated messages are coherent and consistent with the team leaders' intentions. As such, a close affinity and good working relationship between these two important individuals is, in our experience, a common feature of leadership structures that proactively and effectively optimise the perceptions of internal and external stakeholders.

This flexible approach, what some refer to as adaptive expertise (e.g. Klein, 2009), is often associated with the multifaceted and multi-level approach to planning and execution known as *nested action* (cf. Abraham & Collins, 2011; Martindale & Collins, 2012). Via this approach, both manager/PD and psychologist can coordinate actions against short-, intermediate-, and long-term targets; for example, a practitioner may be requested to advise on a manager's need to optimize some players' performances during the current season while actively but covertly promoting them as transfer targets for other teams and recruiting replacements. As an example, consider Figure 1 which addresses the nested layers apparent in the agenda of a professional sports team manager. Specifically, any action or decision to take action must be set against short (e.g. we need the wins), medium (e.g. I need to develop

their commitment to this playing style) *and* long term (we need a secure and consistent culture) agendas *simultaneously*.

The point here is that optimum actions (for example, how sympathetic and supportive the psychologist is with a player struggling to fit the new style) must take into account both short and longer term objectives. Notably, this is an essential feature of the PJDM system proposed to underpin expert behaviour in sport psychology (Martindale & Collins, 2005, 2007, 2012, 2013). Sole attention to any one agenda (N.B. there are always inevitably more than three) will lead to a less than optimum process. Accordingly, and once again, the implication emerges that team leaders' and psychologists' action needs to be shaped to provide a decision which is coherent across team management, and which is designed and deployed as a dynamic best-fit to the demanding, high ego, high status, and self-interested individuals which often characterize elite domains (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012).

Of course, the operation of covert agendas (i.e., those which some performers and support staff are not aware of and which work against some individuals' interests) flies in the face of the more traditional view of sport psychologists as "everyone's friend". More specifically, promotion of the performance agenda may well be at the expense of some parties, an ethical dilemma which, especially if practitioners are also working with support staff and performers as well as team leaders (the usual situation in our experience), challenges some past ideas about the predominance of client welfare (cf. Andersen, 2009; Anderson, Van Raalte & Brewer, 2001). Consider, for example, the ethical dilemma presented by some of the Machiavellian, deliberately undermining performer and staff behaviors referenced in Part 1. In such circumstances, the psychologist (presumably focused on benefit for the majority) should be in a position to become aware of and address such actions, albeit that such challenge may be directly and uniquely linked to those causing the problem. It also follows, therefore, that practitioners must provide and continually reinforce

a clear understanding of their role and modus operandi to all who they consult with if ethical standards and credibility are to be sustained.

We briefly consider some of the "code of conduct" issues which such an approach inevitably raises in the next section. For the moment, however, we suggest that there will almost inevitably be times when a psychologist operating in elite sport will be required to take, or at least advise on and keep confidential, actions which may well be professionally or even personally harmful to some parties. In such an environment, maintaining client trust *and* personal integrity will, especially in the long-term, necessitate a more forthright and "straight" approach than the *chameleon* style self-interest (cf. Kilduff & Day, 1994) which is apparent to us within the world of sport, especially in the upper echelons. If not, then the psychologist may well become another of the team which follows the manager/PD from job to job, loyalty proven upwards but with genuine difficulty to establish optimal relationships with the performers. Of course, this infers the need for separate sport psychologists for management and performers. While this might appear the most convenient solution on initial inspection, it is, we suggest, somewhat impractical due to the extra resource required, an almost inevitable ego-clash between psychologists working with the different sub-groups (potentially worse than that between coaches and players!), plus the further and obfuscating subdivision of responsibility. This last dimension is particularly important, especially since our profession is already witnessing a proliferation of sub-specialists in the almost complete absence of evidence-based practice (e.g., talent scientists: Collins, Collins, MacNamara, & Jones, 2014). This is not to say that a "team of psychologists" approach will never work; indeed, the first author established such a system to cater for support across a multi-centre environment, as is increasingly common in large Olympic sport programmes. In the competitive setting, however, this approach is unlikely to work well unless practitioners are

well prepared, used to working in close harmony, *and* can disagree effectively and appropriately.

So, given that practitioners tend to work with multiple individuals at multiple layers of the team environment, and that this approach is arguably the most beneficial, we therefore see that it is sensible for us to seek more parsimonious, logical, and resource-limited solutions to the challenges of client responsibility. For example, one way through which this apparent conundrum may be solved is through an emphasis on performance-focused critical debate within and amongst staff and performers; an encouragement to spend more time in what Bowman (1998, p.9) describes as the *zone of uncomfortable debate*. This approach is certainly apparent in the working approach of many successful team leaders; for example, the former Leicester Tigers rugby manager Pat Howard (cf. MacPherson & Howard, 2011) who is now with Australian Cricket – a team which have recently been doing rather well! In short, the performance-centered world need not be a dishonest place to live. Rather, person-focused psychologists can work towards an environment where conflict is a normal and accepted part of the performer psyche, albeit that this can take quite a while to establish, especially in the ego (and financially) rich worlds which characterize many of our high performance settings. In sum, we would suggest that it is better to be straight than devious, an approach which surely resonates closely with the spirit of our codes of conduct!

