The day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice: Towards a micropolitical understanding of service delivery.

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Leeds

Leeds Trinity University

School of Social and Health Sciences

March, 2022

Declaration

The candidate confirm that the work submitted is their own, except where work which has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where references has been made to the work of others.

Some of the research themes and findings presented in Chapter 4 of the thesis has appeared in publication as follows:

Haluch, P., Radcliffe, J., & Rowley, C. (2021). The Quest for Professional Self-Understanding: Sense Making and the Interpersonal Nature of Applied Sport Psychology Practice. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology.* 1-42.

I was responsible for collecting, processing, and analysing the resulting data and writing the publication. The contribution of the other authors was to help adapt written content around the corresponding themes for proposed peer-review and publication. The write up around those same themes within the thesis, however, represents my own independently produced work, and occurred separate to discussions around the structure and focus of the corresponding paper.

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Acknowledgements

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the Leeds Trinity University funding opportunity to undertake my studies at the School of Social and Health Sciences. I would like to express my deepest gratitude for allowing me the privilege to continue my education to the level that I never let myself dream of when I was growing up. Throughout the past years of my PhD journey at Leeds Trinity University, I worked with many fantastic people who continually provided guidance and moral and intellectual support that allowed me to grow as a researcher, practitioner, educator, and a person. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to them.

First, I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Chris Rowley and Dr Jon Radcliffe. Your enthusiasm and passion for research investigating everyday realities of sport psychology practice were highly motivational and fuelled my perseverance in the PhD pursuit. While this journey has certainly challenged me at times along the way, I have really enjoyed working with you. Without your patience, consideration, and continued support, I would not have reached the conclusion that I wanted.

My sincere thanks go to the Research Office team, Professor Graham Roberts, Dr John Rule, and Elaine Brook for supporting my professional development and the provision of training opportunities. In particular, I would like to thank the Director of Postgraduate Research Professor Martin Barwood, I genuinely appreciated your assistance and guidance in dealing with encountered challenges.

Thanks should also go to Dr Tom St Quinton for being an excellent office buddy. The patience and time invested in listening to me grapple, and providing a space to vent my frustrations cannot be overestimated. Despite being at different stages, I am grateful we could share part of the PhD journey together, it definitely made my experience more enjoyable.

Special appreciation also goes to my parents, Krystyna and Tadeusz, for your patience, understanding, motivation and encouragement throughout this PhD journey. Your continued support in my life choices, words of wisdom and unconditional love allowed me to believe that I can achieve whatever I set my mind to, something which I will forever be grateful for. While I know that you would like to have me closer to home, I hope this thesis makes the time apart worthwhile and somehow makes you proud.

Next, I would like to thank my partner, Francisca, for dealing with my numerous hours in front of the computer. I realise that this process has been challenging and I would like to express my most profound appreciation of the space that you gave me in the evenings and weekends to study, think and grow. You have been a tremendous support to me and my efforts to complete my training as well as this thesis.

Finally, I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to the participants for giving their time to this thesis and their honesty throughout the interviews. Without your openness and willingness to share lived experiences of applied practice, there would be nothing to report. As such, I would like to take the opportunity in acknowledging your contributions in helping advance knowledge within the sport psychology literature base, and supporting the next generation of applied practitioners in understanding the day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice.

Abstract

The reflective accounts produced within sport psychology literature helped to reveal some of the dilemmas, complexities and nuances of service delivery (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsey et al., 2007; Rowley et al., 2012), with limited attention given to the social-political dynamics of everyday life within sporting settings (e.g., Rowley et al., 2018). Despite the welcomed contributions of such publications, it needs to be acknowledged that the majority of accounts of practice have been produced by neophyte practitioners operating within a single setting, providing an overview of practice from one perspective. Therefore, there remains a lack of empirical research directly investigating how multiple practitioners, embedded in a range of settings, interpret interpersonal interactions that they experience in their work and how they attempt to navigate everyday challenges. Accordingly, this thesis provides an insight into the micropolitical challenges faced by two early-career practitioners in the initial stages of the accreditation process, three early-career practitioners in the final stage of the accreditation process, and two experienced practitioners who have both been registered with Health and Care Professional Council for over eight years. The practitioners sampled within the present thesis provided a fascinating insight into the realities of practice across several Olympic and Paralympic sports, including youth (e.g., football academies, pathway programmes) and senior levels. Data for this thesis were collected through a longitudinal series of repeated semi-structured interviews with each practitioner across an eighteen-month period. Four interrelated superordinate themes of *finding one's place, reality shock, experiential learning* and *forging positive relationships* were constructed across practitioners' career stories through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, (Smith et al., 2009) and were principally understood in relation to Kelchtermans (e.g., Kelchtermans 2005; 2009a, 2009b, 2011; 2018; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) work regarding micropolitics and a professional's personal interpretative framework, as well as Goffman's (1959, 1969) conceptualisation of impression management. The reflective accounts provided by practitioners illuminated the inherent structural vulnerability of their applied contexts, and the significance of professional self-understanding in informing their interpersonal interactions with significant contextual stakeholders. As such, the present thesis demonstrated that applied sport psychologists had to develop micropolitical literacy (Kelchtermans 2005; 2009a, 2009b) in order to protect and advance their respective careers, but also to negotiate their encountered working conditions to fulfil their deeply held normative beliefs regarding their role. Therefore, the present thesis' findings can stimulate further debate and discussion among academic and professional accreditation bodies regarding sport psychologists' education and training, suggesting that programmes of study and training must begin to consider micropolitics and its importance in practitioners' ability to survive and thrive in their applied careers.

Abbreviations

AAASP	Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology
BASES	British Association of Sport and Exercise Science
BPS	British Psychology Society
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DSEP	Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology
FP	Foundation Phase
GBC	Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership
HCPC	Health and Care Professional Council
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
NGB	National Governing Bodies
PDP	Professional Development Phase
PST	Psychological Skills Training
SEPAR	Sport and Exercise Psychology Accreditation Route
YDP	Youth Development Phase

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis, outlining how the research questions for the thesis emerged, providing a rationale for the thesis, outlining its aims and objectives and explaining the approach to research adopted throughout. The concluding sections provide an overview of the structure of the thesis and the synopsis of each section.

1.2. My own lived experience: A catalyst for enquiry

The development of the present thesis' rationale has been a relatively lengthy process that took over a year. It began when I was a trainee sport psychologist and started working in my first professional sport psychology role. During my Master's programme in sport psychology, I secured a part-time position at a professional football academy providing sport psychology support to players, coaches, and parents. Such positions at that time were rare, and I considered myself lucky to obtain a paid role just one year after completing my undergraduate degree. Despite developing a successful coaching background and holding a full-time coaching role at a Premier League club, I decided to move to a new city in the pursuit of a career that started to emerge as my true passion. While coaching provided me with an opportunity to support people in their efforts of achieving performance excellence, I recognised that psychological factors often played a vital role in meeting the demands of professional sport. As such, I felt that a role in sport psychology would provide me with an opportunity to have the most meaningful impact on athletes' overall development and personal growth.

Upon entering the role within applied sport psychology, I looked to transfer my knowledge and understanding of psychological theories and therapies into an effective provision of training, supervision, and consultation to develop players' mental skills, resilience, well-being and high-performance. In my consultation, I used a mixed approach of humanistic and cognitive behavioural psychology (Hill, 2001) to enhance players' abilities to control potentially stressful situations. Also, I focused on supporting players in identifying their strengths and performing to the maximum of their potential. Whilst I gave a lot of attention to the development of the philosophical underpinnings of my practice, I also felt that I understood the environment of elite football and organisational demands of these settings. Indeed, before my role as a trainee sport psychologist, I spent several years at a professional football academy both as a player and later as a coach. Therefore, while acknowledging that each context is different, I felt that I possessed the requisite knowledge required in my new role at the football academy.

Considering the above, and potentially the fact that my first applied experience came at an older age compared to most trainee sport psychologists, I felt confident in my abilities to meet the demands of my new role. However, despite my prior experiences, I quickly became overwhelmed by the realities of applied service delivery. Indeed, I felt unprepared to discuss the psychological aspects of performance while working with highly skilled players and coaches. Each time when I was asked a question I experienced a sense of uncertainty and I doubted my ability to provide a concise and clear answer. While I felt confident in my knowledge and understanding of sport psychology theory, I struggled to engage in conversations with stakeholders who seemed to expect quick and effective solutions to the problems they were experiencing in their role. Therefore, similar to other early career practitioners who documented their experiences within

sport psychology literature (e.g., Cropley et al., 2007; Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsey et al., 2007; Rowley et al., 2012; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock et al., 2008) I struggled to transition from the classroom-based environment to real-life relationships within a workplace.

My insecurities were further aggravated by a range of stakeholders I was required to communicate with. Indeed, while entering a large organisation for the first time I was required to work across all departments, overseeing the implementation of sport psychology throughout the whole academy setting. As such, I was tasked to engage in a wide range of discussions with stakeholders from different backgrounds who held various levels of understanding and buy-in toward sport psychology. Also, while trying to operate within this complex environment, I quickly recognised several interpersonal and role-related conflicts between various members of staff. When seeking to work across all age groups, it seemed as though each phase of player development (i.e., Foundation Phase (FP), Youth Development Phase (YDP), and Professional Development Phase (PDP)) possessed their own unique and diverse approaches to coaching methodology. Such a divide in the approach to player development was particularly evident in the working relationship between coaches, who often disagreed on player's proposed progression pathways.

Although several instances of conflict within this setting informed my choice of research topic, one particularly stands out. As part of my role, I was required to work with the coaches to develop their understanding of sport psychology principles and how they could utilise them within their work with the players. While I was trying to support such development during the discussions after training sessions and matches, I felt that it would be beneficial to deliver educational workshops as part of coaches' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes. However, when trying to arrange such training, I faced a range of unanticipated challenges. Due to contradictions between the staff members from different phases, I struggled to integrate all coaches into the educational process. The full-time coaches within the PDP delivered their sessions in the morning, while the rest of the coaches worked in the evening. Due to such differences in scheduling, the coaches could not agree on the most suitable time to attend the workshop. Next, while attempting to deliver three separate workshops for each phase, I faced a challenge with the part-time coaches, who had an hourly contract and wanted to be paid for extra activities. Despite discussing the issue with the academy manager on several occasions and asking for their support, no action regarding additional payments for part-time coaches was taken, and I could not deliver the planned sessions. As a result, an issue of organisational functionality and timetabling turned into a contested situation where each group of stakeholders looked to put their interests first. The full-time coaches were reluctant to dedicate any additional time to the workshop or to attend in the evening outside their usual working hours, the part-time coaches wanted to be paid for any additional activities outside their scheduled hours, and the academy manager wanted to avoid making unpopular decisions. Also, when discussing the possibility of additional payments for part-time coaches with the academy manager, it became evident that such a decision was the chief executive officer's responsibility, who was working towards reducing academy budget. As such, the academy manager did not want to put themselves in an uncomfortable position by asking for additional funds.

Whilst this situation put me under pressure to meet the requirement of my role and achieve my Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), it also illuminated some of the challenges related to interpersonal interactions within sporting organisations. Indeed, the experiences just outlined allowed me to recognise the impact that

stakeholders who coexist within a particular environment could have on the role of a sport psychologist (McDougall et al., 2015). Also, I learned to understand how interpersonal interactions within the context I practice in could influence the delivery, place and function of sport psychology (McDougall et al., 2015). Undoubtedly, my interactions with a range of stakeholders as well as wider interpersonal interactions within the environment tested my ability to effectively operate within this setting. Therefore, reflecting on my practice during that challenging period, I realised that to meet the objectives of my role, I was required to deal with interdepartmental issues and conflicts of interest, which required further development of my ability to effectively communicate with different stakeholders. Also, I recognised that while I needed to ensure a greater buy-in into services that I proposed, I was also required to understand stakeholders' interest.

My own practical experiences, therefore, reiterated the findings reported in sport psychology literature. Indeed, scholars recognised that applied sport psychologist may often find themselves in settings prone to competition and conflict between stakeholders (Reid et al., 2004), illuminating the significance of interpersonal interactions with various stakeholders in applied practice (Eubank et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Reid et al., 2004). However, despite such findings at the time of my initial experiences, there was a lack of understanding of how practitioners could act in their interactions with significant others to survive and thrive in their role (McDougall et al., 2015). As such, the initial drive for the present thesis was partly personal, as I wanted to develop a better understanding of the milieu of the sporting organisations, I hoped to work in. More specifically, I aspired to enhance my practice and ability to better translate the importance of my role and sport psychology more broadly to a range of stakeholders I was working alongside. However, I also wanted to create a critical understanding of where, when, and how practitioners operating within the elite sporting environments should use their personal qualities to meet such organisational demands. By doing this, I hoped to enhance the knowledge base within sport psychology literature and contribute towards enhancing practitioners' ability to better overcome the challenges of working with a wide array of people.

1.3. Adopting a Micropolitical lens

To better understand the day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice, I identified micropolitics as being an area that may provide greater insight into the sport psychologists' role and responsibilities within elite sports environments. According to Leftwhich (2005), politics is a universal feature of human behaviour that occurs whenever two or more human beings are involved in collective action. Therefore, politics has been described as interactive ingredients of people (who often have different ideas and beliefs), resources (which may include money and opportunities), and power (which may be an ability of an individual always to get things done their way) (Leftwhich, 2005). The political interaction between social agents and different organisations such as schools, companies and sports clubs have been described as micropolitics (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Blase & Blase, 2002). Although no conclusive definition of micropolitics has been developed, the most frequently used has been proposed by Blase (1991):

> "Micro-politics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with a motivation to use power and influence and/

> or to protect…. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micro-politics [while] the macro and the micro frequently interact". (p. 11)

Accordingly to Blase (1991) micropolitical activity becomes evident in a range of forms: talking, pleading, gossiping, being silent, avoiding taking sides and the use of humour. These political strategies have been presented on a continuum of reactive and proactive strategies (Blase, 1991). More specifically, reactive strategies were described as actions aimed at maintaining the situation and protecting against external influences, whereas proactive strategies were identified as actions aimed at improving the situation and working conditions within the organisation (Blase, 1991). However, it needs to be highlighted that while Blase (1991) provided a fascinating description of micropolitical actions, they also concluded that "a simple inventory or list, summing up micropolitical strategies and actions, is not relevant, and probably not even possible, because almost any action can become micropoliticially meaningful in a particular context (Blase, 1991, p.11).

Educational research identified micropolitics as a fundamental dimension of teachers' personal development, describing it as competence to understand the issues of power and interest within schools (Hargreaves, 1995; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b). Also, researchers engaged in a study of micropolitics in school focused their investigative efforts on understanding the interpersonal negotiations, collaborations, and conflicts that comprise everyday organisational life. Significant attention was given to individuals' beliefs around effective teaching and the desired conditions for teachers to carry out their tasks effectively. For instance, building on the work of Blase (1991), Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) identified 'professional interests' as a central aspect of the micropolitical theory. From such a perspective the nature and quality of the relations between different members of a school team were identified as a professional interest. To further understand teachers' sense-making of daily experiences and interaction, Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) introduced the notion of 'professional interpretative framework', which functions as a personal system of knowledge and beliefs through which teachers decide on how to act in their job.

Scholars within sports coaching literature also demonstrated an increased interest to explore the political and complex realities of the working lives of coaches within sporting organisations (e.g., Jones, et al., 2004). Much of the work in this area has been theoretically informed by a micropolitical perspective that served as a lens to better understand how coaches interpret the situations they find themselves in and how this interpretation influences their further actions (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Thompson et al., 2015). Central to scholars' efforts to make sense of coaches' actions within a sporting organisation was the concept of 'professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). These interests, in turn, were identified as a source of cooperation and/or conflict between stakeholders within the organisation, where coaches might use sources of power and influence to further their interests (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Thompson et al., 2015).

Despite the apparent significance of micropolitics within an organisation's functioning, at the stage when the present research was developed, investigations into micropolitics within sport psychology practice were absent from the literature. Given that coaches and sport psychologists practice within the same high-performance contexts, an inquiry aimed to recognise and theorise the micropolitical complexity of sports psychology provision within sporting organisations was identified to address an apparent gap in knowledge.

Moreover, it was concluded that such an analysis of applied practice could increase an understanding of aspects previously taken for granted, mainly where issues of people, resources and power are in question. Therefore, such an investigation was identified as a source of fruitful findings leading to a greater understanding of the milieu of the sporting organisations. In particular, a micropolitical inquiry into the day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice was identified as an approach to enhance an understanding of how practitioners perceive stakeholders' interest, beliefs and opinions, and how they deal with conflict within their applied settings.

1.4. Approach

Upon recognising the significance of investigating the milieu of the sporting organisations from a micropolitical perspective, an autoethnographic style of inquiry (Ellis, 2004) was considered as an approach that held a potential for exploring the interactions between the practitioner/researcher and a social world. Indeed, in an overview of autoethnography, Ellis (2004) described it as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experiences (auto) to understand cultural experiences (ethno). Consequently, I considered that by employing this inquiry style, I would be able to write in a self-consciously value-centred way rather than pretending to be value-free (Bochner, 1994). I believed that such an approach would allow me to produce meaningful research grounded in personal experiences, accommodate subjectivity, emotionality, and have an influence on research (Ellis et al., 2011). Also, autoethnographic research held the potential to present me as subjective or personal while simultaneously objective and public (Church, 1995). Indeed, Church (1995) argued: "I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voice of other people. Writing about myself is a way of writing about these others and about the worlds which we create/inhabit…. Because my subjectivity is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic" (1995, p. 5). Such an inquiry, therefore, was explored as a possibility to present detailed narratives of my lived experiences of interactions with a range of contextual stakeholders, connecting them with social science theories to provide "a more accurate and meaningful framework for understanding" phenomena (Anderson, 2006, p. 379).

However, while the autoethnography was explored as an approach that held a potential for developing a greater understanding of the micropolitical complexity of sports psychology provision, such an inquiry would replicate the methodological approach adopted by previous research exploring the dilemmas, complexities and nuances of service delivery (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsey et al., 2007; Rowley et al., 2012). Instead, I recognised that the significance of the present thesis laid in exploring the day-to-day realities of applied practice from a range of practitioners' perspectives. In particular, an investigation into a range of lived experiences was identified as a significant methodological strength that would allow for a more in depth understanding of the phenomena. Indeed, such an approach would allow to move past the exploration of practitioners' experiences embedded within a single setting. I realised that to contribute towards the growth of the discipline I was required to explore practitioners' experiences of working within a range of sporting contexts. I recognised that by capturing multiple experiences I would be better positioned to understand workplace environments more broadly, developing a greater awareness of how different practitioners deal with the demands of operating within the elite sporting context. Also, by acknowledging that practitioners professional practice evolves after completing postgraduate studies (Tod et al., 2011), I looked to conduct an inquiry investigating practitioners of varying levels of experience, ranging from

trainees to at least five years of experience. Indeed, I recognised that an exploration of interpersonal relations from practitioners' perspective at a different stage of their careers held the potential for identifying likely developmental changes. Such line of inquiry, therefore, was identified to address a lack of scholarly work regarding practitioners' interactions with a range of contextual stakeholders and better prepare future practitioners to deal with contested aspects of sport psychology consultancy (McDougall et al., 2015).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith et al., 2009) was identified as an approach that would allow me to gain insight into applied sport psychology practice experiences. First, IPA's philosophical underpinnings were consistent with the epistemological stands of the research I was looking to conduct. Thus, IPA enabled me to put the participants at the heart of the inquiry and focus on developing an understanding of their experiences of interpersonal interactions in a specific context (Smith et al., 2009). The adaptation of IPA captured participants' lived experiences of the phenomena within a social and cultural context and explored them through an inductive process of sense-making. This allowed more significant attention to be paid to participants experiences of relationship process and contested situations. Therefore, I developed an insider perspective of the experiences in question (Larkin et al., 2006). Simultaneously, IPA allowed me to acknowledge my fore-understandings and assumptions regarding goal diversity and opposing beliefs within a sporting context and to identify my own experiences as an important component of the research process (Smith et al., 2009).

Secondly, the idiographic nature of the IPA allowed for detailed examination of each case. This was aligned with the research objective of investigating a range of contextual, situational, and experiential factors within applied practice. Thus, an IPA approach within my thesis enabled me to give voice to each independent participant. This, in turn, allowed for a detailed examination of each participants' career stories and enhanced an understanding of individual personal experiences, perceptions or accounts of an object or event (Smith & Osborn, 2008). As a result, IPA provided scope for capturing the subjective sense of particular experiences, while also allowing to move from a single case to more general statements that can be compared amongst a wider group of participants (Smith et al., 2009). This was particularly relevant in the present research as the IPA procedures allowed for the synthesis of multiple analyses of single cases. As a result, the current research developed detailed analysis between the cases and produced greater insight into participants' experiences and perceptions.

Thirdly, the objective of the present thesis was to develop an understanding of more tacit elements of service delivery (Martens, 1987). Therefore, the IPA's double hermeneutic process was another significant factor influencing the method's choice. This two-stage interpretation process allows the participants to make sense of the phenomenon by explaining and interpreting their own experiences. Therefore, IPA's adaptation encouraged participants to engage in meaning-making via questioning, uncovering meaning, and further exploring (Cassidy et al., 2011). As a result, participants were provided with a reflective space during the data collection process to make sense of their own experiences and perceptions regarding their interactions with contextual stakeholders. In turn, I adopted hermeneutics of empathy to emphasise with participant trying to grasp the things itself and hermeneutics of suspicion to interpret participants' sense-making from a different perspective (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, IPA selection allowed me to understand what it is like, from the participants' viewpoints, by taking their side (Smith & Osborn, 2008), and engaging in critical questioning of the text (e.g., "What is the person trying to achieve here? Is something leaking out here that

was intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that may be the participants themselves are less aware of?") (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Consequently, I concluded that the IPA choice would allow me to better understand an experience of working alongside a wide range of individuals and discover these experiences' tacit dimensions.

Upon identifying IPA as the most suitable approach for the present thesis, I also acknowledged and addressed this method's limitations. Indeed, it was suggested that over-reliance on language in the data collection process, "constructs, rather than, describes reality" (Willig, 2013, p. 94). This implies that the words used to describe an experience, construct a version of that experience rather than giving a full expression of that experience (Willig, 2013). As a result, language can never provide direct access to someone else's experiences. We can only develop our understanding of how someone talks about their experience rather than the experience itself (Willig, 2013). While acknowledging Willig's (2013) critique, I adopted a perspective that recognised a direct relationship with how people talk and their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Indeed, Eatough and Smith (2008) suggested that IPA holds the potential for unravelling the relationship between what people think (cognition), say (account) and do (behaviour). From such a perspective, Eatough and Smith (2008) argued that when people are deliberating about significant events in their lives, "this thinking is an aspect of 'being-in-the-world' and not simply detached disembodied cognitive activity" (p. 20). Also, to encourage participants to express their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and reflections regarding realities of organisational life, I utilised additional prompting and probing questions. As a result, I achieved greater insight into how participants made sense of their experiences within applied settings.

Secondly, IPA's objective is to develop a better understanding of how the world appears to participants. However, it has been suggested that this approach allows only for a detailed description of participants' experiences without understanding why such experience takes place (Willig, 2013). As a result, this "exclusive focus on appearances" (Willig, 2013, p. 95) provides only a limited understanding of the phenomena. Thus, while acknowledging such potential limitations, I gave greater attention to understanding the cause or origin of experiences (Willig, 2013, p. 95). More specifically, I focused on exploring past events, histories, beliefs, values, and future perspectives of participants and moved beyond understanding experiences at a particular moment and location.

1.5. Aim of the thesis

Eubank and colleagues (2014) concluded that in order to "survive and thrive" (p. 32), sport psychology practitioners required far greater abilities than just domain-specific competence in ethics, consultancy, education, and research as developed through the completion of their professional training and accreditation programmes. Amongst other skills, it was suggested that practitioners needed to understand the sporting environment they are working in, the organisational aims, and the working practices of the key stakeholders (Eubank et al., 2014). While it was concluded that current professional training for sports psychologists allowed for the development of a robust theoretical platform, neophyte sports psychology practitioners were found to be less aware and prepared to work in high-performance environments (Eubank et al., 2014). Therefore, the aims of the present thesis are two-fold. Firstly, the present thesis aims to explore applied sport psychologists' subjective understanding of workplace interactions and relationships in a range

of different settings (e.g., professional football academies and several Olympic and Paralympic sports) and across varying levels of practitioner experience. Significant attention is given to exploring practitioners' perceptions and understandings of working relationships with key contextual stakeholders (e.g., coaches, managers, performance directors) in their respective applied contexts. Secondly, the present thesis looks to seek an in-depth understanding of how applied sport psychologists develop an ability to navigate and manage the many and varied dilemmas encountered in practice. To achieve this, the present thesis adopted a longitudinal approach to data collection, using multiple semi-structured interviews to explore the following research questions:

A) What contextual and situational factors are perceived to impact the actions and understandings of applied sport psychologists?

B) How do sport psychologists experience their interactions and relationships with key contextual stakeholders in their applied settings?

1.6. Organisation of the thesis

The present thesis is divided into six individual chapters, which comprise four main sections. The first part consists of two chapters which seek to sets the scene for the thesis by providing an overview of the relevant literature regarding the structural, theoretical, and methodological underpinnings. More specifically Chapter 2: Literature Review looks to contextualise the thesis within the existing knowledge base while Chapter 3: Methodology presents the rationale for the selected methodological approach to data collection and analysis. Part Two is concerned with presenting participants' sense-making of their lived experiences. This section includes of Chapter 4: Results that illustrates participants' career journeys until the final interview within the present thesis. Part Three provides an interpretation of the practitioners' career story from a perspective of micropolitical analysis. More specifically, Chapter 5: Discussion provides theoretical analysis and interpretations of participants' lived experiences. Finally, Part Four, including the final chapter of the present thesis Chapter 6: Conclusion, provides an evaluation of the thesis and makes recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The objective of the present chapter is to contextualise the thesis within the existing knowledge base. The chapter begins with an overview of sport psychology history, with significant attention given to the emergence of an applied practice literature and accreditation process of becoming a sport psychologist. Next, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of previous work regarding the necessary characteristics, qualities and competencies required for an effective sport psychology provision; the potential challenges of applied sport psychology practice; and factors influencing practitioners' ability to survive and thrive within their applied settings. Finally, by drawing on research in education and sport coaching, the concluding section looks to strengthen the rationale of adopting micropolitical perspective within this thesis.

2.2. A brief overview of the history of sport psychology

Sport psychology first emerged as an identifiable field of study in the late 1960s when research programmes, graduate courses, specialised organisations, and publications started to advance (Gill & Williams, 2008). However, the early development of sport psychology goes back as far as 1895 (Gill & Williams, 2008). During this period, professionals in psychology and physical education began to investigate how motor skills are learned and controlled (Gill & Williams, 2008). Several noteworthy psychologists and physicians started to set up sport psychology laboratories and devoted their careers to studying the area. More systematic lines of research, presentations, and publications began to emerge. For example, Coleman Griffith published two classic books, 'Psychology of Coaching' (1926) and 'Psychology of Athletics' (1928), and approximately 25 studies on motor learning, personality, and character.

During the early years, scholars' primary goal was to provide objective findings to advance knowledge of sport psychology principles and gain scientific acceptance (Williams & Krane, 2015). Research was characterised by a concern with applying the rigid rules of science and embracing the accepted scientific paradigm (Vealey, 2006). Studies were carried out in laboratories in unique and artificial environments to establish systematic control and manipulate variables (Martens, 1979; 1987; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). Accordingly, scholars employed quantification, standardisation, and nomothetic measures of human experiences (Martens, 1987). Such line of inquiry served as a primary foundation for the sport psychology knowledge base and allowed to achieve scientific credibility for the discipline (Vealey, 2006).

However, as the field continued to develop, sport psychology scholars started to question the external validity and generalisability of laboratory experimentation in investigating human behaviour (e.g., Dishman, 1983; Greenspan & Feltz, 1989; Martens, 1979, 1987). For example, in their 1979 article, 'About Smocks and Jocks', Rainer Martens expressed doubts about the utility of laboratory research for sport's personnel and social world. Martens (1979) argued that the sample populations used in laboratory research often failed to represent those for whom the research was designed to house implications. The environment created in laboratories could not recreate the richness of social situations, and the validity of laboratory studies was limited to predicting behaviour in the laboratory setting (Martens, 1979). Finally, studies carried out in the laboratory often imposed a directional model of causality. As a result, Martens (1979) suggested that sport psychology scholars should spend more time investigating the complexities of human thoughts, feelings, and actions in the sport contexts.

Accordingly, research in sport psychology during the 1970s and 1980s switched from laboratory to field settings (Martens, 1987). Scholars started to observe people's behaviour in the real world of sport and increased their interest in applied aspects of sport psychology (Martens, 1987). As a result of such developments, sport psychology researchers started to investigate the effectiveness of mental interventions on helping athletes cope with the demands of sporting competitions (Gill & Williams, 2008; Harris & Harris, 1984; Martens, 1987; Vealey, 2006; Williams & Krane, 2015). For example, in 1972, Richard Suinn published one of the first intervention studies assessing mental skills effectiveness on elite skiers' race performances (Vealey, 2007). During this period, therefore, mental skills training became a primary focus of research (Vealey, 2007). The term Psychological Skills Training (PST) was employed to describe the strategies that practitioners could use to teach or enhance mental skills that facilitate performance and a positive approach to sport competition (Vealey, 2007). These areas included behaviour modification, cognitive theory and therapy, rational emotive therapy, goal setting, attention control, progressive muscle relaxation, and systematic desensitisation (Vealey, 2006; 2007). For example, imagery, relaxation, and self-talk were identified as effective techniques that could help athletes to cope with competitive stress, facilitate attentional control, and enhance self-confidence (Gill & Williams, 2008; Vealey, 2006; 2007; Williams & Krane, 2015).

As a result of an increased interest in sport psychology applied aspects, the discipline experienced a tremendous growth during the 1980s and 1990s (Anderson et al., 2004; Gould et al., 1991). The literature on the use of psychological skills became rapidly available, with numerous published books outlining various PST approaches (e.g., Harris & Harris, 1984; Nideffer, 1985; Orlick, 1986), and the benefits of PST being widely reported (cf. Vealey, 2007; Weinberg & Gould, 2007). For example, a range of comprehensive reviews demonstrated the effectiveness of PST in enhancing athlete's performance (e.g., Brown & Fletcher, 2017; Greenspan & Feltz, 1989; Martin et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2005; Vealey, 1994; Weinberg & Comar, 1994). This accumulated body of research demonstrating the effectiveness of mental skills interventions increased the acceptance of sport psychology, with the importance of psychological skills becoming acknowledged by professional and world-class amateur athletes (Barker & Winter, 2014). Indeed, in the 1980s applied sport psychology witnessed a growth of interest in professional practice (Meyers et al., 2001). An increased number of sport psychology professionals started to work directly with athletes and coaches. Sport psychology practitioners began to be hired to work with professional sport organisations, national sport organisations and universities (Murphy, 1995). For example, the United States Olympic team employed a full-time sport psychologist to help athletes prepare for the 1984 Olympic Games (Murphy, 1995). Similar practices were also adopted in Eastern Bloc countries, including East Germany and Romania (Vealey, 2007; Williams & Straub, 2010).

With an increasing interest in applied sport psychology, some of the most critical questions confronting the field in the 1980s included: "Who is a sport psychologist? What defines a quality graduate-level program in sport psychology? What competencies should a sport psychologist possess?" (Silva, 1989, p. 162). Such questions led to the development of a registry for the provision of sport psychology services by the United States Olympic Committee in 1983 and the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) in 1985. Moreover, applied journals were formed in the United States (i.e., 'The Sport Psychologist' in 1987 and the 'Journal of Applied Sport Psychology' in 1989). In the United Kingdom, the

British Association of Sport and Exercise Science (BASES) implemented a register of professional sport psychologists in 1992, whereas in 1993 the British Psychology Society (BPS) established a Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology (DSEP) within the society.

The forming societies began to develop a process for certifying sport psychologist and establishing qualifications necessary for providing sport psychology services for athletes (Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Schinke et al., 2016). In the early 1990s, the AAASP developed a certification programme for sport psychology consultants in the United States, whereas BPS and BASES developed accreditation process for becoming a sport psychologist in the United Kingdom. As a result of such developments, the aspiring sport psychologists were required to obtain a minimum level of training and experience in applied practice (Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Hutter et al., 2017; Jooste et al., 2016; McEwan & Tod, 2015). The establishment of sport psychologists' registry and certification was reflected in a significant increase in the overall number of practitioners (Roper, 2002). For example, in the first five years since its formation, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology included over 600 sport psychology professionals (Gould et al., 1991).

The growing emphasis on professional practice in the early 1990s (Wrisberg & Dzikus, 2016) and the recognition of practitioners that do sport psychology (Andersen, 2000; Portenga et al., 2011) led to a greater acknowledgement of applied sport psychology as a full sub-discipline of sport psychology (Petrie & Diehl, 1995). Terms such as the application of sport psychology (Silva et al., 1999), doing sport psychology (Andersen, 2000) or the practice of sport psychology (Silva et al., 2007) started to be use more widely, and applied sport psychology began to develop as a specialised area that required specific knowledge and skills, ethical standards, and an understanding of the limits of current techniques (Winter & Collins, 2016). Indeed, in the United States, the American Psychological Association Division 47, Exercise and Sport Psychology was established in 1986 to offer a forum for exchanging information about the practice of sport psychology. In Europe, the field of applied sport psychology received its recognition when, in 1995, the European Federation for Psychology of Sport and Activity recognised that application, together with education and research, was one of the three interrelated tasks of sport psychologists (Wylleman et al., 2009).

The growing recognition of professional practice significantly influenced research within the discipline in the late 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (Wylleman et al., 2009). For instance, significant attention was given to identifying the characteristics and qualities of an effective sport psychology practitioners (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Gould et al., 1991; Lubker et al., 2008; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987). Such line of inquiry highlighted the importance of practitioners' personal qualities and interpersonal skills. Partington and Orlick (1987) and Orlick and Partington (1987) reported that Canadian Olympic coaches and athletes emphasised the significance of liking the consultant as a human being and relating to them quickly and easily. The 'best' consultants were described as easy to get along with, and good listeners. Gould et al. (1991) surveyed United States Olympic sport psychology consultants, sport science and medicine administrators, national team coaches, and athletes from various Olympic sports, who reported that effective consultants fitted well in the team, were perceived as trustworthy and had a positive-constructive attitude. Finally, Anderson et al. (2004) interviewed elite female and male United Kingdom athletes from a range of individual and team sports (e.g., rowing, netball, archery, hockey) who valued a sport psychologist who was friendly, easy-going, fun, and who they could identify with and relate to.

Athletes emphasised that they enjoyed working with someone who was a nice and positive person. Also, these athletes emphasised the importance of communication skills, explaining that they appreciated someone who was straight-talking and trustworthy. More specifically, effective sport psychologists were identified as someone with good listening skills. Athletes also reported that they valued someone they could easily talk to and benefited from off-loading their concerns whenever needed (Anderson et al., 2004).

The personality-related qualities and personal skills needed by practitioners in contemporary practice were further highlighted within research focused on understanding the competencies required in applied sport psychology practice (e.g., Jooste et al., 2016; Tenenbaum et al., 2003). Taking the lead from the mainstream psychology, scholars in sport psychology defined professional competence as "the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served" (Epstein & Hundert, 2002 as cited in Fletcher & Maher, 2014, p. 171). As such, Tenenbaum and colleagues (2003) suggested that sport psychologists needed to develop personal skills (e.g., communication skills, conflict resolution, ability to develop interpersonal relationships) to work effectively with a range of clients (e.g., athlete, coach, other professionals) (Tenenbaum et al., 2003). More specifically, interpersonal skills and ability to "relate effectively and meaningfully with individuals, groups, and/or communities" (Fouad et al., 2009 as cited in Fletcher & Maher, 2014, p. 177) were identified as essential components of applied practice. From such a perspective, personal qualities such as honesty, interpersonal skills, passion, genuine interest in clients, personal conduct and trustworthiness were highlighted as important competencies required to build trusting relationships with clients, getting along with people, and fitting in with the team (Jooste et al., 2016; Tenenbaum et al., 2003).

In addition to personal qualities (Fletcher & Maher, 2014), research investigating competencies in applied practice highlighted the significance of professional knowledge base (e.g., Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Jooste et al., 2016; Tenenbaum et al., 2003; Ward et al., 2005; Winter & Collins, 2016). Such knowledge was identified as "solid knowledge of investigations, main and specific theoretical issues and explanations, descriptions of behaviours, research methodologies, statistical procedures, measurement and assessment procedures and interpretations, and knowledge of ethical standards and procedures" (Tenenbaum et al., 2003, p. 158). From such a perspective, competence in sport psychology was identified as practitioners' ability to apply suitable psychological theory using appropriate interventions to perform tasks in a defined setting (Fletcher & Maher, 2014; Jooste et al., 2016; McEwan & Tod, 2015). Also, it was recognised that sport psychologists needed to be well-informed about psychology more broadly, allowing them to develop a strong understanding of people emotion, behaviour, and cognitive functioning; have a sport-science knowledge and background; distinct training and knowledge to able to apply sport-specific interventions; knowledge of the sport and understanding of how elite sport works; experience in a variety of sports (Jooste et al., 2016).

Finally, by drawing on research in which coaches and athletes have discussed effective sport psychology practice (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Gould et al., 1991; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987), significant attention has been given to the development of service-delivery competence in the training of applied practitioners. Tod et al. (2007) defined service-delivery competence to be a multidimensional process in which practitioners "meet clients' needs and expectations, develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships, understand psychological interventions and apply them to assist athletes in

specific situations, empathise with athletes' situations and interpret them through the lens of suitable theory (e.g., cognitive-behavioural), and reflect on how they (the practitioners) have influenced the interactions and outcomes of service provision" (p. 318).

In the United Kingdom, competence-based training took centre stage in training and developing of neophyte applied sport psychologists. Indeed, since 2009, the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) introduced legislation making terms such as sport and exercise psychologist, sport psychologist and exercise psychologist protected titles. As such, the United Kingdom practitioners are required to meet the standards of proficiency, education, training and professional behaviour to obtain HCPC registration and use the titles mentioned above. Initially, the BPS Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology (DSEP) was adopted as the sole pathway towards HCPC registration as a sport and exercise psychologist, requiring Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) generally achieved through completion of a BPS accredited psychology degree, a BPS approved postgraduate degree (termed the Stage 1 qualification) and a minimum of two years of supervised experience within the BPS framework (termed Stage 2 qualification) (Devonport & Lane, 2014). Throughout the Stage 2 qualification, trainees must have a supervisor who is registered with the HCPC and are required to develop and demonstrate service-delivery competence in professional practice (including research). More specifically, trainees must develop competencies in four key roles related to national occupational standards in psychology (Devonport & Lane, 2014). The four key roles are: the development and practice of ethical principles; the application of psychological services; ability to conduct research and expertise in research methods; and the communication and dissemination of psychological knowledge (Devonport & Lane, 2014).

From January 2020, aspiring practitioners who would like to obtain the HCPC registrations can alternatively undertake the BASES Sport and Exercise Psychology Accreditation Route (SEPAR). Similar to the BPS qualification, the SEPAR candidates are required to work with a supervisor to develop and demonstrate the minimum required level of service-delivery competence across the HCPC standards of proficiency framework to be eligible to apply for registrations with HCPC and use the protected title of sport and exercise psychologist. More specifically, trainees must demonstrate at least a threshold level of competencies divided into knowledge, skills, self-development and management, and experience. As such, the overarching aim of the SEPAR is to ensure that practitioners can work autonomously within a range of sport and exercise environments to help facilitate performance and support the mental health and well-being in clients.

Overall, in its relatively short history, the field of sport psychology has observed considerable growth and development. Published literature gave significant attention to identifying the personal qualities (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Gould et al., 1991; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987) and competencies (e.g., Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Jooste et al., 2016; Tenenbaum et al., 2003) of effective applied sport psychologists. The emergence of the professional organisations led to advancements in training within applied sport psychology ensuring that the aspiring practitioners possessed a minimum threshold of knowledge-based standards required to practice safely and effectively (Tod et al., 2007). The identification of the minimum qualifications, education, and experiences necessary to deliver applied sport psychology services, in turn, led to the establishment of policies and guidelines outlining professional standards, obligations and responsibilities of applied practitioners (Winter & Collins, 2016).

2.3. Challenges of service delivery and ability to survive in applied practice

In accordance with the professional development stages outlined above, the BPS and BASES identified self-reflection as an essential element of the accreditation training. It was suggested that reflective practice could provide practitioners with an opportunity to access, and make sense of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in a specific environment (Cropley et al., 2007; Holt & Strean, 2001; Woodcock et al., 2008), enhance experiential learning (Anderson et al., 2004) and facilitate the professional growth of practitioners (Poczwardowski et al., 1998). As a result, at the turn of the century, a growing number of aspiring early-career practitioners offered autoethnographic accounts of their own formative experiences of applied practice (e.g., Cropley et al., 2007; Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsey et al., 2007; Rowley et al., 2012; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock et al., 2008).

The autoethnographic writing style allowed the authors to describe applied situations with a high level of personal perspective in the form of an authentic and contextualised text. As such, these publications provided a fascinating insight into real-life examples of sport psychology in-action, demonstrating that the trainees often experienced feelings of uncertainty and a sense of being "thrown to the wolves" (Tonn & Harmison, 2004, p. 325). Early-career practitioners reported that when consulting with clients, they were worried to try new approaches (Cropley et al., 2007), questioned their abilities as a practitioner (Lindsey et al., 2007), were overly concerned about appearing as competent in front of athletes (Tonn & Harmison, 2004) and were afraid that the client might look for alternative sport psychology provision (Holt & Strean, 2001). Reflective accounts also demonstrated the discrepancy between professional knowledge and practice, highlighting that early-career practitioners felt "betrayed by the tools that they had learned in the formalised environment of the classroom" (Lindsey et al., 2007, p. 342). In one such example, Holt and Strean (2001) reported that the first author struggled to transition from classroom-based teaching to actual relationships with real-life outcomes.

The experiences of consulting with clients described by early-career practitioners challenged the often straightforward and technical portrayals of practice, illustrating that it is simply insufficient to apply theory to complex realities of service delivery (c.f., Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsey et al., 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Rowley et al., 2012). The provision of more process-oriented accounts of practice (cf., Tod & Lavallee, 2011; Tod & Andersen, 2012) revealed challenges of gaining athletes buy-in towards sport psychology interventions (e.g., Lindsey et al., 2007), fulfilling multiple roles within the organisation (e.g., Jones et al., 2007) and adapting practice to fit within existing organisational routines (e.g., Rowley et al., 2012). While most of such challenges were reported by early-career practitioners (Huntley et al., 2014), more experienced practitioners have also offered critical reflections highlighting issues regarding communication, role clarity, and acceptance at the heart of their practice (Knowles et al., 2012). For instance, Mellalieu (2017) illuminated the significance of working in collaboration with various support staff, whereas Nesti (2010) drew on their experiences of working within professional football to highlight the issues such as poor internal communication, interdepartmental conflicts, and role ambiguity.

The reflective accounts of early-career and experienced practitioners, therefore, demonstrated that service delivery within the elite settings may often be personally demanding and uncomfortable for the practitioner (cf., Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010; Reid et al., 2004). Indeed, an increasing number of

publications started to recognise that applied sport psychologists may often find themselves working within elite sporting organisations which employ a vast array of staff, creating large and complex environments (e.g., Gilmore & Gilson, 2007; Nesti, 2010). The culture of these settings has been described as volatile, unpredictable, and increasingly demanding (Eubank et al., 2014). It was also well documented that sport psychologists operating within high-performance environments may find themselves in stressful, pressurised, highly competitive and success obsessed settings (e.g., Brady & Maynard, 2010; Nesti, 2010; Reid et al., 2004; Woodman & Hardy, 2001) and may need to justify how their input impacts upon athletic performance (Eubank et al., 2014).

Also, it was acknowledged that practitioners may often face scepticism surrounding the applied sport psychology practice (Nesti, 2016). For example, it was reported that practitioners may encounter stakeholders who believe that as a result of their own experience and craft knowledge, their understanding of sport psychology is superior to that of a sport psychologist (Eubank et al., 2014). Indeed, it was demonstrated that while other disciplines within sport science and sports medicine may be perceived by managers and other influential figures as highly complex and requiring specific knowledge, the terms used by the psychologist may often be deemed to be well understood, irrespective of corresponding qualifications (Nesti, 2010). Therefore, it was recognised that athletes and staff within sporting organisations may often negatively perceive sport psychology and not see the value of such services (Nesti, 2010).

The increased focus on the work of sport psychologists within elite and professional teams (cf., Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti 2010; Reid et al., 2004) also illustrated that practitioners might often find themselves in settings prone to competition and conflict between stakeholders (Reid et al., 2004). Indeed, it was acknowledged that practitioners coexisting within the same settings may often have different opinions and may differ in their interpretation of the problem and the appropriate solution (Reid et al., 2004). It was highlighted that applied sport psychologists operating within sporting settings might often experience challenges in establishing effective collaboration with other stakeholders (Reid et al., 2004). For instance, Reid et al. (2004) reported that because the sporting personnel often come from a sporting background, where actions are louder than words, sport psychologists may encounter barriers regarding effective communication and lack of organisational structure promoting regular multidisciplinary meetings.

The challenges encountered by applied sport psychologists were further reiterated by McDougall et al. (2015), who interviewed six experienced sport psychologists working in the elite sport environment. The researchers documented that practitioners operating within modern-day sporting settings were required to fulfil a hybrid role, consulting one-to-one with athletes while supporting multiple stakeholders (e.g. coaches, sport science, technical staff, and administrators) (McDougall et al., 2015). Such situations were particularly challenging to maintain confidentiality whilst keeping positive relationships with different groups (McDougall et al., 2015). Indeed, McDougall et al. (2015) recognised that sport psychologists often have access to information demanded by various stakeholders. As such, it was reported that practitioners might find it challenging to establish credibility and demonstrate value while dealing with potentially sensitive information (McDougall et al., 2015). Sport psychologists were also required to develop trust amongst multiple clients while remaining distinct, detached, and not clearly affiliated with any one specific group (McDougall et al., 2015).

Also, McDougall et al. (2015) highlighted the issues of the "sacking pandemic" (p. 272) witnessed in elite sport, illuminating how sport psychologists often feel under pressure to conform to aggressive and bullying tactics displayed by their colleagues. In one such example, McDougall et al. (2015) documented Chris's experience (pseudonym) who found themself in an uncomfortable situation. In the sport psychologist's own words: "Imagine it as a bit of a playground gang. You're going to be one of us. You're going to do the things that we do, the things we think, or the things that we say or bugger off" (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 271). The issues of low job security were further reiterated by Gilmore et al. (2018) who, upon describing the lived experiences of sport psychologists working within the English Premier League, reported that the provision of sport psychology within the elite sport was "uncertain and risky from the perspective of the worker, and often lacks standard forms of labour security and statutory entitlements" (p. 427). Indeed, Gilmore et al. (2018) demonstrated that high turnover of first-team managers and head coaches has a negative effect on sport psychology practitioners, who often fear losing their job as a consequence of organisational change. Gilmore et al. (2018) reported that each time a manager was sacked, the sport psychologist is at the mercy of the new person coming in and experience a sense of unknown. Therefore, sport psychologists may often lose their job at any point through no fault of their own as the new manager may not believe in sport psychology or bring their staff with them (Gilmore et al., 2018).

The publications just outlined serve to demonstrate how "sport psychology delivery and its place, role, function, and/or influence may vary, and indeed be tested, depending on the sport, sporting culture, and the athletes and individuals who coexist within a particular environment" (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 267). Scholars within sport psychology, therefore, recognised the significance of interpersonal interactions with various stakeholders in applied practice (Eubank et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Reid et al., 2004). While it was acknowledged that attitudes, practices, and ideologies of members of the sporting organisations might challenge practitioners' values, beliefs, and decisions (McDougall et al., 2015), it was also highlighted that building and maintaining multiple relationships with various stakeholders may play a vital role in practitioners' ability to survive and thrive in an applied setting (McDougall et al., 2015). Indeed, developing multiple relationships started to be recognised as an essential element in providing broader and more dynamic service within modern-day sporting settings (McDougall et al., 2015). For example, McDougall et al. (2015) reported that positive working relationships with a range of stakeholders were at the heart of demonstrating value, putting sport psychologists in a position to present impact, and subsequently evidencing service delivery effectiveness.

Similarly, Eubank et al. (2014) suggested that support from key personnel (e.g., the performance director/manager) helps sport psychologists secure buy-in and develop trust within the environment. In one such example, McDougall et al. (2015) demonstrated the significance of positive working relationships by documenting reflections of Ben (pseudonym): "If you can have the trust of those people, then the influence you can have in a sport is huge, but if you start losing people – if you lose the performance director you cannot work organisationally. If you lose the head coach, then you cannot work in competition. If you lose the multidisciplinary team, you are limited to just doing face-to-face contact with the athletes. If you lose the athletes, they will have you out!" (p. 269). McDougall et al. (2015) suggested that in order to develop effective working relationships with members of an organisation, applied sport psychologists must recognise when to challenge the stakeholders and when to refrain. More specifically, sport psychologists needed to

develop an ability to pick their battles and disagreements, assess the risk when challenging decision-makers, and learn to identify the most appropriate moment to influence others (McDougall et al., 2015). It was suggested that practitioners operating within the elite settings were required to adopt a flexible approach while communicating with a range of stakeholders, being prepared to "take a hit on the congruence" concerning personal values and ethical principles (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 273). The effective ability to express alternative opinions was further reiterated by Chandler et al. (2016) who interviewed six sport physicians and seven coaches who had worked with, or were working with, sport psychologists within high-performance sport (e.g., Premier League soccer, rugby, tennis, gymnastics, boxing, and several other Olympic sports). Chandler et al. (2016) suggested that while sport psychologists were required to challenge other staff members about their work, they should respect others' opinions and make suggestions in a nonconfrontational manner or without downgrading colleagues' ideas and input. As such, effective sport psychologists operating within modern-day sporting organisations started to be identified as someone capable of selling their ideas rather than criticising others (Chandler et al., 2016).

Indeed, the most recent publications within sport psychology literature highlighted the significance of tactics that practitioners adapt to survive and thrive within their applied settings (cf., Chandler et al., 2016; Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015). In one such example, Gilmore et al. (2018) reported how a sport psychologist managed their workplace relations by adapting their interventions to managerial team preferences and demands while "smuggling" (p. 429) psychology into how they approached their work. In particular, whilst lacking manager's support, the practitioner looked to engage in alternative projects (e.g., performance lifestyle programme) to deliver sport psychology. The practitioner also looked to build quick wins by focusing their interventions on the manager's work, ideas, and working way. Such an approach allowed the sport psychologists to develop credibility amongst senior executives and colleagues, which allowed them to establish themself as a well-respected and influential member of staff (Gilmore et al., 2018).