Part 3: The implications – What Does this Mean for Training, Professional Development, and Expertise?

Hopefully, we present an accurate if challenging picture of the complexities of life in contemporary high performance sport. Clear implications exist, which must take the training and professional preparation of psychologists way beyond the "safe and straightforward" world of MST. As one early and clear statement, we consider it almost impossible that this level of complexity can be adequately addressed by a competency-based training. We intend

to address the weaknesses of this method elsewhere, noting its common usage in sport (Collins, Burke, Martindale & Cruickshank, 2014). For the present purpose, however, we suggest an immediate move towards more expertise-based evaluation and training as the best way to prepare psychologists for the complex challenges they face in performance sport (cf. Martindale & Collins, 2005, 2007, 2013). In short, the competency approach is just too tidy for the complexities we face; indeed, we would suggest that this is the case in any people-related (which surely equals complexity-propagating?) profession.

It is worth considering albeit briefly due to space limitations, what such an approach would look like. Useful models are already available in parallel professions such as nursing (Girot, 2000) and medical education (van der Vleuten & Schuwirth, 2005). Notably in these settings, development is driven by the practitioner's ability to make increasingly complex but balanced and rationalised decisions against realistic challenging scenarios; in short, just what we have been describing in this paper. Such a programme would firstly introduce trainees to the inherent complexity through a series of case study exemplars, with programme leaders stressing the trade-offs inherent in exploring solutions and the interactions between relevant factors. Secondly, and as a consequence, the need for various bodies of knowledge would become apparent, providing the impetus and motivation to explore these topics. This cycle would continue, with regular blocks of integration interspersed with knowledge blocks, as the trainee gained greater expertise. Parallel supervised experience would involve both observation (by and of more experienced practitioners and through peer supervision) and frequent debate in which decision making processes and outcomes would be shared and evaluated. Accreditation would occur in a similar fashion to these developmental processes, once again emphasising the "shades of grey" type solutions which should characterise all but the most basic interventions in human behaviour. The role played by such debate is crucial, enabling developing practitioners to more fully appreciate the complexities of situation and

solution. This is definitely not something which is achieved by setting requirements for a stipulated number of hours!

A second implication relates to the breadth of knowledge and experience which must be covered in professional preparation. The value of industrial/organizational psychology in performance has been highlighted throughout this paper. However, we consider this but one of several crucial skill-sets which need to be added on to the existing diet of training. As another example, the psychologist must learn enough about the coach role and methodology to enable them to advise and work with (and through) coaches in support of the athlete and team's performance. Furthermore, the psychologist requires a sound working knowledge of skill acquisition, execution, and refinement since, at least for sport, this often represents the biggest source of error in performance. In our view, the separation between sport psychology and motor control, which could arguably be traced to the late 1960s, is something which has often limited practice in applied settings. Further, the effective practitioner needs to know enough about the other sport science disciplines to be able to recognise the need for and potential benefit of such expertise, as well as the ability to develop integrated and interdisciplinary solutions. Plus, of course, all of these additional knowledge sets enable better advice and support to the leadership functions which have been the main focus of this paper.

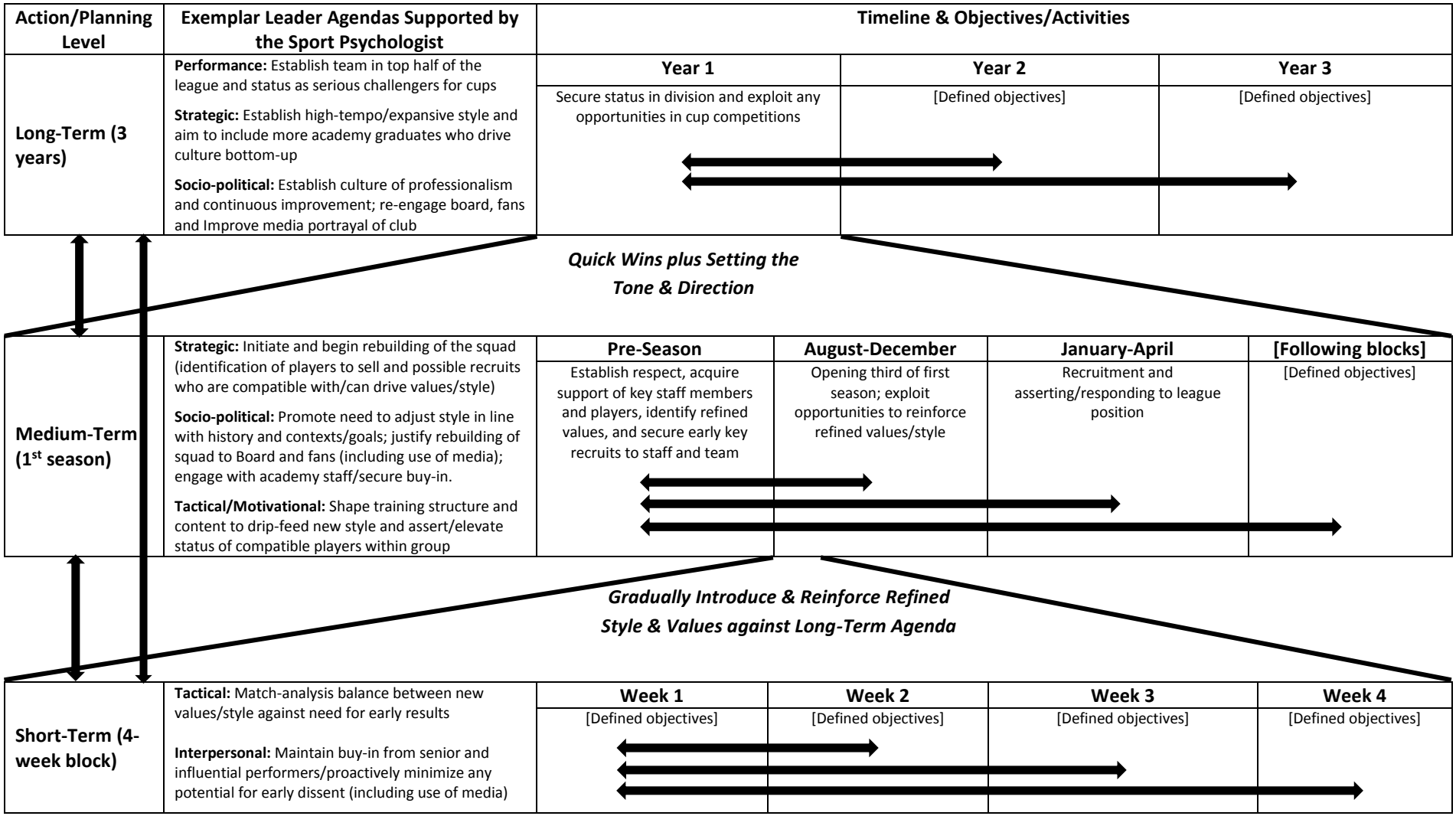
Our final point relates back to the potential ethical quandary which performance environments may generate. Consider, for example, a genuine situation from our experience. Appointed to support the members of an athletics relay team, it becomes apparent that one member is manipulating the others to preserve his/her status by constantly breaking and making alliances. Where does the psychologist's "loyalty" belong? What is his/her code of conduct responsibility to the members of the team, the coach, the Performance Director, and the overarching organization which pays his/her wages? In these dilemmas, we suggest that

the application of PJDM, together with consideration of other parallel codes (for example, the explicit and formalized waiving of a doctor's duty for client confidentiality under certain preannounced conditions: cf. Collins, Moore, Mitchell, & Alpress, 1999) can offer solutions which are both ethically robust and consistent. These sorts of challenges are quite normal, however, and should form another central part of training for those interested in working within high performance. In short, careful consideration of the pros and cons of specific options (yet again, the shades of grey argument presented above) against the specifics of role and targeted outcome should be a central part of professional preparation, particularly given the complex dilemmas which can be faced by applied practitioners. Also once again, very clear a priori discernment and constant clarification of ethical working practice will support the practitioner in what is a very delicate but essential balancing act.

Concluding Comments

In presenting the challenges of elite sport environments and the needs of performance team leaders, it is clear that the development of such high levels of expertise in supporting sport psychologists is a complex and lengthy process. Indeed, operating at this level requires much more than MST and counselling skills, as emphasised, for example, by the need for understanding in political and strategic planning practices. Practitioners with the desire to acquire and sustain expertise in this domain would therefore be wise to adopt a broad and long-term approach to their on-going development. Accordingly, pursuit of such specialist expertise should move way beyond the training and literature-based *competencies* which problematically shape (and constrain) many views over what sport psychology is, and potentially can be. In the case of meeting the performance-oriented needs of elite team leaders, we encourage practitioners to consider and work on the "additionalities" detailed within this paper; in short, if we don't do them, who will? If another psycho-socially orientated professional (e.g., a political consultant), who will inevitably hold different views

on best courses of action, what would this then mean for the extent to which leaders receive streamlined, coherent, and consistent advise? We hope that readers appreciate our slightly provocative but evidence-based stance here and throughout. As we feel there is a genuine need for debate on several of the issues which we have highlighted, this was deliberate. If only applied work was considered as publishable more often by high impact journals such as this, then progress would be further enhanced. Our thanks to the Editors and *PSE* for this opportunity.



= feed-forward and feed-back loops between nested levels; = feed-forward and feed-back loops within nested levels

Figure 1. An exemplar professional team leader's nested plan as supported by the sport psychologist.

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