Despite the apparent significance placed upon stakeholders' interactions within the recent publications, there remains a lack of understanding of how applied sport psychologists grapple with the demands of working with a range of contextual stakeholders and how they demonstrate impact to survive and thrive within applied settings. It is unclear how practitioners develop and maintain relationships with the stakeholders (McDougall et al., 2015) and how they act in their interactions with significant others (Chandler et al., 2015; Gilmore et al., 2018). One area that may hold significant implications for answering such questions is the concept of micropolitics (cf., Blasé, 1991). Indeed, McCalla and Fitzpatrick (2016) suggested that practitioners being aware of micropolitics will be best prepared for effective work within high-performance team settings. More specifically, McCalla and Fitzpatrick (2016) argued that micropolitics might play a vital role in practitioners' ability to set and achieve goals within applied settings, including securing and keeping one's position. The significance of micropolitics was further reiterated by Rowley et al. (2018) who provided a reflective, ethnographic analysis of everyday life within professional rugby league academy. Here the lead author's accounts of practice highlighted how issues of power, conflict, and vulnerability typified the day-to-day interactions and experiences of both the practitioner and other key stakeholders (Rowley et al., 2018).

Overall, the publications outlined in the present subsection highlight the importance of cultural and socio-political skills and knowledge of modern sport psychologists operating within sporting organisations

(Sly et al., 2020). The accounts of practice documented the significance of applied practitioners' ability to understand complex social hierarchies, micropolitical structures and cultural dynamics that exist within various levels of high-performance environments (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; McDougall et al., 2015; Mellalieu, 2016; Nesti, 2016; Rowley et al., 2018). However, the accounts of both early-career and experienced practitioners of engagement in a multitude of working alliances with various organisational stakeholders (e.g., coaches, performance directors, administrators and support staff) remains absence from the sport psychology literature (Sly et al., 2020).

2.4. Learning from micropolitical inquiry in other disciplines

The theoretical and empirical work regarding micropolitics developed in management and education in the 1980s (Blasé & Anderson, 1995). The term micropolitics has been used to describe a range of political interactions that can be found whenever two or more individuals are involved in some form of collective activity in different organisational settings, such as schools, sports clubs, and companies (e.g., Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991; Blasé & Blasé, 2002). Despite such a relatively short history, the study of micropolitics produced some constructive insight into the "woof and warp of the fabric of day-to-day life in schools" (Blasé, 1989, p. 1). Indeed, instead of presenting schools as a set of cohesive and coherent social networks, the micropolitical perspective revealed the often vulnerable and contested nature of organisational life (Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1989; Blasé & Anderson, 1995). Therefore, the micropolitical inquiry into schools demonstrated that while the perceptions of such settings may be associated with rationality, order, collaboration, openness and trust, the reality can be quite different (Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991; Blasé & Anderson, 1995).

The importance of micropolitics was further reiterated within sports coaching literature where the work of Ball (1987) Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a, 2002b), and Goffman (1959) were utilised as theoretical frameworks to analyse coaches' lived experiences. Such an approach revealed the social complexity inherent within coaching processes, developing a more textured and nuanced account of coaching, and presenting a true social and problematic description of the activity (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015). Indeed, findings reported within sport coaching literature characterised sporting settings as complex, dynamic and in a constant state of flux (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Such complexity was associated with pathos, ambiguity, and the chronic discrepancy between proclaimed organisational goals, as established by employers, executives or coaches themselves, and an individual's attempts to achieve them (Jones & Wallace, 2005). More specifically, it was recognised that individuals and groups coexisting within sporting settings might have different interests at hand and actors often possess sufficient agency to choose and change their personal goals as the situation evolves (Jones & Wallace, 2005). From such a perspective, pathos in coaching was associated with coaches limited capacity to attain diverse and often contradictory goals (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Similarly, ambiguity was related to coaches' lack of control over goals, beliefs, priorities, and perceptions of those involved in the coaching process (e.g., players, coaches, assistants, medical staff, managers, and administrators) (Jones & Wallace, 2005).

Sport coaching literature also recognised that coaches are often required to work with a diverse range of individuals, "who may not only bring different goals, motivations and traditions to the working context but who would also not hesitate to act on their beliefs if the opportunity arose to do so" (Potrac & Jones,

2009a, p. 566). It was acknowledged that coaches often found themselves working with individuals who looked after their interest to maintain or advance their position (Potrac & Jones, 2009a). As a result, coaching started to be increasingly recognised as a poorly coordinated, ideologically diverse place "riven with actual or potential conflict between members" (Ball, 1987 as cited in Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 565). Also, it was highlighted that coaches operating within such settings were required to "have an eye over their shoulder" (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 565) and ensure they were not "stab[ed] in the back" (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 567). In particular, such findings demonstrated that despite power relations within coaching being defined as asymmetrical, individual who has a function and value are not entirely powerless in a social encounter (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Instead, it was highlighted that athletes, at times, can exercise considerable power in the interactions with the coach (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac & Jones, 2009a). For example, it was suggested that athletes might withhold the best effort, use derogatory humour, protest, and be confrontational to resist the coach's will (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac & Jones, 2009a). As a result, coaching was identified as a negotiated, contested and power-ridden activity with conflict and manipulation (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Potrac & Jones, 2009b).

While findings just outlined were reported in a performance-oriented setting, studies in various community sports also highlighted the inherently micropolitical nature of coaches' work (e.g., Potrac et al., 2016; Ives et al., 2016, 2021; Gale et al., 2019). Indeed, scholars in community coaching acknowledged that community settings are also politically charged environments, and community coaches are required to recognise the political realities of their working context (e.g., Potrac et al., 2016; Ives et al., 2016, 2021; Gale et al., 2019). As such, by drawing on micropolitical theory, sport coaching literature highlighted that coaching entails far more than an unproblematic application of technical and tactical knowledge or the straightforward application of pedagogical methods and approaches (Protrac & Jones, 2009b). Instead, the evolving literature based on this area demonstrated that interpersonal interactions within the sporting organisation were dynamic and fluid entities that coaches constantly need to consider and reflexively engage with in their everyday practice (Gale et al., 2019). Therefore, the sport coaching research collectively demonstrated that coaches need to develop an ability to read people and situations, develop and maintain positive relationships, and proactively engage in challenging issues (e.g., resistance from others) (Potrac et al., 2013).

However, while illuminating the importance of political realities in the sporting context, scholars in sport coaching also recognised the need for coaches to develop political know-how to effectively navigate their employment contexts. To achieve this and to enhance a scholarship addressing the micropolitics of coaching, scholars within sport coaching employed other theoretical frameworks. In particular, micropolitical investigation within sport coaching used Goffman's theorising, especially their writing on the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Such a line of inquiry helped to enhance an understanding of micro-level interactions and dynamics that comprise coaching, demonstrating how coaches engage in impression management (Goffman, 1959) to strategically manipulate others' perceptions of themselves and obtain the respect of key contextual stakeholders (Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015). Coaches often engaged in white lies, humorous, friendly personas, and constant face work to ensure that they acted in a coach-appropriate manner and maintain players' respect (Potrac & Jones, 2009b). For example, Potrac and Jones (2009a) reported how a football coach managed their front in the interactions with players, assistant

coach, and chairman to maintain an impression of cooperation. Also, Potrac and Jones (2009a) demonstrated how a football coach put a show and engaged in bureaucratisation (Goffman, 1959) to ensure that they appeared to the chairman and the assistant coach accordingly to expectations. Similarly, Huggan et al. (2015) described how Ben strove for self-affirmation to obtain favorable recognition from significant others with whom they worked. This included presenting an appropriate front to the manager, coaching staff, and the players trying to make sure that they and their roles were perceived positively.

Considering that sport psychologists' practice within these same contexts as performance and community coaches (Rowley et al., 2018), the findings reported within coaching literature may serve to enhance the understanding of the challenges and dilemmas that applied sport psychologists experienced in their shared endeavours with others (Eubank et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Reid et al., 2004). Indeed, drawing from other disciplines within sport psychology literature may hold significant implications in enhancing knowledge regarding practitioners' ability to operate within settings prone to competition and conflict between stakeholders (Reid et al., 2004). More specifically, a similar approach to one adopted within the sport coaching literature may enhance sport psychology practitioners understanding of actions that the stakeholders (i.e., coaches, sport science consultants, physiotherapists) take to pursue their interest, outmanoeuvre individuals they are working with and/or solidify their position within an organisation (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Thompson et al., 2015). Indeed, in one such example, Thompson et al. (2015) presented lived experiences of Adam (pseudonym), a newly appointed fitness coach at a Football Association Premier League club, demonstrating how the senior coaches looked to assert their authority over Adam by publicly asking for reasoning and rationale of their training methods and informing the players that they could ignore Adam's instructions. Similar findings were reported by Huggan et al. (2015) who demonstrated how throughout their career as a performance analyst, Ben (pseudonym) was continually required to deal with derogatory comments from different managers who mocked them in front of the entire coaching staff.

Most importantly, however, the findings presented within the sport coaching literature may serve to encourage a more significant investigation of micropolitics within sport psychology, identifying it as means of dealing with demands of working within the sporting setting (Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010). For instance, investigations into micropolitics may hold significant implications for understanding how applied sport psychologists deal with low job security (Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015). Indeed, scholars in sports coaching demonstrated how the practitioners engaged in micropolitical actions to "justify their existence" (Huggan et al., 2015, p. 510). In particular, sport practitioners looked to improve their working relationships with the main decision-makers who could either make or break their career by looking to sell themselves and their ideas (Huggan et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). For instance, Thompson et al. (2015) reported how Adam, by taking part in post-training football games and joining in with the banter through self-deprecating humour, looked to spend more time with significant others to "gain entry to the inner sanctum" (p. 984) of the coaching staff that had been working with each other for over 15-years (Thompson et al., 2015). Similarly, Huggan et al. (2015) reported how Ben invested a significant amount of time in developing new relationships with existing staff members and forming alliances with the staff they identified as forward-thinking, supportive and cooperative.

Overall, by adapting a similar approach to scholars within sport coaching literature and utilising a range of theoretical frameworks, the present thesis's micropolitical inquiry will look to address the paucity of research regarding how applied sport psychologists experience and respond to working with a range of contextual stakeholders, who may often hold and actively pursue opposing beliefs, motivations, and goals (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Nesti, 2016; Reid et al., 2004; Rowley et al., 2018). While research findings within other disciplines provided a fascinating insight into the everyday micropolitical reality of organisational life, it cannot be assumed that such understanding can be naturally and unproblematically applied into applied sport psychology practice. Indeed, while McCalla & Fitzpatrick (2016) draw on the work of Potrac and Jones (2009) in their calls for more significant consideration of micropolitics within the role of applied sport psychologists, they also argued that while trying to engage in political activity, applied sport psychologists should adhere to their professional and personal ethics. Thus, while trying to learn from other disciplines, sport psychology literature should strive to develop its line of inquiry that would acknowledge the specific and distinctive aspects of applied service delivery. Therefore, such research may ensure that the progress made up to date (e.g., McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Rowley et al., 2018) would not be seen as imprecise and speculative.

2.5. Conclusion

The field of applied sport psychology is an emerging and continually evolving profession (Sly et al., 2020). Whilst in the early years the field was characterised by a focus on developing athletes' psychological skills, contemporary practitioners are required to work with a wide range of clients, provide diverse services and hold different roles (Barker et al., 2016; Sly et al., 2020). Indeed, it has been suggested that in order to cope with the demands of current practice, applied sport psychologists are required to adopt a more flexible, free-ranging and hybrid role, whereby the microlevel provision of PST to athletes needs to be supplemented by a macrolevel support and engagement with a range of stakeholders (McDougall et al., 2015; Sly et al., 2020). The fulfilment of such a wider social provision was associated with practitioners' ability to improve communication, reduce conflict, and promote a culturally congruent view of performance excellent amongst members of multidisciplinary team (Eubank et al., 2014). However, an achievement of such objectives was described as a challenging and unpredictable process. Indeed, it was recognised that applied sport psychologists may often experience a range of barriers when attempting to integrate themselves within an organisation (Gardner, 2016; Nesti, 2016). Reflecting on the practical challenges associated with such process, Larsen (2017) compared their attempt to integrate themselves into an elite sporting organisation to "bringing a knife to a gunfight" (p. 7), with a knife representing the practitioners' knowledge and the gun the culture of the organisation. Also, it was recognised that sport psychology provision within elite settings may often be characterised by poor job security and a sense of precariousness (Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015).

The challenges faced by the practitioners operating within the modern-day sporting organisations (Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2016; Reid et al., 2004) served to stimulate a debate regarding changing expertise of the sport psychologists and the reassessment of key professional competencies (Sly et al., 2020). Recent publications acknowledged that contemporary sport psychologists are required to develop socio-political skills to meet the demands of modern-day service delivery (Sly et al., 2020). Such a debate, in turn, added to my motivation of enhancing an understanding of the milieu of the

sporting organisations. Indeed, I recognised that by drawing on research in other disciplines I had an opportunity to provide a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of sport psychology. Also, by directly exploring how applied sport psychologists grapple with the demands of working with a range of contextual stakeholders and how they seek to demonstrate their impact I could contribute to the social analysis of sport work. Indeed, based on my own practical experiences and engagement with literature from a range of disciplines I recognised that the detailed investigation of applied sport psychologists' everyday experiences, held the potential for enhancing understanding of how applied practitioners decide to navigate organisational contexts that may often be typified by ideological diversity, poor coordination, and conflict between the stakeholders (Rowley et al., 2018). By answering such questions, therefore, I was motivated to shine some much-needed light on how practitioners develop and maintain relationships with key contextual stakeholders (McDougall et al., 2015) and how they act as part of their interactions with these significant others (Chandler et al., 2015; Gilmore et al., 2018).In addition, my ambition was to stimulate a debate within professional bodies and academic institutions who seek to train and prepare neophyte practitioners for the everyday demands and requirements of successful applied sport psychology practice. Indeed, by drawing conclusions from my own experiences and literature within sport psychology I recognised that my research held the potential for helping neophyte sport psychologists to avoid a reality shock when entering the working environments (Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Rowley et al., 2012), developing their ability to better manage encounters with a vast array of different contextual stakeholders. Thus, such line of inquiry provides a platform for developing an appreciation of some of the more tacit and experiential aspects of applied practice, in the absence of actual lived experiences, illuminating some of the personal qualities (Chandler et al., 2016) and competencies (Fletcher & Maher, 2014; Wylleman et al., 2009) required to survive and thrive within the complex, and often contested, settings of applied practice. I was very excited, therefore, to produce thesis findings that could encourage further debate among professional accreditation bodies as to how students and trainee practitioners may become better equipped and more comfortable with translating the significance of their work to those in the wider allied professions (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016), and receive greater buy-in from the key stakeholders with whom they work (Eubank et al., 2014).

Also, by engaging with the literature from a range of disciplines I realised that I was uniquely placed to not only make contributions in the field of applied sport psychology but the social analysis of sport work more broadly. More specifically, as someone who held a range of various roles throughout my professional career (i.e., teacher, performance coach, community coach, performance psychologist) I am in a position to engage with micropolitical theory and related frameworks in a deep and meaningful way to explore the social realities of sport work. Therefore, my background and passion for enhancing knowledge in this area may allow me to produce greater critical appreciation and application of Kelchtermans and Goffman's theorising. As such, the present thesis aspires to generate richer and more sophisticated insights compared to one achieved to date. To accomplish this, more can be made of Goffman's ideas (Potrac, 2019). More specifically, while Goffman's dramaturgical ideas have considerably helped to understand the micropolitical interactions and comprise coaching, the majority of such ideas came from one of Goffman's books (Potrac, 2019). Therefore, by drawing on other texts (e.g., Strategic Interactions), the present thesis aims to improve the depth and breadth of micropolitical scholarship. I am confident, therefore, that the present thesis will

contribute to the wider discussion aimed to enhance the scholarship of micropolitics more generally, providing greater insight into the intricacies and dynamics of contemporary social life within an organisation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The current chapter looks to further build upon the preceding discussion around the historical development and trends apparent within applied sport psychology research (as presented within Chapter 2), by outlining the paradigmatic assumptions that underpin the present thesis, and presenting a rationale for the selected methodological approach to data collection and analysis that was adopted. As such, the rationale for adopting IPA (as outlined previously within Chapter 1) is further strengthened here also. The present chapter also describes the data analysis process, steps taken to ensure the current research's quality, ethical considerations, reflexivity, and the researcher's impact on the findings, specifically during the data-analysis process.

3.2. Paradigmatic assumptions

A paradigm can be defined as a set of basic beliefs and fundamental assumptions about the world's nature and the relationship between the world, ourselves, and other subjects (Gibson, 2016). Patton (1978) described a paradigm as "a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world." (p. 2003). Whereas Sparkes (1992) concluded that a "different paradigm provides a particular set of lenses for seeing the world and making sense of it in different ways" (p. 12). In their book, 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions', Kuhn (1962) defined a paradigm as a model for a continuation of a particular research tradition. Similarly, Clarke et al. (2016) suggested that paradigms underpin the research question, purpose, methods, and design. Paradigms also refers to the shared beliefs of a research community (Kuhn, 1962). Indeed, Kuhn (1962) suggested that the same research community members are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice, which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation. Therefore, paradigms are not simply abstract philosophical assumptions, they provide guidelines, systems, and frameworks for conducting research. Paradigms inform and guide our views on the nature of knowledge and evidence, as well as the appropriateness of forms of knowledge and evidence (Gibson, 2016).

Throughout the history of social science, there has been a debate regarding the nature of research (Sparkes, 1992). This debate was based on different assumptions about the nature of reality, the extent to which we can know the reality, and how we can conceptualise the research process (Gibson, 2016; Sparkes, 1992). Several influential publications on the philosophy of science used metaphors as paradigm revolution (Hacking, 1981; Hesse, 1980; Kuhn, 1962) and paradigm wars (Gage, 1989) to describe such a debate regarding research procedures within a range of academic disciplines. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, a similar discussion took place in the field of sport psychology. In the early developments of sport psychology, assumptions and postulates regarding knowledge development emerged from other well-established research traditions (Vealey, 2006). As such, sport psychology research adopted a positivistic perspective and believed of a single reality that could be studied independently through objective scientific processes (Gibson, 2016). Therefore, research was shaped by naïve realism and a belief in nature's general laws, independent of time and context. Studies pursued a nomothetic explanation of human behaviour, looked for general rules across all individuals, and provided little room for interpretation (Gibson, 2016).

However, as sport psychology continued to develop, the traditional nomothetic research design started to be challenged about its effectiveness in describing and understanding the mental process and

behaviours displayed in sport environment (Vealey, 2006). Indeed, in their article, 'About Smocks and Jocks', Martens (1979) was one of the first to express their dissatisfaction with the positivistic paradigm for doing sport psychology research. Martens (1979) questioned the effectiveness of studying the complexities of human cognition and social behaviour from a positivistic perspective. According to Martens (1979), sport psychology research should move away from the ontology of naïve realism and treat people as if they were human beings capable of reacting to and interacting with and at times, even changing their environment. Such a view placed greater significance on observing behaviour as it occurs within the social context of sport.

To expand on their dissatisfaction further, Martens (1987) in their highly influential text, 'Science, Knowledge, and Sport Psychology', argued that human behaviour cannot be seen as an exact science and that understanding the world is a much more complicated process than the superficial view expressed by the doctrine of empiricism. According to Martens (1987), the conception of objectivity is fallacious, and this assumption had a negative effect on behavioural science. In their article, Martens (1987) argued that our understanding of the world depends much on how we perceive it. In science, this means that the laws discovered through research are entirely dependent upon the scientific paradigm that currently influences the scientist's perception. Martens (1987) concluded that each step of the scientific method requires personal judgement and that scientists are far from being value-free, objective, or neutral about the phenomena they study. Overall, the distorted idea of objectivity blocks us form abandoning orthodox science and moving to a better paradigm for studying human behaviour. Therefore, Martens (1987) called for a new philosophy of knowledge that would revolve around responsible people, evaluate experiential learning, and employ ideographic methods.

While the arguments presented by Martens (1979, 1987), at the time of publication, were either unaccepted, overlooked, or considered too risky (Vealey, 2006), at the beginning of 21st century, a more significant number of researchers (e.g., Brustad, 2002; Giacobbi et al., 2005) started to follow Martens (1987) suggestions for adopting an alternative method of studying the complexity and richness of human behaviour. Indeed, a greater number of paradigms, each with its own unique ontological and epistemological perspective, were recognised and adopted within social science. For instance, the interpretivist paradigm highlights the importance of understanding differences amongst humans as social actors, emphasising the importance of conducting research among people, as opposed to objects (Sheppard, 2020). From such a perspective, importance is given to understanding how people interpret their social roles in relationships and how they give meaning to those roles (Sheppard, 2020). Also, the interpretivist approach calls for an understanding of how people interpret the social roles of others in accordance with their meanings of those roles (Sheppard, 2020). Another paradigm in sociology is constructionism, which suggests that we never know what universal truth or false is, what is good or bad, and right or wrong (Galbin, 2014). Accordingly to this paradigm, therefore, we create reality ourselves through the interactions and interpretations of these interactions (Sheppard, 2020). Therefore, research conducted from such a perspective takes a keen interest in understanding how people come to socially agree, or disagree, about what is real and true (Sheppard, 2020). Also, investigations adapting social constructionism focus on investigating the social influences on communal and individual life (Galbin, 2014). Next, the critical paradigm is focused on power relations within the society and interactions of inequality, race, gender, education, and other social institutions that

contribute to a social system (Asghar, 2013). Specifically, this paradigm operates from a perspective that scientific investigation should explore what is wrong with current social reality, identify action to change it, and must provide clear norms for criticism and transformation (Bohman, 2005). Finally, accordingly, to the postmodernism approach, there are no defined terms, boundaries, or absolute truth (Sheppard, 2020). Instead of relying on one approach to knowing, postmodernism promotes multiple ways of knowing and advocated a pluralistic epistemology (Dybicz, 2021). As a result, the postmodern paradigm, through offering a different understanding, provides a new and more radical way of understanding social reality (Dybicz, 2021).

Within sport psychology literature a more significant number of publications started to adopt an interpretive approach, analysing individual perception, personal interactions, and situational influences, rather than pursuing generalised findings (Brustard, 2002). Such development was summarised by Vealey (2006) who provided a review of sport psychology's historical development, emphasising the historical development of paradigmatic assumptions. In their report, Vealey (2006) suggested that the 'box', a notion they used to represent the paradigmatic assumptions throughout the different periods of research development, "evolved from the "subjectivity" of philosophy to the "hard science" of experimental psychology, to motor behaviour, and finally to social psychology so that more contextually relevant knowledge about sport and exercise could be pursued" (p. 148). Therefore, sport psychology research started to create doors for the 'box' so that the methods are more inclusive and diverse. This involved asking real-world questions focused on the person in context and investigating how social-cultural factors influence mental processes and behaviour (Vealey, 2006).

In the last two decades, greater attention was given to real-world questions within sports psychology (Sly et al., 2020). Indeed, the focus within sport psychology research started to shift away from traditional studies looking at the techniques and interventions that work within the applied domain to focus more on the processes and factors that influence service delivery effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Anderson et al., 2004). While such developments in sport psychology literature were considered a step in a right direction, several scholars continued to call for more process-oriented accounts of practice (cf., Day, 2016; Tod & Lavallee, 2011; Tod & Andersen, 2012). Indeed, despite the significant research developments witnessed in sport psychology literature in the last two decades, Hassmen et al. (2016) suggested that the gulf between applied sport psychology and research still remains unsolved. Indeed, in their recent book, 'Rethinking Sport and Exercise Psychology Research', Hassmen et al. (2016) highlighted that "researchers get on with research" (p. 199) and "practitioners get on with practice" (p. 199), solving different problems using different methods and approaches. Also, "the researchers attempting to study applied practice see a messy and complex world with no control and rigour. By contrast, the practitioners attempting to engage with research see a world of stale, abstract and irrelevant findings that would never survive contact with the complexities of the real world" (p. 199). As such, some of the suggestions made by Vealey (2006) regarding the assumptions that "research is viewed as incomprehensible, pointless and boring, while the practice is viewed as pseudoscientific and ineffective" (p. 148) seem to remain unsolved.

Therefore, the present thesis aims to produce practice-based findings used by the practitioners and not merely remain in the journals. To achieve this, the interpretivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krane & Baird, 2005; Sparkes, 1992; Whaley & Krane, 2011) is employed to better understand "the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1988, p. 221). Indeed, the

interpretivist paradigm emphasises exploring individuals' motives and understanding of social life, giving significant attention to the meaning that they subsequently attach to their own and others' behaviours (Crotty, 1998). Such an approach was employed by several researchers within sport coaching literature who seek to gain rich insights into issues about which little is known, including the often chaotic, complex, ambiguous and negotiated working lives of coaches (Jones, 2006; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Thompson et al., 2015). The present thesis, therefore, looks to employ interpretivist perspective to examine the processes and mechanisms of applied practice in the real world, with its central focus being developing a contextual understanding of applied practitioners' perceptions, personal interactions, and situational influences.

Accordingly, this research is informed by a relativist ontology, which assumes fluid, multiple realities dependent on the meanings given to the objects and events (Gibson, 2016). As such, the present thesis acknowledges that there are many truths in the world and a range of interpretations that can be applied to it (Willig, 2013), therefore, placing significant attention on individuals' experiences and their awareness of the world that they live in (Robson, 2002). With this approach, the present thesis assumes that each practitioner constructs their own reality based on their views of the context they are operating in and their perceptions of their interactions with the contextual stakeholders. A social constructivist epistemology is also adopted recognising that knowledge is constructed due to a unique understanding of the world, lived experiences, personal reflections, and interactions with others and the environment (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Such an approach adopted here, therefore, enables the exploration of how a particular practitioner, in a particular context and at a particular time, navigates the inherently complex social world of applied sport psychology (Larkin et al., 2006).

The present thesis, therefore, looks to adopt the interpretive perspective to develop a more reality grounded understanding of the complexities of sport psychology provision within sporting settings. Such research holds the potential to close the gap between research and practice (Hassmen et al., 2016; Vealey, 2006) providing valuable insights into the day-to-day process of applied practice (Day, 2016; Tod & Lavallee, 2011; Tod & Andersen, 2012). In doing so, the present thesis' objective is not to argue that the interpretive paradigm is the best. Instead, interpretive inquiry is identified as best suited for moving understanding of the nuances of applied practice compared to other research paradigms (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Therefore, adopting an interpretivist perspective within the present thesis holds the potential for complementing published research findings from both this and other paradigms, contributing to the knowledge of the complexities of the day-to-day sport psychology practice (e.g., Rowley et al., 2018).

3.3. Research design

Considering the aims of the present research and developments in sport psychology literature discussed here and in Chapter 2, the current thesis adopts a qualitative research design. This exploratory research method is considered appropriate to explore how applied sport psychologists make sense of the world in which they work, how they experience events, and how they manage certain situations (Willing, 2013). Also, this form of inquiry is identified as a suitable method to investigate "what is happening, particularly in little-understood situations... seek new insights... [and] assess phenomena in a new light" (Robson, 2002, p. 59). Therefore, by adopting a qualitative research design, the present thesis gives a

significant attention to exploring multiple interpretations, meanings and perceptions that participants associate with their experiences.

3.4. Choice of the phenomenological approach

The objective of the present subsection is to provide detailed descriptions of IPA's philosophical underpinnings to further strengthen the rationale of the methodological approach adopted (as introduced in Chapter 1). Also, in depth explanations of IPA's philosophical underpinnings presented here aim to develop readers' comprehensive understanding of the research process. It is anticipated, therefore, that readers will be better equipped to comprehend IPA exploratory qualities. More specifically, detailed descriptions of phenomenology and hermeneutics aspire to enhance readers understanding of participants perceptions and experiences. Similarly, thorough explanation of idiographic nature of the IPA aims to support readers understanding of how a given practitioner, in a given context, makes sense of the interpersonal interactions. The present subsection, therefore, seeks to enhance readers understanding of the research findings and the complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden experiences as shared by the practitioners.

3.4.1. IPA as phenomenological

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that is interested in the world, as experienced by human beings within a particular context and at a particular time (Willig, 2013). Phenomenological philosophers have been "extraordinarily diverse in their interests, in their interpretation of the central issues of phenomenology, in their application of what they understood to be the phenomenological method, and in their development of what they took to be the phenomenological programme for the future of philosophy" (Moran, 2000, p. 3). Despite such a broad spectrum of phenomenological approaches, they all have a common interest in understanding human experiences (Smith et al., 2009). For example, Edmond Husserl, who is acknowledged as a founder of phenomenology, argued that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and in its terms (Smith et al., 2009). Famously, Husserl suggested that rather than quickly looking to fit 'things' within pre-existing categorisation systems, we need to focus on each 'thing in its own right'. The 'thing' that Husserl referred to is the experiential content of consciousness. To achieve this, we need to give more attention to the taken-for-granted experiences of the world and the individual's consciousness. This, according to Husserl, requires bracketing, putting to side one's perceptions, and series of reductions, moving away from the distractions of one's assumptions. Such an examination of a phenomenon should include a description and a reflection to fully establish the 'essence' or 'eidos' or 'idea' of the subjective experience (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, Husserl's phenomenology requires a degree of reflexivity and an ability to step outside the 'natural attitude' of our everyday experiencing, where we basically engage in the world without giving any significant meaning to our experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13).

Philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre developed Husserl's work further, moving phenomenology away from descriptive commitments towards more interpretative understanding. For example, Heidegger became increasingly concerned with ontological questions of existence, suggesting that we are 'thrown' into a pre-existing world of people, language, and culture. Thus, they introduced the concept of the 'person-in-context', arguing that we make meaning of the world as it appears to us, and we cannot be meaningfully detached from it. From Heidegger's perspective, our 'relatedness-to-the-world' and our

engagement with the world are fundamental parts of our constitution (cf., Larkin et al., 2006). Merleau-Ponty focused on the embodied nature of our relationship with the world, arguing that our body should not be perceived as an object in the world, but as a means of communicating with it. Finally, Sartre suggested that 'existence comes before essence' and that "the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project to be unfurled" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). Overall, understanding of experience was described as a complex process that invokes perspective and meanings unique to the person's embodied and situated relationship to the world (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19).

Drawing on the tradition of phenomenology just outlined the present thesis aims to recognise the significance of lived experiences and attempting to gain rich and detail accounts of such incidents (Smith et al., 2009). More specifically, by adopting the IPA the present thesis looks to discover the essential components of phenomena that make them unique and distinguishable from others. By adopting such an approach, the present research is concerned with the meaning that practitioners assign to their experiences and to identify components that make the phenomena special (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, the more contextualised approach is also acknowledged by adopting a more 'interpretative' approach to understanding people's relationships with the world and the meanings associated with particular events (Smith et al., 2009). More specifically, as a researcher, I look to adopt a 'reflexive move' and going back to the things themselves (Smith et al., 2009), the experiential content of consciousness, to fully engage with practitioners' thoughts, values, goals, and means of sense making. I strive, therefore, to engage with practitioners' reflections of their experiences and make sense of the significance of those experiences. In doing this, I also acknowledge the dynamic nature of research process and the active role that I played within it (Smith & Osborn, 2015). While trying to get close to the practitioners' world and taking an insider perspective, I sought to recognise the impact of my conceptions on the interpretative activity and my sense making of practitioners' world (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). For this reason, the present thesis acknowledges the significance of hermeneutics, which focused upon the matter of interpretation itself.

3.4.2. IPA as hermeneutic

The IPA second theoretical underpinning comes from work of hermeneutic phenomenologists – notably Heidegger. Originally, hermeneutic developed as a philosophical underpinning for interpreting biblical texts and subsequently developed an interpretation of a more comprehensive text (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger adopted hermeneutics in his description of phenomenology and used it to argue against descriptive phenomenology. In his major work, 'Being and Time', Heidegger (1962/1927) introduced a concept of 'Dasein' that refers to a unique experience of being a human. Heidegger argued that this concept could only be accessed through interpretation that involves our prior experiences and preconceptions. Therefore, Heidegger suggested that we bring a fore-conception to the encounter, and our prior experiences play a role in the process of looking at the new stimulus (Smith et al., 2009). Importantly, Heidegger (1962/1927) cited in Smith et al. (2009, p. 25) suggested that:

> "Our first, last, and constant task in interpreting are never to allow our... fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structure in terms of the things themselves." (p. 195).

Therefore, we need to be aware of the danger of putting our preconceptions upfront to interpret and prioritise the new 'object'. In other words, the phenomenon, or the thing itself, may play a significant role in interpreting and influencing the preconceptions and the fore-structure, which can then affect the interpretation process (Smith et al., 2009). As a result, an interpretation of a text is a process of "engaging in a dialogue between something that is old (a fore-understanding) and something new (the text itself)" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 26).

Following Heidegger, the objective of the present thesis is to give a significant attention to the dynamic process of analysing the phenomenon and the relationship between the fore-understanding and the new phenomenon being attended to. While acknowledging the role of bracketing in the interpretive analysis of qualitative data (Smith et al., 2009), the present thesis looks to follow the lead from the IPA proponents who argued that bracketing is a cynical process that can be achieved only partially (Smith et al., 2009). As such, I look to recognise, via reflective practice how my fore-understanding influences new interpretations (Smith et al., 2009). As such, IPA allowed me to further reiterate my active role as a researcher by acknowledging an engagement in 'double hermeneutic' to make sense of the practitioners' sense-making. As a result, I can develop a more in-depth interpretation through detailed reading and rereading (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This dynamic process of interpretation and reflection is achieved by adopting a hermeneutic circle model that addresses the relationship between the 'part' and the 'whole'. In relation to IPA, the 'part' represents the process of practitioners' sense-making, while the 'whole' represents the researcher's knowledge and experience. The hermeneutic circle, therefore, plays a significant role in IPA analysis by making it an interactive process and allowing me to move back and forth through the data. This cyclical approach to data analysis allowed me to discover a more profound meaning within the data by entering different levels of interpretation and perspective on the 'part-whole' coherence of the text (Smith et al., 2009).

3.4.3. IPA as idiographic

A final, yet significant, major influence upon IPA is idiography (Smith et al., 2009). First, it is a concept that focuses on the 'particular', in the sense of 'detail', that is the depth of analysis regarding individual experiences in a specific context. Second, it is committed to understanding how experiential phenomena are understood from the perspective of a 'particular' people (Smith et al., 2009). As a result, the present thesis focus on a small, purposively selected, and carefully situated samples (Smith et al., 2009). It is important to highlight that an idiographic focus on the 'particular' does not focus on an individual. Although the phenomenological view of experience is amenable to an idiographic approach, understanding the experience comes from a relationship with the phenomenon. Therefore, while an individual may offer a unique perspective of the phenomenon, it does not mean that an individual's experience is their 'property' per se (Smith et al., 2009). As a result, idiography deliberately avoids generalisations, but rather cautiously establishes generalisation by putting a significant emphasis on the 'particular' (Smith et al., 2009). In other words, the present thesis looks to develop an in-depth understanding of the 'particular', which then may or may not resonate with others in the same setting.

3.5. Recruitment

3.5.1. Sampling

Considering the idiographic nature of IPA and the influence on exploring detail understanding of participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009), the present study has a sample size of seven participants, which is in line with the recommendation of between four and ten participants for IPA study (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Considering multiple interviews are employed in the present study, this sample size is sufficient to ensure richness of data collection and in-depth analysis and reporting (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). To ensure that the participants are a homogenous group (Smith et al., 2009), a purposeful sampling method was employed to recruit them. A conscious effort was made to recruit participants with an experience of working in a range of environments. More specifically, significant attention was given to recruiting participants who had an experience of consulting with multiple different stakeholders across various sports. However, the homogeneity was ensured by recruiting participants who had experience working within sporting organisations and shared some common experiences of working with multiple stakeholders within sporting settings. In other words, all participants had an experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, all participants were able to offer insight into their experiences of contextual and situational factors of service delivery (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009).

3.5.2. Screening of participants

Careful consideration was given to selecting participants that were suitable to address the research questions. Several prerequisites were defined to determine a participant's eligibility. All participants in the present study completed Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) Stage 1 (this involves completing a BPS-accredited Master's degree in Sport and Exercise Psychology) and have completed/or were in the process of completing BPS QSEP Stage 2. It needs to be highlighted that at the time of data collection process the SEPAR was not accredited route and as such was not identified as an eligibility criterion. All participants were required to deliver sport psychology services within a sporting organisation and work with a range of contextual stakeholders.

3.5.3. Participants

In the first stage of the recruitment process, fourteen respondents who met the sampling criteria were identified. Ten of these respondents were in the early stage of their career and four were experienced practitioners. Considering the number of neophyte respondents, and the significance placed upon capturing stories of practice from practitioners with a wide range of experience, the researcher and the supervising team identified five early career practitioners based on the diverse settings they were operating in. More specifically, the identified neophyte respondents were delivering sport psychology services in sports such as football, athletics, swimming, speed skating. The remaining five early-career respondents were thanked for their interest in the research and informed that due to the nature of the study only limited number of neophyte practitioners could be included in the sample. Also, due to the nature of the study and the time required for data collection, two of the experienced practitioners decided to withdraw their interest of taking a part in the research project. As such, the present thesis includes seven participants ranging from early-career practitioners (M = 3 years) to highly experienced practitioners (M = 19 years of experience). Three participants were in the process of completing BPS QSEP Stage 2, two obtained their Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) accreditation during the data collection process, and two were experienced

sport psychologists who were already HCPC accredited. All seven participants possessed a minimum one year of experience delivering sport psychology services within a sporting organisation as part of a multidisciplinary team. Finally, all seven participants provided an insight into the role of a sport psychologist operating at different organisations from a range of sports either on a part-time, full-time, or consultancy basis.

3.6. Practitioners Pen-Profiles

The objective of this section is to present idiographic pen-profiles of each pseudonymised practitioner to further introduce the participants to the reader. The below summaries provide some contextual information regarding practitioners' career and basic demographic details up to the point at which data collection occurred (e.g. career stage during data collection process, years of prior experience, and existing qualifications). It needs to be highlighted that these summaries are not interpretative and did not form part of the analysis, they solely seek to give the readers an introductory glimpse into the respective backgrounds of each of the practitioners. Therefore, the pen-profiles look to support readers' sense-making of any changes that occurred over time in terms of practitioner's contexts of practice, highlighting practitioners' interactions, impressions, and events of importance at critical time points in their applied careers. It is also anticipated that they will provide context to practitioners lived experiences that are fully explored in the proceeding chapters.

3.6.1. Early career practitioners in the initial stage of the accreditation process

Dan (see Appendix F for accompanying practitioner timeline)

Dan's first applied experience came during their master's course as part of a practical module. They were responsible for working with coaches and players at an academy of a women's football club. Following graduation, Dan secured an applied placement at an academy of a professional football club, an opportunity that came from meeting the lead sport psychologist at an academic conference and a successful informal interview. As such, during the initial stages of their applied placement, Dan was working alongside a more experienced practitioner. However, after only a few months, the lead sport psychologists left the club, and Dan was the only practitioner within the organisation. Following nine months, the academy decided to recruit a new lead sport psychologist. Despite Dan getting to the final stage of the interview process, they were not successful in securing the position. However, following the recruitment process, Dan was offered a part-time job at the football academy and was offered their first applied contract. Throughout the data collection process, Dan was responsible for working with academy players aged between eight and sixteen, parents, coaches, and other support members of the academy staff (e.g., physiotherapists, operations manager). Dan's main stakeholders include the academy manager, head of coaching, U16 coach, goalkeeping coach, and operations manager.

Dan's stories of practice provide an insight into the experiences of early career practitioner operating within a professional football environment. Such accounts' significance lies in developing our understanding of the nuances of working within an environment prone to change and uncertainty. In particular, during the data collection process, Dan experienced a relegation of the first team to a lower league and several changes of the first team manager. While such changes did not affect Dan directly, they had a ripple effect of the club budget and ultimately job security of staff operating at the academy level. Also, Dan experienced several changes of coaches within the academy which was often associated with the need for an ongoing process of

forming new relationships. In particular, in the later stages of the data collection, Dan experienced a change of academy manager and head of coaching. Such a change had a particular significance on Dan's role as the outgoing management staff believed in sport psychology provision, and Dan was concerned that the new manager might not share the same beliefs.

3.6.2. Early career practitioners in the initial stage of the accreditation process and PhD in Sport and Exercise Psychology

Amy (see Appendix I for accompanying practitioner timeline)

Amy's first applied experience came during their master's course, where they secured an applied placement supporting student-athletes' psychological development at a university. In obtaining this position, Amy drew on their previous relationships with the university's coaching staff, who recommended them to the lead sport psychologist. Following the applied placement, Amy was offered a part-time contract at the university, and they remained in that position for one year. Following their time as a university sport psychologist, Amy secured an applied PhD position working with elite (national) youth athletes in an Olympic sport, completing a BPS accreditation in sport and exercise psychology. As part of these experiences, Amy worked with their supervisor with elite international athletes in another Olympic sport. During the data collection process, Amy worked predominately in Olympic sports with both youth and senior athletes. During this experience, Amy identified performance director, coaches, athletes, and supervisors as primary stakeholders. The stories of practice shared by Amy provide a fascinating insight into early career sport psychologists experiences of sport psychology provision within an Olympic cycle, illuminating the issues of funding and nuances of operating within two different environments.

3.6.3. Early career practitioners in the final stage of the accreditation process

Tom (see Appendix J for accompanying practitioner timeline)

Tom's first applied experience came during their master's degree, where they delivered educational workshops at a football academy. Following graduation, Tom secured an applied placement at the first team of a women's football club to provide sport psychology services for one season. Throughout the early stages of their career, Tom engaged in a range of networking activities contacting several applied practitioners to increase their understanding of the profession. Due to their proactive approach, Tom secured an applied position at a consultancy company that specialised at providing psychological support at a range of organisations. As part of their contract, Tom was responsible for delivering sport psychology services within winter Olympic sport working with the youth athletes two days a week. Alongside this experience, in the second year at the consultancy company, Tom started working an academy of a professional football club three times a week. Throughout the data collection process, Tom worked within two very different environments identifying the performance director, academy manager, and coaches as the key stakeholders they were working alongside. Due to their role at the consultancy company, Tom had excellent access to supervision working with a senior psychologist in each of their applied environments.

The stories of practice shared by Tom provide an insight into the nuances of applied practice. More specifically, despite working at a consultancy company, Tom experienced significant pressure associated with the changes at the sporting organisations. In particular, during their time at a winter Olympic sport, they experienced the organisation losing the funding and ultimately going through drastic changes, which directly

influenced Tom's role. More specifically, the senior psychologists within the environment lost their position. As a result, Tom was required to start working independently, forming new working relationships within an environment experiencing high levels of job insecurity. Tom experienced similar challenges during their time at the football academy where in the first six months into their role, the academy went through a restructuring process changing the academy manager and several key members of the coaching staff.

Alice (see Appendix E for accompanying practitioner timeline)

The reflective accounts shared by Alice highlight the challenges of forging a career within applied sport psychology. In particular, in the early stages of their career, Alice was required to provide sport psychology services at a range of organisations to meet the accreditation process requirements. Also, Alice was required to deliver sport psychology services around a full-time job, which they needed to take to fund the costs of the BPS accreditation and supervision. While reflecting on their initial experiences, Alice expressed their frustrations with limited applied opportunities, highlighting that they were required to travel four-hour round trips to a football academy for their applied placement. Following several applied internships, Alice secured their first full-time role within applied sport psychology at an academy of a professional football club. In this position, Alice was responsible for working alongside a part-time sport psychologist providing services to players, parents and coaches. Alice identified academy manager, head of coaching and coaches as the main stakeholders within the environment.

The reflective accounts provided by Alice echoed the experiences of other early-career practitioners, highlighting the challenges of securing an applied position and the demands of working within elite sport. More specifically, during the data collection process, Alice experienced a relegation of the first team to a lower league, several first team managers' changes, and numerous changes of the coaching staff within the academy. As such, Alice experiences reiterated the unstable nature of the elite sport, highlighting the practitioner's ability to forge new working relationships with incoming members of staff.

Beth (see Appendix G for accompanying practitioner timeline)

The lived experiences shared by Beth echoed the experiences of other early-career practitioners, highlighting the challenges associated with securing an applied position. Indeed, in the initial stages of their career, Beth was also required to work at several organisations to meet the accreditation process requirements. While reflecting on such experiences, Beth reiterated their frustrations with a limited amount of funding provided for sport psychology support and ultimately a lack of value towards sport psychologists' services. Following several placements, Beth secured a part-time position within a sporting institute supporting Paralympic athletes. While such a position initially felt as a dream come true, the challenges associated with operating within sporting environments made Beth question their role and ultimately lead them to resigning from their position and pursuing a career abroad. During their time within Paralympic sport, Beth identified performance director, head coach, welfare officer and strength and conditioning coach as the main stakeholders within the environment.

Beth's reflective accounts demonstrated the demands of applied practice highlighting a range of frustrations that the practitioners may experience throughout their career. In particular, such stories of practice illuminated how the limited job opportunities and financial constraints associated with applied sport

psychology delivery may result in low job satisfaction and ultimately force the practitioners to leave the profession.

3.6.4. Experienced practitioners registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC)

Steve (see Appendix H for accompanying practitioner timeline)

Steve is one of the most experienced practitioners sampled within the present thesis providing an insight into eight years of applied practice. While reflecting on their early career experiences, Steve expressed similar frustrations as other practitioners highlighting limited job opportunities within the profession. More specifically, Steve recalled how they even considered leaving the profession when they struggled to secure applied work early in their career. As such, the reflective accounts of Steve's experiences reflected a wide array of challenges and dilemmas that practitioners might encounter over the course of a career within applied sport psychology practice. Within their reflections, Steve focused on their experiences of working at an academy of a football club, supporting youth athletes preparing for international competition and their role within sporting institute supporting elite athletes competing within a range of Olympic disciplines.

The stories of practice shared by Steve demonstrated the realities of a sport psychologist workings within a range of applied settings and the nuances of building relationships with various contextual stakeholders. Such accounts hold a significant implication in developing an understanding of the contextual and cultural differences across different sporting settings, demonstrating the nuances of supporting athletes in their preparation for major sporting events (i.e., Commonwealth Games, Olympic Games, and Paralympic Games).

Jake (see Appendix K for accompanying practitioner timeline)

Jake is the most experienced practitioners sampled within the present study, with over 30 years of experience supporting athletes at all competition levels. During their fruitful career, Jake supported athletes and coaches at major sporting competitions such as the Olympic Games and World Championships. Compared to other practitioners sampled within the present thesis, Jake always held a lecturing position at various universities while providing sport psychology support on a consultancy basis. As such, the reflections shared by Jake offered a unique insight into the realities of applied practice and held a significant implication in understanding the demands of applied practice from a position of secured full-time employment and stable income.

3.7. Ethical considerations

This thesis received approval from the School of Social and Health Sciences Ethics Committee at Leeds Trinity University (SSHS/2017/048) on the 13th of July 2017 (see Appendix A for ethical approval letter). All practitioners were asked to read and sign a consent form. The study's nature and purpose were clearly outlined in the participants' information sheet (Appendix B) and explained verbally to all volunteers. All practitioners were allowed to ask additional questions before agreeing to take part in the study. It was recognised that due to the longitudinal nature of data collection and the use of repeated interviews, practitioners could feel obliged to continue (Allmark et al., 2009). Also, while no risk to practitioners' health and well-being were identified, some interviews could address sensitive issues to practitioners, which could

make interviews emotionally intense (Allmark et al., 2009). To address these ethical considerations, practitioners were reminded throughout the data collection process that they had the right to stop the interview, move to the next question or withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation. Also, the practitioners were informed that they hold the right to withdraw their data from the study up to two months following the last interview.

Throughout the data collection, analysis and writing-up processes, significant attention was also given to issues surrounding the privacy and confidentiality of practitioners and the organisations in which they worked (Allmark et al., 2009). Personal information that could be used to identify the practitioners and the organisations they worked in remained strictly confidential. The researcher was the only person who had access to this information. The data collection process was carried out confidentially, and each practitioner was initially given a number instead of using their names or initials. During the write up of the findings, the numbers of practitioners were replaced with pseudonyms. Also, practitioners gave their consent to audio recordings of the interviews. They were informed that all recordings would be kept in password-secured external drives and folders to prevent damage, loss, or theft. Each recording was assigned a different code that included practitioners' number and interview date (Groenewald, 2004). In the data transcription process, all personal information (e.g., names of the organisations or characters of colleagues) were replaced with the word "organisation one football" or "colleague name 1". To reinforce security and ensure confidentially, the data (recordings and transcripts) were stored on password protected hard drive. Finally, due to the research nature, the practitioners were informed that it might be impossible to assure complete confidentiality. It was explained that while practitioners may remain confidential to the general public, the narratives and life histories that they provided would ultimately be included in the final write-up of the thesis and may result in them being identifiable to peers also involved in the study, or other individuals from within their organisations (Allmark et al., 2009).

Another challenge was related to the potentially exploitative relationship that could arise between the researcher and the practitioners. Due to the nature of data collection involving multiple interviews, attention was given to the way relationships are being formed and managed. Casey (2006) suggested that the boundaries can be blurred as the research progresses. These issues included the nature of power imbalance within the relationship and how the relationship affects the practitioners emotionally, psychologically, and personally (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2010). The researcher was mindful of the ethical implications when managing the relationship making sure that appropriate boundaries were maintained throughout the data collection process. In particular, the face-to-face interviews were carried out in an environment that was trustworthy (e.g., meetings rooms within the university facilities). Throughout the data collection process, significant attention was given to avoiding situations where practitioners could think they were friends with the researcher (Casey, 2006).

3.8. Data collection

3.8.1. Rationale behind semi-structured interviews

Considering that a primary objective of IPA is to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of experiences and phenomena under investigation, the present thesis adopted semi-structured interviews as a means of encouraging reflections and in-depth exploration of each participant's experiences (Larkin &

Thompson, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2009). While interviews are the most widely used method to collect qualitative data in the sport and exercise sciences (Smith & Sparkes, 2016), the present thesis acknowledges that such an approach may often be taken for granted (Potter & Hepburn, 2005) and perceived as a default option for collecting qualitative data (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Such assumptions may create a "real danger of creating a launchpad for poor research" (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 103). Therefore, when deciding on the most appropriate method for data collection and to ensure high-quality data collection process, the present thesis drew from relevant literature (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2013; Brinkmann, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). With this in mind, although other alternatives of data collection can also be used (e.g., diaries, focus groups), semi-structured interviews were employed within the present thesis based on the potential for the most valuable source of knowledge about experience and meaning rather than simply a default option (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Adopting semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection allow the present thesis to remain consistent with IPA's idiographic commitments, inviting the participants to offer rich, detail, first-person accounts of their lived experiences and feelings about the target phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Indeed, the data collection process explores one person's experiences, providing participants with an opportunity to speak freely and reflect on their stories in some length (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher enters into in-depth conversations with the participants, encouraging meaningful reflections and sharing (Brinkmann, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Rubel & Okech, 2017). This, in turn, allows the data collection process to be collaborative with the researcher striving to get to know the participants by providing them with an opportunity to talk about themselves and their socio-professional worlds (Alexander & Clare, 2004; Brinkmann, 2013). Semi-structured interviews, therefore, meet the objectives of the present thesis, capturing stories that had personal meaning to the participants and provided an insight into their professional lives, including past events, current actions, and imagined futures (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The utilisation of semi-structured interviews in the data collection process proves to be an indispensable source of rich and new knowledge about the social and personal aspects of participants applied practice (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

The selection of semi-structured interviews was further underlined by a desire to increase access to geographically disparate participants. Indeed, to meet the objectives of capturing a variety of lived experiences, participants in the present thesis were based at several different locations across England. Therefore, semi-structured interviews allowed the data collection process to be carried out as a combination of face-to-face (n = 5) and telephone interviews (n = 43). While the telephone interviews have several limitations relating primarily to the lack of visual or nonverbal cues, challenges to establishing rapport, and potential loss of contextual data (i.e., ability to observe participants) (Novic, 2008; Holt, 2010; Smith, 2005), in recent years telephone interviews have been recognised as an effective method that provided rich, vivid, detailed, and high-quality data (Chapple, 1999; Kavanaugh & Ayres, 1998; Smith & Sparkes, 2016; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Accordingly to Carr and Worth (2001), the increasing popularity of telephone interviews is a reflection of the broader social change and technological advances. As a result, the telephone has become the main electronic medium for almost every aspect of modern interpersonal communication (Carr & Worth, 2001). Therefore, some of the limitations regarding telephone communication reported in the 1970s and 1980s (cf., Victor, 1988) appear to be less valid now (Carr & Worth, 2001). For instance, Jackie et al. (2006)

conducted a study comparing telephone versus face-to-face interviewing. The results demonstrated that the main difference between face-to-face and telephone interviewing included the channels of communication and the physical presence of the interviewer (Jackie et al., 2006). This, in turn, may provide some advantages to telephone interviewing. For instance, while face-to-face respondents can observe the interviewer's reaction to their answers, they may report sensitive behaviours and attitudes less truthfully compare to telephone interviewees (Jackie et al., 2006). Therefore, in a face-to-face interview, a participant may be more likely to edit responses to appear in a more favourable light (Jackie et al., 2006).

Within the present thesis, the data collected via the telephone produced data that were at least comparable in quality to that attained by face-to-face interviews (Carr & Worth, 2001). Also, the longitudinal approach adopted within the present thesis allowed me to further overcome some of the limitations of telephone interviews. More specifically, by conducting the first interview in person and engaging with all participants for a prolonged time, data collection races via telephone interviews allowed to establish rapport, reduced anxiety, and allowed the participants to find their voice (Carr & Worth, 2001). Both face-to-face and telephone interviews lasted on average for over an hour and no differences were identified in terms of participants' fatigue or the length of answers (Carr & Worth, 2001). Therefore, telephone interviews produced the same level of quality of free-flowing conversations. In addition, despite the lack of visual cues in the telephone interviews, no difference was observed in the ability to ask probing questions or introduce more sensitive topics. As a result, the telephone interviews conducted within the present thesis produce the same level of data richness as in-person interviews in terms of world count and topic-related information (Azad et al., 2021). Therefore, the utilisation of telephone interviews within the present thesis yielded positive results in terms of quality and depth of collected data (Azad et al., 2021).

Overall, semi-structured interviews within the present thesis allow the researcher to ‘know’ participants' experiences and meanings, providing a detailed and complex insight into participants' decisions, values, motivations, beliefs, perceptions and feelings (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Considering that the stories told in an interview are shaped by the society and culture the participants inhabit, the data collection process within the present thesis reveals the sociocultural dynamics of lived experiences, illuminating how the context in which participants operate influenced their meaning, decisions, values, and motivations (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Therefore, semi-structured interviews meet the objective of the present thesis providing a fascinating insight into participants' subjective understanding of the socio-political aspects of the workplace interactions and relationships with a range of contextual stakeholders.

The different facets that comprise Kelchtermans’ (2005; 2009a; 2009b) theorising around professional self-understanding and Goffman’s (1959) ideas regarding impression management were utilised to help inform the individual interview guides, with open questions being posed to help explore the practitioner’s unique perspectives and sense-making (see Appendix D). Questions such as “can you describe a typical week within your current role?”, “how would you describe your interactions with (a specified key stakeholder)?” and “can you describe any developments in your relationships with (a specified key stakeholder)?” guided the overarching discussion, and participants were encouraged to lead the conversation and introduce topics that were meaningful to them beyond the interview guide. Indeed, such an approach allowed the researcher and participants to enter into a dialogue where questions could be modified in light of responses and a particular meaning given to the lived experiences, providing space and flexibility for original

and unexpected issues to arise (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The researcher often asked unplanned questions that allowed for discovering unanticipated information (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and a greater understanding of the day-to-day events that had taken place between the interviews. The interview schedule allowed for a greater understanding of how participants made sense of their interactions with the contextual stakeholders and how their perceptions influenced their behaviour and actions in practice.

3.8.2. The use of accompanying practitioner timelines

To support the interview process, each participant was asked to create a timeline outlining their applied experience to date. The use of a visual depiction of a participant's career, where events are displayed chronologically, served to facilitate a recollection and sequencing of personal circumstances (Berends, 2011). This included the organisations they worked at, the duration of their employment, the level of athletes that they worked with (i.e., youth/senior, international/club level), their roles and responsibilities, and the key stakeholders who they worked with. As a result, these timelines helped the participants to focus their attention during the interview by acting both as a memory aid and a visual guide for how the interview will progress (Kolar, Ahmad, & Chan, Erickson, 2017). These timelines were also used as a visual middle ground between the researcher and the participants and allowed more context-specific questions and responses (Kolar et al., 2017). Therefore, the timeline 'placed' the participant in the context of a significant life event (Berends, 2011) and created a space for nuanced communication of meaning, struggle, emotion, and experience (Kolar et al., 2017).

3.8.3. Rationale for adopting a longitudinal approach

The present study adopted a longitudinal approach (Caruana et al., 2015) to data collection to better understand any temporal change in a practitioner's self-perception according to any changing contextual circumstances. Considering the complexity of social worlds and conceptualisation of time, an increased number of studies have adopted a longitudinal approach to collect data, following participants across time (Calman et al.,2013). A longitudinal approach provides a unique way to understand the relationships among experience, time, and change, capturing the nuanced and subjective understanding of lived phenomena, which may change, evolve, or remain stable across time (Calman et al., 2013; McCoy, 2017). Such investigation also facilitated a rich exploration of how individuals interpret and respond to such change, illuminating the significance of the meaning, causes, and consequences of changes or continuities across time (Hermanowicz, 2013).

The adoption of a longitudinal approach within the present thesis also remains consistent with IPA's philosophical underpinnings (McCoy, 2017). Indeed, the development of hermeneutics within IPA illustrated the significance of understanding the phenomena in relation to time and the temporal context consisting unique composition of human values and norms alongside unique political, economic, and social landscape (Moules et al., 2015). As such, the context of time is at the heart of understanding and interpreting experiences through the IPA approach (Moules et al., 2015). Therefore, the longitudinal approach adopted within the present thesis was aligned to IPA's emphasis and attention to the ever-changing nature of temporality and understanding of experiences across time (Moules et al., 2015). Similarly, the longitudinal approach aligns with the hermeneutic conceptualisation of change (McCoy, 2017). Indeed, IPA recognises that difference is an intrinsic part of human experience underlined by the notion of continually changing personal context (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, this approach allows for a greater understanding of meaning's

complexities by paying significant attention to convergence, divergence, commonality, and difference within individual's experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In this way, the longitudinal approach aligns to IPA's theoretical underpinnings in hermeneutics and its ontological position that values subjective positioning in reality allows for an epistemological and ontological congruence within the present thesis (McCoy, 2017).

To capture practitioners' accounts of formative experiences throughout their professional careers until the final interview, the data were collected over an eighteen-month timeframe. During this period, six participants took part in six interviews each, with one participant taking part in five interviews due to personal circumstances. This allowed practitioners to reflect more comprehensively on their professional experiences in a timelier manner than obtaining "snapshot data" (Murray et al., 2009, p. 959) of lived experiences specific to a particular time and place. Also, multiple interviews allowed for the development of a less hierarchical and more collaborative and trusting relationship with practitioners. Therefore, the researcher was able to better access practitioners' experiences and their perceptions of these experiences and whether they changed over time and, if so, in what way. This approach allowed for the collection of fascinating insight into organisational life (e.g., changes to organisation structure) and revealed how practitioners forged key relationships. As a result, a more holistic understanding of practitioners was developed, and the researcher was able to gather 'thick' descriptions of individual experiences (Vincent, 2013).

3.9. Transcribing

Each interview recording was transcribed verbatim by the researcher personally. As discussed in section 3.7. (Ethical considerations) all identifiable pieces of information were excluded from the transcript and replaced by a simple label. The transcription process played a significant part in the immersion in the data and a greater understanding of practitioners' experiences. Each interview was typed in a landscape format in Microsoft Word and then formatted in a way to allow auditable steps of analysis to be conducted: landscape, line-numbered with space to the right of the transcript for initial noting, and the left for emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). However, due to a significant amount of data, the transcripts were transferred to NVivo 12, allowing a greater level of management and analysis of the data. The analysis process undertaken is described in more detail in section 3.11. (Data analysis and interpretation).

3.10. Data summary

Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes, was reordered onto a voice recorder, and were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts yielded 511 pages of 1.08 spaced interview data.

3.11. Data analysis and interpretation

The present thesis employed the IPA stages outlined by Smith et al. (2009) due to clear and detailed explanations provided. The steps suggested by Smith et al. (2009) provided valuable guidance that helped the researcher to manage the analysis process and provided a sense of order. The following sub-sections will go through each step that was taken during the data analysis process. However, it needs to be highlighted that due to the time scale required to collect the data and the timescale of the present PhD thesis, transcription took place between the interviews with single case analysis conducted at the end of the data collection process (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the researcher acknowledged the potential impact of the data

transcription on the analysis process (see section 3.13. Research reflexivity) ensuring that the interpretation of single cases was not affected by other participants' experiences.

3.11.1. Reading and re-reading

The first step in IPA is a process of immersing oneself in the original data. As discussed earlier (see section 3.9. Transcribing) this process started with the data transcription that allowed for greater understanding of participants' experiences. Following the transcription process, the researcher adopted a single case approach and listened to individual participant interviews while reading the transcript. This allowed to check for accuracy and enhanced familiarisation. During the subsequent reading of the transcripts, the researcher focused on the individual participant and actively engaged with the data to "enter the participant's world" (Smith et al., 2009, p.82). This process aimed to develop an understanding of the 'life stories' and no comments or markings were made during this stage.

3.11.2. Initial noting for a single participant

This step included further familiarisation with transcribed data from each participant in turn. The researcher highlighted words, parts of the sentences or the whole sentences that appeared particularly pertinent in capturing how a participant thought, talked, and understood a given issue. Exploratory notes and comments started to be added to the transcript. This process took place initially using Microsoft Word, which allowed for easier reading and re-reading of the data. The comments took the form of the descriptive comment*s* (Smith et al., 2009) and focused on describing key experiences and events that the participant talked about. However, the descriptive and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2009) were added to the data using the NVivo 12 software annotations to allow a greater level of management and analysis of the sizable data set (see Appendix L). Therefore, the initial noting process moved towards a more interpretative level and focused on achieving a more overarching understanding of the matters discussed by the participants. It needs to be highlighted that while the researcher aimed to make linguistic comments (Smith et al., 2009), the reading and re-reading of data demonstrated limited variability in the tone and language used. As a result, only a limited number of comments had linguistic form and did not influence the data analysis process.

3.11.3. Developing emergent themes for a single participant

This step looked to reduce the data volume while maintaining complexity (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, as a researcher, I looked for interrelationships, connections, and patterns between the exploratory notes by creating initial codes using Nodes in NVivo 12 (see Appendix M). More specifically, while reading and re-reading the data I identified words or phrases repeated in an individual practitioners' responses. The objective of this process was to identify a bunch of words or statements that related to the same core meaning of the lived experiences that an individual practitioner was trying to convey through their responses (Alase, 2017). As a result of such data coding process, the analysing exploratory comments and chunks of the transcript were re-organised into the emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009) (see Appendix M). While this process looked at the participants' lived experiences, greater attention was given to the interpretation of the data. Therefore, this analysis process involved an interaction between the text and the researcher who attempted to understand what participants said (Smith et al., 2009). To ensure that the analysis remained faithful to the participants' lived experience, the researcher relied on hermeneutic cycle principles. The process of developing emergent themes involved constant revisiting of the coding framework and the original transcripts. The engagement with the transcript moved forward and backwards through the

continuous reading and re-reading of the data. As such, the data analysis process was fluctuating and dynamic. Thus, "the part was interpreted in relation to the whole; the whole was interpreted in relation to the part" (Smith et al., 2009, p.92). The hermeneutic cycle ensured that the data's interpretation was authentic and representative of the participants' accounts. Whereas the self-reflections (see section 3.13. Researcher reflexivity) ensured that the researcher recognised their position in the analysis process and acknowledged how their subjective values, understandings and perceptions affected the interpretations.

3.11.4. Searching for connections across emergent themes

In this step, the objective was to identify patterns and connections between the emergent themes and develop subordinate themes for each participant (see Appendix M). This was done in NVivo 12, where some of the emergent themes were clustered together when their connections made sense (see Appendix N). During this process, the clusters were checked against the primary transcript to ensure that they represented what the participants said and were given a descriptive label. Some of the emergent themes were discarded at this stage if they did not fit into the emergent structure or did not provide a rich account concerning the research questions. At this stage, a range of processes proposed by Smith et al. (2009) were used to develop subordinate themes. These included:

- Abstraction – identifying patterns between the emergent themes. It involves "putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 96).
- Subsumption – bringing a series of related emergent themes together by giving them a subordinate status.
- Contextualisation – identifying the narrative parts within each analysis that relate to a particular moment or an event. As a result, the emergent themes can be organised in terms of the temporal moment where they are located.

Next using the same processes, the subordinate themes were developed into superordinate themes for each participant. This was done by identifying connections between the subordinate themes before grouping them.

3.11.5. Looking for patterns across cases

Once all seven cases had been individually analysed in the manner outlined above, the final step in the analysis process involved searching for connections and patterns across cases (see Appendix N). Similarities and differences between the superordinate themes were identified to develop master themes, which "reflected the group of participants' experiences as a whole". They captured "the quality of the participants shared experiences of the phenomenon under investigation" (Willig, 2008, p.61-62) (see Appendix O).

3.12. Ensuring quality

Several guidelines for assessing quality and validity in qualitative research have been produced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes & Smith, 2009; 2014; Tracy, 2010). For instance, an approach proposed by Yardley (2000, 2008) was identified as a sophisticated way of assessing quality and validity in IPA (Smith et al., 2009). However, the most recent developments in qualitative research suggested that it is inappropriate to apply universal criteria to judge research underpinned by an ontological position of multiple and subjective

realities (Burke, 2016). It was also recognised that a checklist approach for assessing quality is too simplistic and prescriptive for qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009). As such, the present thesis followed the most recent developments in qualitative research, adopting relativist approach to ensuring quality (Burke, 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2018). Contrarily to the criteriological approach (cf., Sparkes & Smith, 2009, 2014), the relativist approach does not use the quality criteria in a fixed and rigid way. Instead, it is study-specific and subject to constant reinterpretation (Burke, 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2018). The relativist approach is closely aligned with ontological relativism and epistemological constructionism, reflecting the assumptions and beliefs of the interpretivist paradigm. From this perspective, the researcher is required to make informed decisions and ongoing judgements regarding the most appropriate criteria that reflect the inherited proprieties of a particular study (Burke, 2016). Considering the nature of the present thesis and the chosen methodology, the quality will be ensured by following the criteria outlined below.

3.12.1. Substantive contribution

The current thesis will demonstrate a 'substantive contribution' to contemporary knowledge advancement by investigating an area that received scant attention within applied literature. More specifically, the present thesis enhances an understanding of how the complexities, nuances, dilemmas, and the day-to-day realities of applied practice influence sport psychologists' self-understanding and perceptions of their role. By adopting a novel theoretical lens, the present thesis aims to develop knowledge on how sport psychologists advance their relationships with contextual stakeholders and consequently survive and thrive within their professional applied settings.

3.12.2. Width

The current thesis attempts to ensure 'width' by including multiple and various voices during the data collection, analysis and report writing processes. The accounts presented in the current thesis include viewpoints and experiences of a range of practitioners who had different practical experience levels and who operated in a range of different settings (see section 3.6. Practitioners pen-profiles). This results in various opinions and a thick description of the contextually situated meanings, to account for the complex specificity and circumstantiality of the data. The findings include rich interpretations and numerous quotations within the chapters to follow, to help facilitate and support the reader's judgement of evidence. Such a 'width' of accounts and interpretations, therefore, allows the readers to develop their own conclusion about the scene (Burke, 2016).

3.12.3. Resonance

The current thesis looks to demonstrate 'resonance' by producing vivid, engaging, and structurally complex accounts that would encourage the reader to feel, think, interpret, react, or change (Burke, 2016). Also, the 'resonance' of the current thesis will be achieved if the presented accounts and findings correspond with the readers' situations in their own applied practice. Therefore, the detailed descriptions of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning aim to create a sense of 'transferability' amongst the readers that may feel that they have experienced the same things in another area (Burke, 2016). Therefore, the current thesis looks to produce qualitative work that readers can emphasise with, which resonates with them and stimulates curiosity (Smith & Caddick, 2012). In other words, the findings look to provide readers with "familiar resemblance to reader's experiences, settings they move in, events they have observed or hear about, and people they have talked to" (Smith, 2018, p. 140).

3.12.4. Impact

This thesis provides a new conceptual understanding of applied practice realities and challenge the rationalistic and descriptive accounts that have typified the sport psychology literature to date. This thesis's findings develop new knowledge to improve practice, highlighting how sport psychologists cope with the nuances of their practice and presenting the implication that developed normative principles about service provision (Burke, 2016). As a result, the current thesis looks to challenge how practitioners develop their understanding of the sporting environments in terms of power, conflict, control, and goal diversification. The findings also seek to demonstrate how sport psychologists experience and grapple with the day-to-day demands of practice and how they seek to manage and resolve issues.

3.12.5. Credibility

The present research looks to achieve 'credibility' through a prolonged period of engagement (eighteen months) with the participants during the data collection process. This effectively allowed the researcher to develop an insight into practitioners' tacit knowledge and delve beneath the surface to explore issues that are assumed, implicit, and have become part of practitioners' common sense (Burke, 2016).

3.12.6. Transparency

To ensure 'transparency', the supervisory team were used as critical friends to encourage reflexivity and challenge the researcher's knowledge construction (Burke, 2016). Supervisors acted as a sounding board and provided critical feedback regarding theoretical preferences, the development of the interview guide and the process of analysing the data. The researcher was encouraged to reflect upon and explore multiple and alternative explanations and interpretations as they emerged in relation to the data. The different perspectives offered by the critical friends challenged and developed the researcher's interpretations, and they allowed for a more coherent and theoretically sound argument made about data generated (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

3.13. Researcher reflexivity

As discussed earlier, developing paradigmatic assumptions viewed the researcher as a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection, and interpretation of 'relevant' data (Finlay, 2002a). Research and meanings have started to be regarded as a joint product of the participants, the researcher, and their relationship (Finlay, 2002b). However, the researcher's acknowledgement as a part of the research process has understandably resulted in critical questions being posed regarding rigour and quality within qualitative research approaches. Therefore, as part of laying claims to the integrity and trustworthiness within corresponding research outputs, it has been recognised that researchers need to identify how subjective and intersubjective elements influence their research. Such process is addressed by the idea of 'reflexivity', which was defined as researcher's ability to recognise own beliefs, values and attitudes, and their personal effect on adopted research methods (Payne & Payne, 2004). Reflexivity, therefore, was identified as a tool allowing researchers to engage in an explicit, self-aware analysis of the research process (Finlay, 2002b) and is now the defining feature of qualitative research, with most qualitative researchers giving significant attention to how their role affects the co-construction of knowledge (Finlay, 2002a).

In particular, the IPA acknowledges that exploration of participants' experiences cannot be separated from the researcher's view of the world (Willig, 2013). Indeed, Smith and Osborne (2003) referred to double

hermeneutics in IPA, highlighting the researcher's role who makes sense of the participant who is making sense of their experiences. From such a perspective, IPA assigns the researcher an active, interpretative, and producing understanding (Smith et al., 2009). While the findings reflect the participants' accounts of lived experiences, it also acknowledges researcher involvement throughout the research process (Smith et al., 2009). This may include the questions asked, the choices made, researcher position in relation to the participants and the interpretation of participants' experiences during the interview and subsequent analysis of the data (Smith et al., 2009). For these reasons, reflexivity within IPA research received significant attention with the researcher being expected to make their own position explicit (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In particular, researchers have been encouraged to engage in critical self-awareness of their subjectivity, interests, predilections, and assumptions and identify how these may impact the research process and outcomes (Finlay, 2008).

The current thesis draws upon three distinctive forms of reflexivity identified by Wilkinson (1988) to demonstrate that the findings and knowledge developed were not a result of the researcher's perspectives, biases, logic, and prior knowledge. 'Personal reflexivity' was used to identify the influence of my motivations, interests, and attitudes on the research process (Wilkinson, 1988). As discussed earlier (see section 1.2. My own lived experience: A catalyst for enquiry) I possess prior experiences of operating within sporting organisations as both a trainee practitioner and a (UEFA A Licensed) football coach. As such, the previous perceptions regarding structural, political, and cultural characteristics of the sporting settings played a significant role in shaping I fore-knowledge (i.e., the pre-existing beliefs, values, and understandings the researcher brings to the project) (Smith et al., 2009). While phenomenology upholds the idea of 'transcendental subjectivity' as a form of neutrality where the researcher vacates their own lived reality (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007) by engaging in 'bracketing' personal past knowledge (cf., Husserl, 1970), the present thesis followed the philosophical approach of IPA recognising that 'bracketing' might be unrealistic to achieve (Smith et al., 2009). Instead, I looked to engage in critical self-awareness and bring personal experiences, values, perceptions, and assumptions to the fore, to consider how they might influence the collection and interpretation of qualitative data (Smith et al., 2009).

Also, the supervisory team were used as 'critical friends' to encourage reflexivity (see section 3.12.6. Transparency). Such processes helped me understand how my personal experiences could influence the interpretations of the career stories shared within the present thesis, enabling me to focus on what the participants said, rather than what I precisely needed to know. Significant attention was given to my perspective as a trainee sport psychologist and the potential of such a position to considerably shape the engagement with the data. For example, it was anticipated that some of the trainee and early career practitioners' stories might resonate with my own experiences. Therefore, my lived experiences were acknowledged during the data collection process and were an integral part of the interview process. Such an approach allowed me to ensure that practitioners stories were thoroughly explored, with questioning focused on practitioners' sense-making, rather than imposing too much of my own experiences upon the practitioners. This allowed the practitioners to share their stories without restriction or restrain, allowing the data collection process to explore the practitioners' unique perspectives and sense-making. A similar approach was adopted within the data analysis process, where the acknowledgement of my applied experiences ensured that the sense-making of practitioners' career stories drove the data's interpretations.

Next, ‘functional reflexivity’ was used to identify the interactions between the researcher and the participant (Wilkinson, 1988). Here, I reflected on the power relationships and status within the research process. More specifically, I recognised that I was in control of the research as I developed the idea, formulated the questions, and organised the format of the research. Thus, significant attention was given to ensure that my own experiences and theory did not affect the data collection process. Even though the workings of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) and Goffman’s (1959) were used as a theoretical lens to generally guide interview schedules, the questions asked focused specifically on exploring practitioners’ stories and the perceived meaning that they had attributed to events that were deemed to be significant in relation to their professional lives. Thus, the objective of interviews was to encourage practitioners to express the perceptions of their experiences freely, instead of trying to ask leading questions that would reinforce previous findings and support the theory. It was also ensured that my personal experiences regarding the demands of applied practice and interactions with contextual stakeholders did not affect knowledge development.

Finally, ‘disciplinary reflexivity’ allowed me to determine my stance towards professional self-understanding and micropolitical theory. The current thesis aimed to challenge the rationalistic and descriptive representations of applied sport psychology practice and encourage a broader debate regarding the type of research within sport psychology literature. The workings of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) were identified as a tool to investigate sporting organisations' political context and provide theoretically robust scrutiny of contextual reflections. Thus, the theorising of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) was used as a device for interpreting personal meaning-making and developing an understanding of every day ‘grit’ of organisational life in which applied sport psychologist is embedded. As a result, the micropolitical analysis of sporting contexts responded to calls for more nuanced and process-oriented accounts of practice (Tod & Lavallee, 2011; Tod & Andersen, 2012). By challenging the up-to-date portrayal of practice, the current thesis added to the evolving body of knowledge addressing how applied practice frequently occurs in settings that are characterised by varying degrees of the ideological agreement; coordination; and actual, or potential for, conflict (Cassidy et al., 2016). Therefore, the theoretical lens employed in the current thesis contributed to the development of knowledge regarding sport psychologist experiences regarding working with various stakeholders, who may hold and actively pursue opposing beliefs, motivations, and goals (Rowley et al., 2018).

3.14. Conclusion

Overall, an adaptation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith et al., 2009) within the present thesis provided me with an opportunity to develop a deep and meaningful understanding of the social realities of sport work. More specifically, by putting the practitioners at the heart of the inquiry, I achieved the research objectives of developing an understanding of experiences of interpersonal interactions in a specific context. Throughout this process, however, I was required to acknowledge my own fore-understandings and beliefs regarding sporting context. It is here the support of my supervisors, who acted as ‘critical friends’ was highly valuable. More specifically, my supervisors created a space for me to express my ideas and clarify my thinking, providing an appropriate balance between support and challenge. This, in turn, facilitated personal reflexivity (Wilkinson, 1988) throughout the research process allowed me to enhance my critical thinking skills and an ability to overcome encountered obstacles.

Indeed, the research process outlined in the present chapter was a challenging task that I would not be able to complete on my own. Starting from formulating a research idea, through data collection and analysis, to writing up the results, my supervisors asked critical questions facilitating and enhancing the research process. More specifically, the act of listening, questioning, reflecting, giving feedback, and summarising my supervisors enabled me to look for a deeper meaning and possible alternative explanations. Therefore, by knowing the right questions to ask at the right time and framing the questions in the right manner, my supervisors helped me engage in critical self-awareness and find different solutions to encountered challenges throughout the research process. Such relationships, therefore, kept me motivated, made the journey more enjoyable, and enhanced my confidence in achieving the objectives set at the beginning of the research process.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1. Introduction

The present chapter seeks to account for the stories of practice shared by practitioners as part of this research project. Four superordinate themes that emerged from the data illustrating actual examples taken from individuals to justify the meanings attributed to them during the IPA process (Smith et al., 2009). These themes represent practitioners lived experiences and include: *finding one's place, reality shock, experiential learning, forging positive relationships*. This chapter will examine the clear connections and patterns between everyday experiences and themes that emerged during the analysis. While presenting each theme individually, it needs to be highlighted that they occurred within the more comprehensive narrative, which captures the true complexity of the data. Therefore, while the themes presented here represent the higher-order qualities shared in the experiences of the phenomenon embodied within the individual (Smith et al., 2009), readers are encouraged to acknowledge the interconnectivity between themes. More specifically, although each superordinate theme outlines practitioners' everyday sense-making within the sporting context of the phenomenon of interpersonal interactions, a comprehensive understanding of such experiences can only be achieved by recognising the inter-connections between the themes.

As discussed in the proceeding chapter (3.8.2. The use of accompanying practitioner timelines), the practitioners reflected on their past life experiences from a perspective of the sense-making within a particular moment in time, rather than meanings that they hold at the point of interview. Moreover, the readers should note themes presented in this chapter represent the lens through which I interpreted the reflective accounts during the research process. As such, the themes presented in this chapter should not be taken to symbolise the practitioners' only truth, but rather, they are possible interpretations emerging from my perspective as the researcher. Thus, the themes identified and explored in this chapter are not absolute, as another researcher may draw attention to different or additional themes.

4.2. Finding one's place

Regardless of how many years of experience practitioners had accumulated as sport psychologists, they all reflected on initial stages on their career when discussing their respective timelines. Indeed, a number of the practitioners' reflections accounted for within this project focused on their initial experiences of securing applied positions and delivering sport psychology services within a range of applied settings. Several subordinate themes emerged during the analysis process, which represent the motives behind entering the profession and the realities of the early stages of applied career. These include: *passion for sport and working with people, embracing an uncertain career* and *working alongside allied professions.*

4.2.1. Passion for sport and working with people

While striving to understand the process of *finding one's place,* it became clear that practitioner's sense-making of their professional selves and their applied experiences was heavily influenced by own life experiences, and their overarching *passion for sport and working with people*. Indeed, all practitioners sampled within the present thesis expressed that they took an active part in sport from an early age, highlighting their passion and love for the sport. As such, it was apparent that practitioners' personal experiences of training and sporting competition held significant importance in sparking their interest in sport psychology, encouraging them to consider it as a career. Indeed, several practitioners expressed that

they investigated sport psychology as a means of understanding their own athletic endeavours, with Jake recalling:

> I think that this *[interest in sport psychology]* comes from personal experience. I think that as a sport performer, I was quite psychologically sound and, in some circumstances, I was not! I wanted to understand why this was the case, and what I could do about it, I suppose. (Jake, Interview 2).

In a similar vein, when reflecting on their motivation for pursuing a career in sport psychology, Tom identified their own sporting experiences as the main factor encouraging them to take an interest in the psychological aspects of sport:

> I was a scholar *[football apprentice],* and I thought that being a full-time athlete will be like a promised land, everything that I was hoping for as a child. But then you find yourself signing a professional contract, and you find yourself coming in and going "naahhh I want to go home." Come in, do what I am supposed to do *[attend training sessions]* and then just go off. Coming in on some days and just saying "I do not want to be here." So, lacking this motivation. I thought that I cannot be right in my head as this was something that I always wanted to do *[be a professional footballer]*. (Tom, Interview 2).

Practitioners desire to understand their own sporting performances was further exemplified by Amy, who reflected on their initial perceptions of sport psychology:

> I actually ended up going abroad *[after receiving a sporting scholarship]* to do a master's, which accidentally was in sport psychology. At the time, I did not have an interest in it *[sport psychology]*. Well, I was interested in sport psychology, but not for the point of view of becoming a sport psychologist. Rather more of a view that I am an athlete, and this could actually be helpful for me. (Amy, Interview 1).

Experiences such as those outlined here seemingly played an important role in shaping practitioners' subsequent career choices and initial interest in sport psychology as a professional field. Indeed, whilst it should be stressed that prior sport participation is in no way viewed as a requirement for becoming a sport psychologist, it was apparent that such experiences elevated the significance of the mental aspects of elite sporting performance in the eyes of the practitioners sampled within the present thesis. Several practitioners expressed how they took upon themselves to learn from professional athletes about the psychological characteristics required for elite sport performance. During their early life, therefore, the practitioners dedicated themselves to understanding fundamental principles predictive of success within sporting competition, questioning a range of factors that contributed towards performance excellence. This desire to understand how athletes, teams, coaches, and sport administrators consistently excelled in their own performances was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who recalled:

> I was interested in why the Australians always seem to beat England *[in professional cricket]*. Why, when you listen to interviews between the Australians and the English, the attitude and the mindset was completely different? I was

> always looking at it going, "Why is this team always better? The people are different, and it doesn't matter who the people are, the team is always better than our team! Why is that? Why do they consistently perform better?
>
> I was a big Manchester United fan, I was always interested in why Manchester United are always winning things but other teams not? Why are they always on top? It cannot be only a physical thing. So, there was always that interest growing up. (Steve, Interview 1).

While recognising that psychology may play a significant role in their sporting performances, practitioners expressed that throughout their competitive/grassroots athletic careers, psychological skills had held a 'second-class' status and were rarely addressed. In one such example, Steve recalled:

> When I was a younger athlete, I think that a lot of the things that I struggled with, I was not being coached. So, my sport was cricket and a lot of the times when I was playing cricket, a lot of the things that probably I needed to develop as a 13/14-year-old were a lot more about the mental and psychological side. However, I was not getting any of that from the coaches. I had a lot of coaches talking about the technical stuff, and it was a lot of technical focus, but there was no one really talking to me about the psychological side of things. (Steve, Interview 1).

The participants interviewed in this thesis, therefore, collectively expressed their frustrations regarding the lack of sport psychology they encountered support during their own athletic ventures. Whilst achieving an understanding of practitioner's shortcomings in their efforts to become a professional athlete falls outside the scope of the present thesis, it is apparent here that the challenges encountered as sport performers made the practitioners value the significance of psychological skills in pursuing performance excellence. As such, it may be suggested that practitioners' athletic experiences propelled their actions within their professional career, encouraging them to provide services to their clients, which they never had access to themselves during their own engagement with competitive/grassroots sport. Such sense-making may be justified by accounts provided by Alice, who reflected:

> I think that this *[psychology]* is such a massive part of the puzzle. The coaches cannot focus on all of those things, and I think my role can really be the difference. If I can support them *[players]* on that mental side of things, then this can really be a difference for some of them. Some of them have bags of talent, and if you can help them to fulfil that potential, we had seven academy graduates in the first team last week, and this is what it is all about. Helping them to reach the summit of their career. (Alice, Interview 1).

It was apparent, therefore, that the practitioners decided to pursue a career in sport psychology to address the limited mental support available to athletes. Also, all participants collectively expressed their beliefs of the value of sport psychology support on athletes' performances, well-being, and careers. Similarly to Alice, several practitioners acknowledged that coaches are not able to focus on all aspects of athletes development

and only a dedicated and specialised attention given to mental aspects of performance can provide the athletes with an opportunity of fulfilling their sporting talent.

The desire to support athletes in their pursuit for performance excellence and a successful career in professional sport was also underlined by practitioners' passion and love of working with people. Indeed, the stories of practice shared within the present thesis illuminated the significance of helping people to develop and achieve personal growth. Several practitioners reiterated their desire to support people in their efforts to become the best version of themselves. From such a perspective, it became clear that the practitioners experienced a sense of pride and personal fulfilment while "upskilling people" (Steve, Interview 1) and helping them achieve their goals. Such sentiments were particularly evident in the interviews with the two most experienced practitioners included within this project, with Steve recalling:

> Someone asked me what sport psychology is and what we do, and when I described it, they summed it by saying, "So, your job is to help people achieve their dreams." I think really this is kind of what we do! When I look back at my own career, some of the best moments are the moments when I watched people achieve their goals. It does not really matter what it is. So, it may be winning a gold medal, but it is that pure satisfaction of watching a smile on someone's face and knowing, okay, I played a part, not a huge part, but I played a part in helping them get there. (Steve, Interview 6).

Similar sense-making was evident in Jake's reflections:

> I get a sense of achievement from those roles, from working with a client where they get a breakthrough. It is a feeling that it is a tangible outcome, and this is a very familiar thing in that helping profession. I am not getting performance-related pay but helping someone understand why, when they are standing over a *[golf]* putt, they think in a particular way. This is probably a career-changing or life-enhancing moment for them. When you see that, the level and sense of achievement, this is beyond anything that they can pay me for assisting with that. (Jake, Interview 6).

As such, it was apparent that the practitioners demonstrated high levels of empathy towards the athletes that they supported. Several practitioners expressed a desire to help the athletes understand their emotional and cognitive processes during sporting performance, an area that some of the practitioners themselves had struggled with previously as part of their own sporting endeavours. Therefore, the practitioners were able to relate to some of the problems that the athletes were experiencing and support them in overcoming them. Indeed, several practitioners expressed that an ability to help the athletes understand themselves, their thoughts and behaviours was one of the biggest rewards of their profession.

It is also important to note that whilst the practitioners expressed their desire to support athletes in achieving performance excellence, the desire to work with people went beyond the focus on sporting achievements alone. Indeed, several practitioners reiterated the significance of enhancing the athlete's wellbeing, with Tom acknowledging:

> Athletes come to me to talk about performance, but actually, we spend 90% of the time talking about wellbeing related things and about happiness rather than sport-related things. I have a number of examples when athletes come, and they just want to talk. It is really important to provide that space, so they offload some of the emotions that they carry on with them. (Tom, Interview 3).

From such a perspective, it was evident that the practitioners within the present thesis experienced personal responsibility for athlete's holistic development and often focused on broader aspects of their life, not necessarily related to performances on the pitch, athletics track or in the swimming pool. It was apparent that while the practitioners were concerned with athletes sporting performances, they valued their overall development and growth as a human being. This was particularly evident in the interviews with practitioners who worked with youth athletes within developmental environments. With success as a professional athlete rarely guaranteed, the practitioners looked to provide services to young people that would allow them to be successful in other areas of life. One such example was articulated by Alice, who recalled:

> I would like to see young players I have been working with going on and being successful. That would be like a massive achievement for me, to see players that I have been working with playing at the highest level, having a successful business, going to university, and having a successful career. (Alice, Interview 6).

Therefore, it was apparent that a career in sport psychology had a personal meaning to the practitioners sampled within the present thesis. Indeed, throughout the interviews all participants expressed their passion for making a difference in people's lives. All participants collectively expressed how supporting athletes enhanced their job satisfaction, describing the consultancy process as an extremely rewarding experience. It was evident that all practitioners were committed to help the athletes grow as a person and develop skills that would allow them to succeed in professional sporting career, and beyond.

While such sense-making may hold significant implications in developing an understanding of practitioner's potential motives to pursue a career in sport psychology, it was also apparent that passion for sport, love of being involved in the competition and working under pressure were other significant factors which continued to galvanise and motivate them as their careers progressed. Indeed, it was evident that all practitioners cherished the opportunity to be involved with sporting organisations, expressing a high level of job satisfaction and enthusiasm that stemmed from operating within sporting settings. Such a drive and a desire were particularly evident during the early stages of the practitioner's career when they often were required to complete their qualification around full-time employment in sectors not associated with the sport. In one such example, Alice reflected on their initial volunteering experience of delivering sport psychology at a football club academy:

> When I was going there *[the football club]* after a 9-to-5 shift at work, I would never say, "Aww, I really don't want to go." I would be much more excited about that part because I did not feel like it is work. It is something that I really, really enjoy doing, and I get a really good job satisfaction from it. (Alice, Interview 2).

More importantly, it was evident that as the practitioners progressed throughout their career, their passion and enjoyment of working within sporting setting intensified, and they continued to experience high levels of job satisfaction. The love for working in sport was particularly apparent in the interview with Alice, who, upon reflecting on several years of applied experiences, continued to reiterate their high levels of enjoyment, in Alice's own words:

> I never wake up in the morning thinking "I do not want to do this, I do not want to go in!" I suppose it is because of the enjoyment and the passion for it, so yeah like not feeling like I am coming to work. Like every day is different! I enjoy every day! The challenges that it brings, the challenges of a fast-paced environment and trying to overcome these challenges with a really good group of people. I think that this is a massive part of it. (Alice, Interview 2).

The passion for working in sport was further exemplified by Dan, who concluded:

> I think that I could do it *[sport psychology]* in business, and I could do it in arts, and academia. But I do not think that I would be interested in that, especially in that day-to-day stuff of waking up early and doing like 12 hours a day. Whereas in sport, you just enjoy it that much that you are used to it. (Dan, Interview 6).

The sentiments just outlined provided an interesting insight into the practitioners' sense-making of their time in context. More specifically, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis perceived the nature of the elite settings as one of the main factors motivating them to remain in their job. Indeed, while acknowledging the challenges of operating in a fast-paced and success obsessed environments, all practitioners reiterated the enjoyment that they experienced as a result of being part of elite sporting organisations. This was particularly evident amongst the practitioners who deliver sport psychology services within settings that they were involved as a youth performer, with Beth reflecting:

> I think that working in swimming has increased my motivation! One, this is my sport, and I love swimming! I had the knowledge base of the sport that got me a bit of a head start, and I generally enjoy watching athletes compete, and maybe I can sort of empathise with them because I kind of did it myself. (Beth, Interview 2).

Overall, while trying to make sense of the practitioners' career stories, it was apparent that their passion and love for sport significantly influenced their desire to pursue a career within the sporting industry. Also, it may be suggested that, while falling short at their attempts to pursue a career as a sport performer, the practitioners within this thesis recognised the significance of psychological aspect of high performance and as such realised the value of psychological skills in enhancing athlete's potential. From such a perspective, it was apparent that a career in sport psychology allowed the practitioners sampled within the present thesis to combine their passion for sport and desire to work with people. Interpretations of the practitioner's career stories from such a perspective hold significant implications for enhancing understanding of practitioners' sense-making of the contextual and situational factors encountered within their applied settings. These interpretations are presented in the concluding section of the present chapter and

serve to demonstrate the significance of *passion for sport and working with people* on practitioners' ability of *finding one's place.*

4.2.2. Embracing an uncertain career

While the practitioners interviewed in the present thesis spoke with enthusiasm about their reasoning behind seeking to pursue a career in sport psychology initially, it was clear that such process was a demanding and stressful experience. More specifically, the subordinate theme of *embracing an uncertain career* presents a range of obstacles that practitioners faced during the initial stages of their professional journey. The objective of this subordinate theme, however, is not only to present a list of experienced challenges. The interpretations of the reflective accounts presented here serve to demonstrate practitioners' sense-making of such challenges, illustrating the range of negative emotions experienced at this stage of an applied journey.

First, upon completion of their respective university programmes, practitioners were required to grapple with limited job opportunities, with one practitioner describing the process of securing applied positions as "a long and very, very hard road" (Steve, Interview 1). In one such example, Dan recalled:

> I think that there are opportunities, but we are in a field where many people are coming out of universities or many people trying to be part of the field and sustain a living from it *[applied sport psychology]*. There is a lot of people for a limited amount of jobs. (Dan, Interview 1).

Similar sentiments were echoed by all practitioners sampled in the present thesis. Indeed, when reflecting on their early career experiences all practitioners reiterated the competitiveness inherent within the field. Also, it was apparent that the practitioners felt that the budgets available at the sporting organisations were one of the main barriers preventing them from securing a paid position. As a result, all practitioners that participated in present thesis were required to provide sport psychology services on a voluntary basis in the early stages of their career.

While volunteering was perceived as one of the most important aspects of professional development and an essential step in career progression, many practitioners expressed their dissatisfaction with the process of becoming a qualified sport psychologist and the amount of voluntary work required. Such frustrations were apparent in an interview with Steve, who reflected:

> One of the barriers and one of the challenges that I have found when finding work and what someone said to me was: "Why would we pay someone who is a trainee? We have money to pay for a psychologist and we can pay for a qualified psychologist. However, why do we need to pay you if you are a trainee? (Steve, Interview 1).

Several other practitioners also acknowledged that sporting organisations would often appear to be taking advantage of the number of early-career practitioners looking to gain applied experience, and the fact that psychological roles could easily be filled without necessarily needing to pay a practitioner accordingly. The limited number of paid opportunities, therefore, further intensified the frustrations experienced by the

practitioners. Indeed, all practitioners sampled here voiced their disappointment and questioned the accreditation process within sport psychology. In one such example, Alice reflected:

> I feel that as a master's graduate having to work three positions for free, you think in any other environment would that be acceptable? I am not sure it would, but I know it happens in sport, it is the same for physiotherapists or sport scientists. However, they may get some kind of salary whereas there are so little paid opportunities as a brand-new Stage 2 candidate. I think that is something that would not be accepted as a junior doctor. To come out of your medical degree to then go as a junior doctor and not get paid. We spend four years at university, and you can come out and not get paid. In my experience, I know people that are almost finishing their Stage 2 and are still not getting paid. So, accessing these opportunities and being able to forge your career and the monetary side of things is also part of that. I mean you cannot live without the money, unfortunately. (Alice, Interview 1).

The sentiments just outlined posed some interesting questions regarding practitioners' sense making of their early career experience. More specifically, why, despite apparent high levels of frustration, dissatisfaction and even annoyance, did the practitioners decide to embrace this uncertainty as part of their professional careers? Also, why, despite the encountered challenges, the practitioners decided to pursue a career in applied sport psychologist? Such questions were intensified by a range of negative reflections regarding the journey of becoming an accredited practitioner. In another example Beth reflected on their initial experiences:

> I found it really hard because I felt like I was just not that valued because it is a lot of voluntary work. I have my degrees, I have my masters, I got a 1st *[in my dissertation]* and a distinction in my masters. I am still not making any money whatsoever! I found it very difficult, and I think it is quite ridiculous. (Beth, Interview 1).

It was apparent, therefore, that the practitioners experienced a range of negative emotions during the early stages of their career. It was clear that practitioners felt unappreciated and experienced a lack of value placed towards the role of applied sport psychologist. This in turn, had a negative impact on their job satisfaction and made them worry about the prospects of establishing themselves in the field. Indeed, several practitioners described that initial process of securing applied positions as a "pretty low point" (Steve, Interview 1) in their career. The practitioners also reflected that the setbacks they experienced made them question pursuing a career in sport psychology. This was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who recalled:

> I went for a job interview, and the feedback that I got was, "we absolutely loved you we think you would be perfect for the role. Your knowledge was fantastic; the way you presented was great; the way you presented how you would like to work was great, exactly how we would like to work. However, we went for the other guy because they went to three Olympic Games." So basically, I did everything that I

> could, but the role was offered to people with more experience. When you are going through the websites trying to find work, and you receive a phone call saying, "We chose the other guy because they went to three Olympics." There is nothing that you can do about that! So yeah, in those times, job satisfaction is pretty low, and it can be really difficult, it can be really hard. And there is a lot of times when you go; "Have I chosen the wrong career here? Do I need to rethink what I am doing? Would I be better off in going into coaching? So, I have some coaching qualifications as well, is that a better option? Would I be better off switching completely?" (Steve, Interview 1).

Accounts shared by the practitioners' demonstrated that climbing the career ladder within applied sport psychology was particularly difficult and that the initial rungs were extremely challenging to grasp. Also, they allowed for a greater understanding of the intense emotions experienced by the practitioners at the early stages of their career. More specifically, it became clear that in addition to frustrations and disappointment, the practitioners often experienced high levels of stress. While the practitioners reflected on their experiences retrospectively, the severity of the emotions experienced was sill apparent at the time of data collection. In one such example, Tom recalled:

> I was always anxious about opportunities, whether I will get an opportunity, whether I will ever create a career. I am paying all this money for my masters and my Stage 2. Will I ever earn that back in terms of my career? Will I ever make it up? Will I break even? So, there is always that anxiety around that. So yeah, at that point you get that *[doubt]*. Is it ever going to fall for me? Am I ever going to get an opportunity where I will earn money doing what I think I would really enjoy? So, I would be lying if I would say that I did not have anxiety about that. (Tom, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was evident that the accreditation process was the most challenging period in practitioners' career. While the practitioners largely spoke about the difficulties associated with securing paid positions, it was apparent that the main source of frustrations was directed towards sporting organisations lack of appreciation towards sport psychology provision. Indeed, while speaking about the passion for sport psychology and the impact that it could have on people's sporting careers and lives in general, the practitioners interviewed within the present thesis were surprised about the limited importance placed on the development of psychological skills. While the practitioners seemed to accept the limited budgets available at the sporting organisations, they questioned how the money were divided and why only a limited portion, if any, was allocated to sport psychology support. Indeed, several practitioners expressed that while in their opinion the sport psychology should be the most important service available to coaches and athletes, in reality it was the last thing the sporting organisations worried about.

Due to the challenges of securing applied opportunities, therefore, the practitioners often were required to provide sport psychology services at several organisations simultaneously. All practitioners reiterated that to secure paid positions they worked on a part-time or consultancy basis delivering sport

psychology either a few days during a week, for a limited number of days during the season, or during the training camps and competitions. This was particularly evident in a discussion around Beth's career timeline.

> *[Organisation A]* was a certain amount of days over the season, it was not every week. *[Organisation B]* was whenever I was needed. *[Organisation C]* was just the camps that they would put for a few days during a year. *[Organisation D]* was once a week. Then I would do the competitions whenever they were, so I think I did around 4 or 5 during a season – maybe a bit more but definitely under 10. (Beth, Interview 1).

While part-time positions provided the practitioners with a valuable opportunity to gain applied experience, such work also posed a range of unexpected challenges and an additional burden on the practitioners. More specifically, several practitioners recalled that they were not able to accommodate the demands of their role in the time allocated by the organisation, with Beth recalling:

> It is really stressing me out because like I said I am on 0.6 a week *[part-time contract]* and I am supposed to work seven and a half hours a day, which is not realistic because the way the training is scheduled. So, they have a morning session at 6.30 am, and then they come back and have a session till 5.30 pm, so that is 11 hours. I get there at 7.30 am, and I am trying to leave around 5 pm, but this is still over seven and a half hours. (Beth, Interview 2).

The sporting organisations, therefore, were described by Jake as environments "low on resources and high on demand" (Interview 1). Indeed, whilst delivering sport psychology services for a few hours a week, practitioners felt under pressure to also try and purposefully demonstrate the positive impact of their work. Such situations, in turn, posed yet another challenge as the practitioners felt that due to a limited time available, they were not able to meet all of their role-related objectives. It was evident that the practitioners were wary of "being spread too thin across too many people" (Jake, Interview 4). Also, it was apparent that the practitioners were frustrated with working with athletes for a limited amount of time as they felt that in such circumstances, they were not able to have an impact that they would like to have, with Amy recalling:

> It is hard because theoretically, I am only once a week with those guys. So, I can't just go great *[have one-to-one consultations with]* 20 athletes. I feel like I see them ever so often and I do a workshop with them, and then there are some things to follow up that I will reinforce with the staff, but this is happening over email or a WhatsApp which may help, but it is not ideal. So, for me the most significant thing is that we are a camp-based programme, so we see the athletes once every, maybe every month, but to be honest from October to February you do not see much of them. So yeah, contact with the athletes is limited. When we identified that there is a real need to work on psychology with a particular individual, I did not feel that I had enough opportunity *[to consult with athletes]*. Still, at the same time, I was not able to develop them *[consultancy opportunities]* in a way, to work at an individual level with those guys. It would be beneficial to be in those two sports every day and

> see those people more often because then you do not miss out on the information, and you can be more effective. (Amy, Interview 4).

Similar challenges were expressed by Steve, who recalled:

> I had nine months to develop a mentally tough team, and when you look at it, and you go through the schedule, and they have one training camp a month, which is three days long. So, we had nine months, so I have got 27 days, and during those camps, it is not only focused on psychology, so I was given maybe two or three hours per camp. So, if you will think about it, I had 27 days, but I was only allowed to have two or three hours per camp, so that is two or three hours every four weeks for nine months. So, not a lot of time to have any kind of impact. (Steve, Interview 4).

Such experiences where shared by all practitioners who similarly to Steve initiated their career by delivering sport psychology on a part-time basis. While these opportunities of entering the sporting organisations for the first time eased the negative emotions and anxiety, they challenged the practitioner on a different level. More specifically, the practitioners recalled how they found themselves under immense pressure due to a limited amount of time available to consult with athletes. It was clear that in the early stages of their career the practitioners were required to think on their feet and find creative ways of maximising the time dedicated towards sport psychology. The demands of working on a part-time basis were best captured by some of Jake's reflections:

> I had to prioritise what I have been doing with my time. I felt there was not really any space for me to add things in, which would be worth putting time and resources into. So, it was a bit of a judgement call. The project is going in that direction, it is not going particularly well, but it is going well enough to function. Maybe my energy is used somewhere else, and it was fine at the time because there was plenty of other things that I needed to work on and that was one of the performance problems that was highlighted, but it was not something I felt I could have enough input. There was a lot of things that we wanted to do, but there were time limitations of what we could do. So, we had to make some key decisions about what we had to focus on and where we will try to spend this limited time to try to influence and primarily it was down to me to make those decisions and make those choices. So yeah, it was frustrating, but this is what you got, so you need to maximise the opportunities that you got. (Jake, Interview 4).

It was clear, therefore, that part-time consultancy positions within sporting organisations were particularly demanding for the practitioners. While the early-career practitioners were required to grapple with the limited amount of time dedicated towards sport psychology, they also had to deal with the nature of the sporting organisations. More specifically, the practitioners described sporting environments as fast-paced and highlighted that in such settings everything is "fast-moving" (Alice, Interview 5) where one week was entirely different for another and "people forget things very quickly" (Alice, Interview 5). The challenges of

delivering sport psychology services within such settings were particularly evident in an interview with Alice, who recalled:

> You have to like start again. So, by the time you come back in your messages faded away, and I think that it is difficult because you need to keep reintroducing things. After all, people are used to you not being there, because you are not there all the time. I think that they do not see you as vital if you are not there all the time, and that is making it so much difficult. (Alice, Interview 5).

It was also apparent that the part-time and consultancy positions challenged practitioners' ability to promote sport psychology services and the significance of mental skills. Indeed, the practitioners realised that while the athletes perceived strength and conditioning coaches, physiotherapist and analysts as people who could have a significant impact on their development and performances, sport psychology struggled for a similar status and recognition. Indeed, several practitioners reflected that due to the limited amount of time spent within the environment, they struggled to build strong relationships with the athletes who often were reluctant to engage in sport psychology services. Such sense-making was particularly apparent amongst practitioners working within football who expressed their surprise about the stigma associated with sport psychology delivery within such contexts. These reflections, therefore, further exemplified the unexpected challenges faced by practitioners, illuminating that the provision of sport psychology did not reflect the expectations and aspirations that the practitioners held prior entering sporting environments.

The sentiments just outlined demonstrate that while the practitioners developed certain perceptions regarding sport psychology during early stages of their life and throughout their time in the university, their beliefs were often challenged upon entering applied settings. Indeed, while perceiving psychological skills as the most important aspect of elite performance, the practitioners were required to grapple with lack of value placed on sport psychology support within sporting organisations. It was apparent that due to such perceptions the sporting organisations were putting sport psychology as least important when determining their budgets and funds dedicated to different support services. As a result, in the early stages of their career the practitioners were often required to provide sport psychology services on voluntary basis. Also, the limited job opportunities within applied sport psychology forced the practitioners sampled within the present thesis to work on a part-time or consultancy basis throughout the majority of their career. Due to such circumstances, therefore, the practitioners often found themselves working in an environment for a limited amount of time and could not spend as much time with the athletes as they would like to. Such work arrangements were often a trigger for negative emotions such as frustration, anger and disappointment as practitioners queried if they were effectively able to address athletes' individual needs, and have a significant impact on their performances. This stage of practitioners' career, therefore, was characterised by experiences of low levels of job satisfactions and discontent with a lack of appreciation of the services they were offering. Such sense-making was particularly apparent amongst practitioners operating within football where they continued to experience a significant reluctance towards their services. More specifically, the practitioners felt disappointed that often they were not given the time required to change people perceptions.

4.2.3. Working alongside allied professions

While it was apparent that during the process of *finding one's place* all practitioners believed that psychological support, either via one-to-one sessions and group workshops, might hold significant implications in the development of people that they supported, practitioners also expressed their desire to move away from working in isolation, instead seeking to integrate psychology as part of any broader performance programmes. Indeed, throughout the data collection process, practitioners reiterated the key role that other professionals could effectively play in developing psychological skills amongst athletes. The perceived significance of practitioner-stakeholder interactions was echoed across several stories of practice shared by practitioners within this thesis, depicting other professionals as a key figure contributing to sport psychology provision's effectiveness. In particular, the practitioners identified the coach (or coaches) as significant stakeholders who spent the most time with the athletes and, therefore, played a vital role in unlocking athletes' psychological potential. As such, practitioners recognised the value of collaborative work across several professions typically associated with a multidisciplinary team (e.g., physiotherapists, nutritionists, video analysts, strength and conditioning coaches), collectively expressing that the energy put towards working with people in collaboration was "time well spent" (Jake, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was clear that upon entering sporting organisations the practitioners were striving to establish themselves as a valuable member of the multidisciplinary team. Also, considering the challenges associated with the limited time available to consult with athletes, the practitioners strived to establish collaborative opportunities with other professionals as a means of enhancing their influence within the environment. As such, it was apparent that to overcome the unexpected challenges within applied sport psychology, practitioners strived to move away from working predominately with athletes and started to pay a greater importance to supporting other stakeholders. Such sense-making was evident in the interviews with Dan, who recalled:

> In my head, psychology comes from me going straight into a player whereas it could be better going from me through a coach to the player and have a broader impact. Because the coach can influence other players as well, and that is where my reflection has gone. (Dan, Interview 2).

> I think that it is logical to work through people rather than with 200 people *[players]*. So, it is better to work through 20 people *[coaches]* to get that message out. (Dan, Interview 4).

Steve's reflections further exemplified such sense-making:

> When I left the football club, I worked with an international *[sport]* team helping them prepare for World Championship. This was, I suppose, a shift in experience because there was very little focus on the one-to-one work with individual athletes. This was more about how we develop as a team. Therefore, I was working through the coaches and the support staff. My focus was to ensure that the coaches and the support staff were developing various qualities and characteristics, that the coaches were trying to develop as a team. (Steve, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was apparent that while striving to *find one's place* the practitioners looked to integrate sport psychology into the work of coaches and other support staff. For example, Alice explained how one of their main objectives within the sporting organisation was to "help the staff in helping the players get better" (Interview 5). To achieve this, Alice strived to educate coaches, developing their knowledge and understanding of sport psychology, assisted coaches in session design, and tried to ensure that psychology was integrated into all sessions on the grass. Such an approach was particularly evident in one of the interviews where Alice reflected on the day-to-day responsibilities in their role at a football academy:

> We need to make sure that the coaches have an awareness of what psychological characteristics they want to develop in their sessions. Having a psychological outcome is a massive part of their practice. This allows us to ensure the psychology programme is running as soon as they [*the athletes*] step through 'the door', all the way till they leave for a day. That means that we are testing them in the gym, and we are pushing them psychologically by setting new goals and pushing their boundaries. So, setting new goals around personal self-development throughout the day. One of the focuses for us is to raise the awareness of the staff in terms of their role in the development of the player's psychological elements. (Alice, Interview 4).

It needs to be highlighted, therefore, that throughout the process of *finding one's place* all practitioners interviewed as part of this thesis saw positive working with key contextual stakeholders as a means of potentially achieving their own role-related objectives. Indeed, all practitioners reiterated that working in isolation would prevent them from providing a support that athletes required. As such, practitioners strived to work alongside other professionals as a mean of meeting athletes individual needs, enhancing development opportunities and ultimately driving performances. Such sense-making for the rationale of working alongside multidisciplinary team was best explained by Jake, who described the process of sport psychology support within a sporting organisation;

> An athlete got injured on one of the programmes that I have been working on, and there was a big team around this athlete, strength and conditioning coach, physiotherapist, doctor. The thing that would make the biggest difference from the psychology point of view was to work on the recovery programme. So, working alongside the strength and conditioning coach and the physiotherapist to engage and monitor the progress that they *[athlete]* were making in their recovery. So, for me, it was the case of, yes, the athlete would benefit from the psychological support independently and *[they would benefit]* from the support of other practitioners because they are in an injured state. However, to maximise the benefits, it was essential to communicate with the strength and conditioning coach and the physiotherapist to work out a plan that we could then reinforce *[as a team]*. By doing this, we were able to ensure that we were working in the same direction for the benefit of the athlete. (Jake, Interview 1).

As such, it was clear that in their efforts of *finding one's place* the practitioners strived to work alongside other professionals to help the athletes achieve their desired performance goals. Indeed, all practitioners

collectively reiterated the impact of positive working relationships with other professionals on the effectiveness of sport psychology provision. It was clear that all practitioners believed that such relationships helped them convey their messages to the athletes while keeping sport psychology at the forefront of everyone's thinking. Also, the practitioners exemplified how even when not present within an environment they were still able to enhance athletes' psychological development via positive working relationships with key stakeholders who were embedded within the environment full-time. In one such example, Alice described how their work with the academy manager allowed them to integrate sport psychology into the day-to-day functioning of the sporting organisation;

> I spoke with the academy manager about doing more coach education, because they asked me to work on the coaching programme predominately. So, I talked to them, "Is there an option for me to do any kind of delivery at least in the six weeks blocks?" They said, "Yes, we can potentially do this." I think that I presented the idea, and between us, we formulated this plan. (Alice, Interview 1).

Alice reflected that such an approach to their work strengthened the messages they were trying to convey and contributed towards the development of an environment focused on promoting psychological skills. As such, by enhancing their ability to work with key stakeholders Alice was better positioned to achieve their ultimate goal of developing athletes' psychological capabilities and supporting them to achieve greater performances consistently. Such a realisation was exemplified by other practitioners interviewed within the present thesis, who collectively reiterated the importance of working with other professionals for the benefit of the athletes.

The stories of practice shared within the present thesis, therefore, illuminated the importance that practitioners placed on forming positive alliances with key contextual stakeholders as a means of achieving their applied objectives. As such, one of the main aims during the process of *finding one's place* was to provide a more integral services when embedded within the sporting settings. More specifically, the practitioners reiterated the significance of working collaboratively with key stakeholders and supporting each other in the delivery of their respective roles. To achieve this, the practitioners strived to share knowledge and information with other professionals, looking to contribute their expertise in the support of others within their roles. The practitioners aspired to enhance interdisciplinary communication and develop a more united voice amongst all stakeholders supporting the athletes. From the practitioner's perspective, such an approach held the potential to develop a combination of various solutions and ultimately enhance the athlete's development. More importantly, the practitioners believed that by adopting such an approach, they would implement performance psychology into training programme and competition, which would ultimately contribute to achieving the common end goal (i.e., putting the athlete in the best position to succeed).

While in general, however, the participants of the present thesis expressed positive experiences of working with coaches and other professionals, several stories shared throughout the interviews revealed barriers to this process. In particular, the practitioners realised that they were required to operate alongside a wide range of individuals who often might think differently and have different priorities. Several examples demonstrated that professionals often were not committed to working collaboratively, did not respect each other's differences and/or did not possess the required skills for collaborative work. It was also evident that

practitioners operating within the same environment may often not get along, making working in collaboration particularly tricky. Jake described some of such barriers:

> It is occasionally an attitudinal thing where they *[other professionals]* do not want to work with another person. They do not want to work collaboratively, and they want to hold on to a little bit of power that they may feel that they have in that scenario. So yeah, lose their ability to, I guess, take responsibility for something that has happened and then the reward for it. Occasionally, when people do not want to share the credit, they do not want to work collaboratively (Jake, Interview 4).

Indeed, despite their efforts to work in collaboration, the stories of practice demonstrated that the practitioners within the present thesis encountered individuals who were reluctant to engage in multidisciplinary work. The reflective accounts illustrated that while trying to embed themselves within the environment, practitioners often faced a range of barriers to incorporate their services into sporting organisations' day-to-day functioning. In particular, they were usually required to work with professionals who had negative experiences with sport psychology and did not want to change their working ways. More specifically, some stakeholders within practitioners' respective settings were often wary and sceptical of sport psychology. Indeed, several practitioners reflected that they felt other stakeholders were often "threatened" (Tom, Interview 3) by psychology. Such experiences while working with stakeholders were particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who recalled:

> When I was in the football club, it was very, very mixed in terms of the key stakeholders. So, I will extend the coaches to the chairman, as I did know the chairman. I did not work directly with the chairman, but he was really on board with me and what we were trying to do with psychological development or all-round player development. My experience of them was that he was very supportive, kind of open access, and I have got the same from the director of youth as well. They were like if you would like to come down more often or if you would like to come in on a matchday and get involved, it was more like free-range open access and it was a great experience. However, the head youth team coach was an ex-Premier League footballer and did not like psychology, they had a very bad experience as a player and had a very poor view of psychology. So, working with them certainly at the start was a real challenge. So, that was a very negative experience. When I first met them, they did not say hello to me, they looked me up and down and then walk off. So yeah, it was very difficult. (Steve, Interview 1).

As such, it was apparent that during the process of *finding one's place,* Steve encountered a range of challenges. Indeed, while managing to overcome the frustrations associated with the lack of applied opportunities, Steve was required to face a challenge of stakeholders who did not value sport psychology support. Here, the practitioners once again encountered unexpected obstacles that resulted in a range of negative emotions. Indeed, while after a period of time Steve understood the youth team head coach's reasons behind their perceptions, such information was not available to them during the first interaction.

Therefore, the actions of the youth team head coach triggered feelings of nervousness and fearfulness for Steve. Indeed, Steve recalled how they were unaware of how they could interact with someone who did not have an interest in sport psychology services and as a result were cautious in their actions while in the presence of the head youth team coach.

The sentiments provided by Steve were echoed by several other practitioners who also reflected on the challenges of working alongside a wide range of individuals. One of the main obstacles encountered by the practitioners was associated with integrating sport psychology into the training routines. For example, describing their experiences of developing working relationships with stakeholders within the football academy, Alice recalled;

> I had a challenge of part-time coaches, who of course, had other positions and were not so keen on changing the way they coached and took on new information. They already had full-time jobs, they came in an evening for not a lot of money, and that is the challenge for them, and I think I had some resistance. (Alice, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was apparent that despite practitioners' efforts to integrate sport psychology into the daily routines of the sporting organisations, they often experienced unexpected challenges from the key stakeholders operating within these settings. Indeed, the practitioners assumed that all stakeholders embedded within the elite setting would be open to sport psychology support and would welcome an additional input into the training programmes. Many practitioners reflected that throughout their education they only learned about the positive attitude that coaches and other professionals within sporting settings demonstrated towards sport psychology. While at university, the practitioners rarely, if ever, discussed with their tutors' scenarios where the stakeholders had a negative perception of sport psychology and were not 'buying-in' to the services offered by the sport psychologist. As such, the practitioners felt overwhelmed by such challenges and often experienced self-doubt in their interactions with the contextual stakeholders.

It needs to be highlighted that similarly to Steve, most of the practitioners interviewed went through a range of negative experience associated with limited job opportunities. The negative encounters with key contextual stakeholders, therefore, elevated the negative emotions making the process of *finding one's place* particularly daunting for the practitioners. Indeed, several practitioners reflected on the stress, nervousness and uncertainty that characterised their initial experiences within applied sport psychology. The interactions with the stakeholders who did not believe in sport psychology, therefore, were one of the main factors contributing towards such evaluations by the practitioners. Indeed, all practitioners spoke about the demands and pressure of interacting with stakeholders who had a negative perceptions of sport psychology. In one such example, practitioners highlighted the challenges of working with stakeholders who had a successful sporting career as an athlete and who, as a result of past experiences, were reluctant to embrace new approaches. The challenges of working with individuals who were not interested in developing their understanding of sport psychology principles were evident in an interview with Dan, who recalled:

> With coaches, I think that certain old school coaches will always be a bit wary about it *[sport psychology]*. They believe that being on the grass and being coached and being told where to stand at what cone at what point. They will always believe

> in this, and nothing even sport science is going to change that, they *[players]* still will be Premier League footballers. (Dan, Interview 1).

While such interactions were particularly evident within football, where most stakeholders who operated within such settings had a successful playing career and transitioned into the coaching roles upon retirement as a professional footballer, similar experiences were also present in other sports. Similarly to Dan, therefore, several practitioners experienced a challenge of working alongside stakeholders who had previously achieved sporting excellence without the support of a sport psychologist. Indeed, with sport psychology still being a relatively young profession, a significant number of stakeholders had not previously had an opportunity to work with sport psychologists during their athletic career. These stakeholders, therefore, believed that such support was simply unnecessary, and athletes could achieve their potential without it. What did matter, according to these stakeholders, was hard work at the training ground and athletes should be solely focusing on these aspects to achieve their sporting aspirations.

Another significant factor underlying the challenges encountered by the practitioners included stakeholders lack of understanding regarding the scope and depth of what sport psychology could bring to the environment. Indeed, several practitioners recalled that stakeholders were "passing on" (Beth, Interview 3) athletes rather than working in collaboration. In one such example, Beth reflected on their experiences of working with a head coach:

> I do not think that they understand psychology either. Some of the athletes were falling out, and they were just like, "can you go and sort it out?" So, it is like just passed it down to me, there is an issue, "go and speak to a psychologist." You know what I mean? They would be like, "aww go and see the psychologist." (Beth, Interview 3).

Such challenges of working in collaboration echoed across stories shared by all practitioners within the present thesis. In one such example, Jake reflected:

> I think that sometimes people will use you as a crutch really. So, if they cannot find a way to be effective in their role, they may turn to you and say, "that is your problem, I have done everything that I can, it must be psychological." So, rather than working collaboratively, they say, "I have done my bit, now it is your problem." So, that is quite frustrating and not in the spirit of working collaboratively. Part of that is just the simple pragmatic approach of how people work and not just their style of working, but that is definitely a challenging attitude which is not anti *[collaboration]*, but it is almost like, "I did everything I could, therefore it must be yours." (Jake, Interview 1).

Therefore, the practitioners often found themselves working alongside stakeholders who were unaware of how to work effectively with sport psychology professionals. Indeed, Beth described how the head coach within their sport felt that sending athletes to see a sport psychologist was the best course of action that would allow them to have confidential conversations and get certain aspects of their chest. Similar sense-making was apparent in Steve's reflections who concluded that the stakeholders within the sporting setting

had a limited understanding how to work collaboratively within the multidisciplinary team. Indeed, that was an overarching reflection made by all practitioners interviewed in the present thesis, who realised that despite a range of departments within the sporting organisations there was rarely any crossover of the work carried out.

Finally, whilst some stakeholders within sporting settings were very direct and clear at making their position known regarding sport psychology, others tended to pay a "lip service" (Tom, Interview 4) during meetings and informal discussions demonstrating a seemingly false buy-in to sport psychology. For example, Steve recalled working alongside a performance director who was very reluctant to incorporate psychological principles into the training programme despite expressing their support for sport psychology. Tom echoed such experiences while reflecting on their efforts to work collaboratively with a head coach;

> I am always second-guessing, and I wonder what they are actually thinking and what their perception of sport psychology actually is, because often they would say, "yeah, yeah it makes sense, let's do that!" And then you come in the next day, and they will still be doing the same thing. Or you may say to them, "it would be beneficial to spend some more time with an athlete before the training session because they would benefit from that clear focus," and they will go, "yes, yes, yes I will do that!" But then they will just carry on as usual. (Tom, Interview 4).

Interactions with such stakeholders were particularly challenging for the practitioners, who despite their efforts were not able to determine the rationale behind stakeholders' actions. Indeed, both Steve and Tom voiced their frustrations of working alongside individuals who were reluctant to express their true opinions. Both of these practitioners reiterated how they found it easier to work with stakeholders who did not want to engage with sport psychology as then they had a clear goal of overcoming such challenges. In a situation, where the stakeholders were very supportive in the meetings and private conversations, although were not willing to incorporate sport psychology into session design and delivery, the practitioners struggled to determine on how to act in interactions with such individuals. This was particularly apparent in the reflections produced by Tom, who was discouraged to work with the head coach. Indeed, Tom felt that regardless of the messages that they wanted to convey the head coach would agree with every statement and suggestion to then continue with the training sessions as usual.

Therefore, while striving to *find one's place* within the sporting organisations, the practitioners often found themselves out of their comfort zone. Indeed, the negative interactions with the key contextual stakeholders made the practitioners feel like a bolt-on service. More specifically, several practitioners exemplified how the sporting organisations were employing them to meet the requirement of the governing bodies. In one such example, Beth expressed how working at a football academy, they felt that the organisation employed them to pass the requirements of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) and an audit. Operating within such setting, Beth recalled how their role and sport psychology more generally were not important in coaches' eyes. Such negative impact of stakeholder's interactions was reiterated by Jake who recalled how they struggled to incorporate sport psychology into existing routines of an organisation;

> On one occasion, I was going in, and I think it was a three hours' drive to get to that team. I arrange everything to arrive early and spend a day there. However, they

> decided that they will take a day off on that day, and there was nobody in, including the coaches. At that point, I thought, that is not something that you would expect from a system that bought into your service delivery and sort of was acknowledging its relevance. That was the big turning point for me. I did six hours of driving for nothing. It struck me that this was the way things would go, and it was not a high enough priority for them, a tick in a box. (Jake, Interview 2).

The stories of practice presented by Beth and Jake illuminated the significance of stakeholder's perceptions on the practitioner's job satisfaction and overall sense-making of their time in context. While such experiences did not necessarily force the practitioners to reconsider their career choices per se, it was apparent that a lack of recognition and appreciation from the contextual stakeholders influenced Beth's and Jake's motivation and job satisfaction. Indeed, as a result of negative interactions with key contextual stakeholders, both Beth and Jake lost interest in operating within their respective settings and ultimately resigned from their positions. Such accounts of practice, therefore, exemplified the importance of stakeholders' interaction in practitioners' efforts of *finding one's place,* highlighting a crucial aspect regarding practitioners' willingness, or lack of it, of remaining within their applied role.

While the stakeholders' perceived understanding of sport psychology provision was an apparent obstacle in the practitioner's pursuit for collaborative work, several practitioners also experienced challenges when working alongside stakeholders who had a good knowledge of psychological principles. In one such example, Beth expressed how they struggled to work with a welfare officer who completed a master's degree in sport psychology:

> I remember while I was doing my first workshop, they *[the welfare officer]* was trying to tell me, "next time, I think you should do this, this and this." That was a bit like, "I would not do that like this." (Beth, Interview 1).

Similarly, Alice expressed how they found it challenging to work with a coach who had a master's degree in sport psychology and thought that "they knew best because they had this level of expertise" (Interview 7). In Alice's own words:

> When they focus on coaching and some of the things that they would do I would go, "like how, how can you say that you have a level of understanding of sport psychology and then you would do something like that?" So, when they focus on their role, which is not sport psychology, then they forget some of the things that in their mind they do really well because this is not their role. So yeah, from my experience it has been challenging to work alongside people who have prior knowledge of sport psychology, either through an undergraduate degree, masters or some of those Football Association courses, which are not necessarily the best form of education. Also, people think that they have a good understanding from the previous practitioner who is not necessarily a sport psychologist or is not someone who did it well. (Alice, Interview 7).

The experiences described by Beth and Alice highlighted the complexities of *finding one's place* within a sporting organisation as trainee or neophyte sport psychologist. In particular, it seemed that while embedded within the sporting organisations the practitioners found themselves in a constant state of uncertainty and were not aware of how to act and what to do. Such doubt in the evaluation of applied experiences was particularly apparent in the reflections produced by Alice. Indeed, on one hand Alice strived to upskill the stakeholders that they were working alongside to enhance their knowledge and understanding of sport psychology. On the other hand, however, Alice was frustrated and upset to work with individuals who believed that they "knew it all" (Interview, 7). As such, it was clear that Alice was fighting a constant battle and struggled to find allies within their environment.

Taken collectively, despite reasonable levels of buy-in to sport psychology services within their respective organisations, the practitioners of the present thesis experienced a range of barriers in their efforts to integrate sport psychology into existing training routines. Such sentiments further reiterated the pivotal role that key stakeholders may have in defining the role and responsibilities of applied sport psychologists. Indeed, it was evident that stakeholder's knowledge and understanding of sport psychology, and their previous experience influenced their encounters and working relationships with the practitioners of the present thesis. Also, it was apparent that the practitioners often felt frustrated due to their interactions with stakeholders and their reluctance to work in collaboration. As such, the sentiments just outlined hold significant implications in developing an understanding of practitioner's sense-making of their applied settings, illuminating the significance of stakeholder's perceptions regarding sport psychology and their willingness to working alongside sport psychology practitioners.

4.3. Reality shock

The stories of *finding one's place* outlined in the preceding section illuminated practitioners' inadequate preparation to successfully work alongside a range of stakeholders. While such experiences hold significant implications in developing an understanding of how practitioners perceive the situational and contextual factors of sport psychology delivery, it was apparent that upon entering the applied environments for the first time the practitioners experienced a *reality shock.* Indeed, practitioners' early-career experiences presented a range of demands faced by the trainee and neophyte sport psychologist within applied settings. As such, the superordinate theme of *reality shock* can be seen as significant in enhancing understanding of the dilemmas faced by the practitioners upon leaving the university and throughout their career. The three subordinate themes of *experiences of self-doubt, influences from above* and *challenges of demonstrating impact* are presented next to outline the complexities inherited within applied sport psychology practice.

4.3.1. Experiences of self-doubt

While the practitioners of the present thesis experienced a range of challenges in integrating sport psychology services into a sporting organisation's existing routines throughout their career, it was apparent that such attempts were of a particular significance during practitioner's earlier career experiences. More specifically, several practitioners recalled that they "felt very unprepared" (Alice, Interview 1) for the realities of applied practice when they came out of university. Indeed, practitioners reiterated that while they have learned about several psychological approaches throughout their education, they felt that they were not taught how to practice and operate within sporting environments. In one such example, Steve suggested a

"mismatch" (Interview 1) between their university curriculum and applied practice. Such sentiments were echoed by Jake, who reflected on the current education for trainees in sport psychology. In Jake's own words:

> The training that is now available to future practitioners to work in those different areas is not sufficient at the moment. I think that this scope of practice is not covered on the postgraduate programmes. I think people need to process something equivalent to having those opportunities to develop those specific skills sets required to work in all of these different ways. So, I think that this can be quite frustrating for people developing in the area – you see academic courses that do not really supply people with an opportunity to do the bit at the systemic level. (Jake, Interview 4).

Several practitioners expressed similar conclusions to Jake, reiterating that their experiences in the classroom have not prepared them for the challenges of applied practice, with Amy suggesting that the realities of the applied environment were not "like the textbook said" (Interview 6). Similarly, Tom acknowledged:

> I think that there are two things. There is a misperception of what sport psychology will look like when you are a master's student. I had an assumption that I will have an opportunity to work with people, and yeah, the literature is very performance-focused, and you feel that you have to be doing something. So, psychology is something that you do to people if that makes sense. So, if you are not doing something, you are not doing your job. I think that I had this misperception as a result of various educational experiences. So, you do not know what you do not know, and you do not know how this *[applied practice]* looks like. (Tom, Interview 3).

Indeed, it was evident that the practitioners did not always receive sufficient training to allow them to operate effectively within the sporting settings. More specifically, upon entering employment within sporting organisations for the first time, practitioners anticipated that their role would revolve around one-to-one consultancy with the athletes and workshop delivery. Therefore, an awareness of practice realities and different ways of working was developed as a result of initial experiences within applied settings.

The process of entering the sporting organisations for the first time, therefore, was characterised by high levels of self-doubt. All practitioners interviewed here questioned their readiness for applied practice, reflecting how overwhelmed they felt during their initial experiences. This was best described by Tom, who reflected upon their lack of preparation for the delivery of sport psychology services within sporting organisation;

> I did not know what would be beneficial. So, when I went in there and being asked, "What do you think? What would you like to do?" I went, "Pfff, I have no idea what I would like to do. I know that I can offer some one-to-one work and I know that I can offer some group workshops, but that is all I know." (Tom, Interview 1).

It was evident that such a perceived lack of preparation for the reality of applied sport psychology practice paid a significant role in practitioners' interactions with contextual stakeholders. Indeed, several participants continued to reiterate their perceived lack of confidence during the initial stages of their career. Stories of service delivery within sporting organisations demonstrated that participants experienced a range of insecurities and did not know what they supposed to be doing. Such sense-making was particularly evident in practitioners' reflections regarding their interactions with stakeholders who either did not believe in sport psychology or who had misperceptions of the discipline. In one such example, Tom reflected on their encounters with contextual stakeholders during the early stages of their career:

> I did not have, at this time *[early in my career],* the confidence to have those type of conversations *[challenging the opinions of other practitioners]* as I probably was not as certain what was it *[applied sport psychology provision]*. I was not very confident in explaining what I did. So, I shied away from those type of conversations. (Tom, Interview 4).

It needs to be highlighted that Tom's first applied experience came at a women's first team football club where they were required to work alongside a highly experienced head coach. Such circumstances strengthened Tom's insecurities and feelings of self-doubt as they were unsure on how they could contribute towards the functioning of the organisation and players performances. Indeed, Tom reflected on how they were very reluctant to make any suggestions and often refrain from expressing alternative opinions. Such experiences were also apparent in other practitioners' reflections who likewise exemplified situations where their own self-doubt stopped them from engaging in proactive conversations with key stakeholders. Such evaluations of practitioners' time in context were further amplified by their relative inexperience of working alongside other allied professionals. Several practitioners recalled how they felt nervous and reserved in their encounters with others, and they experienced a "doubting voice" (Dan, Interview 1). In one such example, Dan recalled an instance where the feedback received from a coach had left them to question their role, albeit due to their interpretations of less directive interactions with a coach. More specifically, when reflecting on the early stages of their career, Dan recalled:

> I would overthink certain conversations. So, if a coach would say, "look, we do not need this *[psychology]* today." I would go away and think, shit, have I? What does that mean? Don't they want me anymore? Don't they want the work? Don't they value it?" In the early days, I would overthink those things. I would go home overthinking certain things. It would then make me come in the next day worrying about it! (Dan, Interview 1).

The sentiments presented by Dan were echoed across all stories of practice, illuminating that during early stages of their career, practitioners questioned what they were doing and if the stakeholders would buy-in into the services that they were providing. Considering the lack of applied opportunities and the uncertainty regarding career progression, it was apparent that in the early stages of their career the practitioners found themselves under considerable amount of pressure and feared about losing their position. It was clear, therefore, that the number of trainee and neophyte sport psychologists looking for the first applied experiences influenced practitioners' sense-making of their time in context. More specifically, the

practitioners interviewed here felt that they could be easily replaced if they will not meet the expectations set by the sporting organisations. Therefore, practitioners' actions were determined by fear of making mistakes and upsetting the key contextual stakeholders. More specifically, upon *finding one's place* the practitioners wanted to remain within the applied role and were reluctant to engage in actions that could lead to termination of their contract.

To fully present the challenges of the situation the practitioners found themselves in the early stages of their career, it needs to be highlighted that often they were the only sport psychologist within their respective settings. Indeed, while the sporting organisations employed senior physiotherapists, strength and conditioning coaches, and analysts, the trainee or neophyte sport psychologists often did not have an opportunity to work alongside a senior colleague. Such a situation posed additional challenges as most of the practitioners sampled within the present thesis did not have an opportunity to observe and learn from more experienced colleagues within their discipline. As such, while the trainee sport psychologists worked with a BPS/BASES supervisor, all practitioners that took part in the present thesis collectively expressed that they would benefit from working alongside someone embedded within their settings and therefore aware of daily challenges of a particular context.

Indeed, it was apparent that due to a lack of opportunity to work alongside a senior sport psychologist, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis struggled in their interactions with stakeholders. Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Steve who recalled how they were "conscious of going in and telling someone who coached for 15 years and played in the Premier League what *[they]* would change about their session" (Interview 1). Indeed, participants sampled in the present thesis reflected that they did not have the confidence to disagree with other professionals and put forward different opinions to those expressed by "higher-up individuals" (Dan, Interview 1). In one such example, Alice recalled:

> First, it was much more difficult to challenge *[stakeholders' opinions and ways of working]*, and I would feel like nervous about going in the next day and seeing that person if I disagreed with someone. (Alice, Interview 1).

Also, several participants expressed how they often found themselves on a "tricky ground" (Jake, Interview 7) when trying to offer suggestions on improving existing practices at the club. More specifically, several participants recalled how they felt as some stakeholders could perceive such offering as a "personal attack" (Dan, Interview 3), with Dan reflecting on an instance whereby;

> I was delivering a workshop, and then the coach walked in halfway through. I noticed that the boys *[players]* had changed. They were very open and honest with me before, and when the coach walked in, they shut off and did not say anything. When I fed this back to the coach, they took it in the wrong way. The coach thought that I was trying to outcast them from psychology workshops and that this was something that they should not be involved in. Whereas the only thing I was trying to do was to offer them some feedback. Later this week, the players had a video analysis session, and I went in to listen. The coach looked and me and said, "no, I do not want you to be a part of this." (Dan, Interview 4).

Such sentiments were echoed by several practitioners illuminating the nuances of applied sport psychology and the significance of interpersonal interactions. Also, they demonstrated that upon entering the applied settings for the first time the practitioners were unaware that such interactions could take place and as such they were not aware how to deal with difficult conversations. While such encounters could be experienced by practitioners within other disciplines, it was apparent that the sport psychologists had limited support available to them within the settings that they were operating in. Indeed, while a neophyte strength and conditioning coach was able to seek advice from a senior practitioner, the trainee and neophyte sport psychologists were often required to deal with such situations on their own. Such situations, in turn, often led to negative self-evaluations on the practitioners' part, and a perceived lack of competence. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners often questioned their own ability to become an effective sport psychologist and did not think that they had the skills required for a successful career in the field.

Overall, the data presented here can be seen to exemplify the experiences of *reality shock* that practitioners may face upon entering the applied context. Indeed, it was evident that the experiences gained at university have not matched the demands of service delivery within sporting organisations. As such, all practitioners voiced their negative self-evaluations and experiences of self-doubt. It was clear that the practitioners felt unprepared for the realities of applied practice upon leaving the university and they did not feel prepared to work alongside stakeholders and such experiences intensified their insecurities. Also, it was evident that practitioner's sense-making of their time in context during the early stages of their career was influenced by the limited job opportunities and a fear of losing one's position. As such, the *experiences of self-doubt* presented within the present subordinate theme hold significant implications in developing an understanding of early career practitioners' sense-making of situational and contextual factors encountered within applied settings.

4.3.2. Influences from above

When reflecting on their experiences of working within sporting organisations, the practitioners sampled within this thesis typified limited control over the organisation's day-to-day functioning as a characteristic often associated with their practice. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that their role was determined by the stakeholders in management positions who "controlled their destiny" (Dan, Interview 5). This was particularly evident in an interview with Amy, who reiterated that their role depended on the person who "was leading the ship" (Interview 6). More specifically, Amy suggested:

> In a professional sport like in here, say a new sporting director will come in and goes, "I don't believe in sport psychology! We are paying that much for a psychology contract?" So, that can be a possibility, and this can always happen, so I am aware of that. (Amy, Interview 2).

Dan echoed such sentiments reflecting on the ripple effect because the club they were operating at failed to get promoted. As a result, the club experienced financial difficulties and was required to make cuts across all departments. Dan described such a situation as a "nerve-racking time" (Interview 2) as due to the budget review, several practitioners faced the possibility of losing their job. In Dan's own words:

> They *[owners]* got rid of two chairmen and brought the old one back, and they are an ex-accountant, and they are really, really tight on money. So, I think, where in

> the last few years the Academy budget was set, but it also was loose and that you can go over for certain things. Whereas now, they are going through everything really closely going, "Do you need that? Do you need that?" (Dan, Interview 2).

The sentiments just outlined, therefore, serve to illustrate the *reality shock* experienced by the practitioners who upon entering the sporting organisations learned that their job security, or lack of it, was often unrelated to their ability of meeting the role objectives. More specifically, as a result of their own educational experiences, practitioners believed that security in employment was associated to knowledge and understanding of sport psychology theories and an ability to apply such knowledge within their consultancy with the athletes. However, practitioners' initial experiences illustrated that the decision regarding contract termination were often related to the perceptions of the key decision makers and financial situations at the sporting organisations. It was apparent, therefore, that the practitioners recognised that they might lose their position due to factors outside of their control. Such *reality shock,* therefore, was an additional source of negative emotions experienced by the practitioners. More specifically, such realisations added to the concerns associated with losing one's positions that stemmed from negative interactions with the stakeholders. It was apparent, therefore, that the practitioners experienced high levels of uncertainty and worried about their job security.

The sense of uncertainty and limited control over employment was particularly evident in an interview with Dan, who experienced a change of leadership at the organisation they were embedded. In Dan's own words:

> I am not delusional, *[I know that if]* I am being kept on it is not because I am good at my job because you cannot think like that. So, they *[the chairman]* will not get rid of me because I am not good enough. If they do get rid of me, it is because of the *[financial]* cuts and the hierarchy. (Dan, Interview 2).

Such sentiments, therefore, further reiterated the significance of the *influences from above* on the practitioners' job security, illuminating the impact of the key decision-makers on practitioners' role. Practitioners acknowledged that their role was often related to key stakeholders' perceptions regarding the significance of sport psychology services. Each time the organisation was going through a restructure, the practitioners felt at risk of losing their position, especially if the stakeholders who supported sport psychology were amongst those potentially leaving the organisation. Each time such a change took place, therefore, the practitioners were afraid that the new person coming in may have negative perceptions regarding sport psychology and they may lose their job. As such, the transition period was often identified as a highly stressful time where the practitioners were doubtful about their destiny.

Whilst none of the practitioners sampled within the present thesis actually lost their job following the changes to the key stakeholders at the sporting organisation, it needs to be highlighted that such changes still ultimately had a significant impact on practitioners' role. Often the practitioners were required to adapt their services to the ideas of the new person and often end the projects that they were working on. Indeed, several practitioners recalled that following a change in the leadership they were required to start their work from scratch. Many practitioners described such a transition period as a frustrating process, highlighting their

disappointment and dissatisfaction from abandoning good projects who had to be cancelled due to beliefs of key decision-makers.

However, it needs to be highlighted that such *influence from above* was not only evident during periods of structural change at an organisation. The significance of key decision-makers on the practitioners' role was also apparent during their daily interactions. Such sense-making was best summarised by Alice, who reflected on their role within the football academy:

> Generally, at the end of the day, we are in a football programme, and the coaches are in charge of that programme. You can offer something, and if they do not want to take that, that is their programme, and I think that sometimes you need to allow the coaches to do those things. (Alice, Interview 5).

The reflections produced by Alice demonstrated that any suggestions or ideas they might have regarding the training programmes and development of the players needed to be authorised by the coaches who had a final say on all aspects related to training sessions. Indeed, Alice exemplified situations where they were required to ask coaches for a permission to hold one to one consultation with a player. Such sentiments were echoed by all practitioners who collectively acknowledged how they were required to align their services in accordance with the demands of the key decision makers. In one such example, reflecting on their working relationship with an academy manager, Tom recognised that they could not make "overwriting decisions" (Tom, Interview 7). In Tom's own words:

> You can only do what you can do. I can only control what I can control. So, I only have a certain amount of control over this process. So, I can only offer an opinion, and I can only offer the possible outcomes and possible alternatives. If they *[academy manager]* chooses to take it or not, this is only their decision, and these are the outcomes of these decisions. (Tom, Interview 7).

Similarly, Steve reflected on their experience of working with a head coach who did not value sport psychology:

> We were contacted by an external organisation who wanted a physiotherapist and a psychologist to join their multidisciplinary team. So, these are people I do not have any relationships with, and I did not know them at all. I walk into this environment, and the head coach hates psychologists, does not have any time for the psychologists, and does not want to engage at all. So, I was completely unable to impact them and the importance of my voice within that team, from the head coach perspective, was zero. So, if I would say something and the head coach would disagree, that was it, there was no discussion. So, the importance of my role became very minimal, and the impact that I had was very minimal. (Steve, Interview 5).

While the sentiments presented by Steve illustrate the importance of *influences from above* on practitioners' ability to fulfil the objectives of their role, it also needs to be highlighted that such experiences came at a later stage of Steve's career, which allowed them to better cope with the demands of such situations. However, recalling similar examples during early stages of their career, Steve emphasised the

experience of a *reality shock* when faced by such situations for the first time. Therefore, while making sense of practitioners' experiences at different stages of their career, it was clear that they lacked the necessary preparation to enter the sporting organisations for the first time. The experience of the *reality shock,* therefore, were best evident in the reflections produced by the practitioners who were at the initial stages of their career during the data collection process. In one such example, Beth reflected on the resistance they faced from the senior management team when trying to implement their ideas:

> I wanted some of our CPD's in the sport to be about psychological safety. However, not everyone really knew what it was. So, when they *[senior management team]* were making decisions above me, what is most important to be included in those workshops, they did not choose that workshop. So, then it is like it is such a busy schedule, I really wanted a session with them *[key contextual stakeholder]* to get it going, but then I had to change my approach and do little bits of it here and there, and it would not be all of it. (Beth, Interview 4).

Therefore, despite their qualifications and experience, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis were not entirely in control of their programmes. It was apparent that the practitioners were obligated to follow the requests from the key decision-makers and their opinions were often viewed as suggestions and possible course of actions. The reflections produced by Beth hold the potential to enhance understanding of practitioners' perceptions of the contextual and situational factors encountered in their respective settings. Indeed, while striving to demonstrate their impact and contribute towards the development of the athletes, Beth found themselves feeling powerless and frustrated. Indeed, while recognising cultural issues and communication deficiencies amongst the staff members at their organisation, Beth was not given the tools to drive the required change within the environment. Such experiences left Beth demotivated as they concluded that the senior management team did not have an interest in driving cultural change within the organisation. Therefore, Beth questioned if their efforts would result in desirable outcomes without the support of the key decision makers.

Consequently, the limited recognition from the key stakeholders had a significant influence on the practitioners sampled within the present thesis as they often found their ideas being rejected. Indeed, it was apparent that practitioners often felt frustrated as they were not able to implement all their ideas. The challenges of incorporating sport psychology principles into the functioning of the sporting organisations was best described by Dan, who reflected on their experiences of working at a football academy:

> I think from the sport psychology position we cannot just say, "Nah,, we will do what we would like to do", because we do not have this kind of power or that feasibility to do that and we are in a position where we need to go along and adapt to the programme. (Dan, Interview 5).

Such challenges were further exemplified by Tom, who reflected on their experiences of working alongside an autocratic head coach "who was very clear of what they wanted to do and how things should be done and was not necessarily too interested in other people opinions." (Interview 2). Indeed, Tom recalled how they were often "knocked back quite quickly" (Interview 1) when trying to offer their opinions and make suggestions:

> I suggested things, but it was more 'coach is king'. They were doing what they were doing, and whatever I did was separate to that. It was not how we could collaborate? How can we work together? It was, "look after your psychology stuff, I do not really want to know about it." They were a big advocate of it and was very keen on it *[sport psychology]*, but they saw it as a separate thing. "You work with the players, and I will coach". (Tom, Interview 7).

As a result, Tom was often required to deliver what the head coach wanted. In one such example, Tom recalled:

> I can remember a workshop, when I did it, I thought, "That was rubbish, like rubbish, it was not any good. I did not give players any value." But the management felt that it was useful, "We got a big game, so can you deliver a workshop on dealing with pressure?" So, I did a workshop on dealing with pressure. Did I think that this was very impactful on players, probably not reflecting now and even then, but they were pleased that we done what they wanted us to do. (Tom, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was apparent that, practitioners' beliefs and opinions regarding sport psychology were challenged during the early stages of their respective careers. Indeed, the practitioners quickly realised that they were the only person within their respective environments who put a significant importance on sport psychology services. Also, the practitioners understood that the key decision makers within sporting setting either gave the practitioners no sense of direction in terms of the service delivery or dictated each aspect of the consultancy process. As such, during the early stages of their career, the practitioners recognised a lack of opportunity to discuss their opinions with other stakeholders. Once again, it needs to be emphasised that such sense-making was taking place simultaneously with the challenges of *finding one's place* discussed earlier within the present chapter, which further adds to the feelings of stress and uncertainty experienced by the trainees and neophyte sport psychologists.

The stories of practice shared within the present thesis, therefore, demonstrated that the practitioners often found themselves in difficult situations where they were required to navigate their interactions with stakeholders. In one such example, Jake described a situation where they made recommendations to the existing training programme:

> If you are opening an issue or you are querying something which they *[key stakeholders]* do not agree with, or it is something that is non-negotiable form their perspective, then you are on a tricky ground straight away. Because you are questioning something that has not been questioned before and it is not officially open to question, in fact it is not open to question. So, you start to damage this rapport and trust when you do not handle it sensitively. I think that I definitely came out of one of those scenarios where I was thinking, well, that is the end of my role – where is my P45? (Jake, Interview 1).

Such sentiments further exemplified the vulnerable nature of applied sport psychology practice. Indeed, it was apparent that practitioners' efforts to incorporate their services into the training programmes and ability

to make suggestions were incredibly challenging. Often knowledge of sport psychology theory and research were insufficient to navigate necessary conversations with the stakeholders. Indeed, several practitioners reiterated how they found themselves out of their comfort zone when discussing training programmes with the key decision makers. As such, the accounts of practice provided a greater insight into the realities of applied practice, demonstrating how the practitioners of the present thesis reason the contextual and situational factors encountered in their applied practice.

The accounts of practice documented within the present thesis, therefore, illustrated the influence of the key stakeholders on the practitioner's role within sporting organisations. Indeed, it was evident that the scope of service delivery was often determined by the key decision-makers (i.e., performance director, head coach, academy manager). Several practitioners acknowledged that their destiny was in the hands of key stakeholders who often determined if the organisation would invest in sport psychology provision. It was also apparent that sport psychology was not people's first agenda, and its significance was "below coaching, analysis, and sport science" (Dan, Interview 5). As a result, several practitioners acknowledged that they were required to adapt their services following existing training programmes and take the lead from other stakeholders (i.e., coaches). From such a perspective, it was apparent that the practitioners perceived themselves "lower down the food chain" (Beth, Interview 5) and someone "easy to get rid of" (Beth, Interview 5) compared to stakeholders in the senior management team. In turn, such sense-making had significant implications on practitioners' interactions with key contextual stakeholders and their ability to challenge existing routines within the sporting organisation. Indeed, the reflective accounts illuminated that the practitioners were often concerned with their long-term job security and as such often refrained from challenging the key decision-makers as they did not want to be perceived as "someone who is not pushing in the right direction and therefore just a burden" (Jake, Interview 7). Therefore, the stories of practice just outlined hold significant implications in enhancing understanding of the vulnerable nature of applied sport psychology practice and the *reality shock* experienced by the trainees and neophyte sport psychologists as a result of their sense-making of their interactions with key contextual stakeholders.

4.3.3. Challenges to demonstrate impact

While making sense of practitioners' early career experiences, it became clear that an experience of *reality shock* was underpinned by the *challenges to demonstrate impact.* More specifically, while the effectiveness of applied sport psychologists was often associated with their personal qualities and associated knowledge base, it was apparent that while striving to remain in their role the practitioners were faced with unexpected aspects of demonstrating impact. Several practitioners acknowledged that their position within an organisation was often directly linked to the performances of the athletes they supported. This was particularly evident amongst practitioners who worked within Olympic sports. In one such example, Beth acknowledged that their role was influenced by the number of medals won by the athletes at major competitions:

> Like it is hard because UK Sport sets the targets, like you need to get that number of medals. Otherwise, your funding is cut. So yeah, it is about the medals at the top (Beth, Interview 1).

Such sentiments were reiterated by Steve, who recalled:

> So, your job and your livelihood are up in the results of the people that you support. If they do not get results, then the sport will not get more money. If the sport does not get more money, then you cannot be actually paid. So, there is pressure there. (Steve, Interview 1).

It needs to be highlighted that in this instance the *reality shock* experienced by the practitioners stemmed from an apparent lack of awareness regarding the demands of applied sport psychology within sporting organisations. Indeed, all practitioners reiterated that such challenges were never discussed during their time at a university and never appeared in the literature. Therefore, several practitioners were shaken by a realisation that their job security might be directly linked to the performances of the athletes they supported. Such understanding, in turn, further intensified the negative emotions associated with *finding one's place.* The practitioners once again found themselves overwhelmed by the realities of applied practice, experiencing high level of stress and uncertainty.

During the early stages of their career, therefore, the practitioners learned a harsh lesson about the applied realities within the profession. Several practitioners described a sense of hopelessness that stemmed from the realisation that their destiny might be dependent on the outcomes of the sporting events and the results achieved by the athletes. Such sense-making was particularly apparent amongst practitioners operating with organisations dependent on UK Sport funding. Indeed, these practitioners recalled how they realised that the performances of the athletes often determined the budget of the sporting organisations and therefore the amount of the support staff embedded within the environment. Considering the range of factors that can influence the results of athletes, the practitioners acknowledged that they often felt powerless in their attempts of remaining in the role. While several practitioners interviewed went through first-hand experiences of the disappointments associated with sporting competition, Tom's career stories illustrated the consequences of the sport losing its funding. In Tom's own words:

> My role has changed. I do not know if I have mentioned before, but they lost the funding, and there was a lot of change in that environment. There was a lot of staff that left, including the psychologist that I was working with. So, my role has changed there, and I am now the only psychologist working in this environment. I am working now across all levels, whereas before I was working with the pathway athletes. I am now working with the top end of the spectrum, so the top end athletes. Within this, I am working with a different coach. (Tom, Interview 4).

Whilst on this occasion Tom was able to remain in their role, albeit in a different capacity, their reflections exemplified the vulnerable and unpredictable nature of the sporting settings. Also, Tom acknowledged that such a situation further increased the pressure they found themselves under, as they did not have any guarantee that the sport would not go through further cuts. A such, while operating within this particular setting, Tom continued to be concerned about their own job security, anticipating that their position might be terminated at any time. While such pressure associated with keeping one's job was particularly highlighted by the practitioners operating within Olympic sports, it was a common aspect of applied practice identified by all practitioners sampled within the present thesis. Indeed, practitioners operating within football clubs

often reflected on the pressure and insecurity associated with the performances of the first team and consequences of relegation and/or lack of promotion. This was best articulated by Dan:

> The fact that we did not get promoted *[impacts my role]* because now we have issues with money and contracts *[for staff]*. So, there been some cuts in the club, and I do not know anything about my contract. So yeah, it is football, and you never know what may happen. (Dan, Interview 7).

The employment insecurities were further intensified by practitioners' realisation that their position was most vulnerable out of all support roles within the sporting organisation. This was exemplified by Steve, who acknowledged:

> The first person, in my opinion, and from the experiences that I had, if an organisation needs to make changes and needs to make cuts. The first role that goes is the sport psychologist. You are not going to fire your coach. You will get rid of your support team, and traditionally that has been the psychologist. (Steve, Interview 1).

While Steve reflected on their experiences retrospectively, it was clear that in the early stages of their career such realisation resulted in an intense emotions of *reality shock.* Indeed, several practitioners expressed their disbelief when learning about the uncertainties associated with their role. As such, the ability of overcoming the *challenges of demonstrating impact* became one the most important aspects of practitioners' role whilst embedded within the sporting organisations.

While the practitioners interviewed as part of the present thesis embraced such challenges, demonstrating high levels of energy towards proving their worth, it needs to be highlighted that such objectives were often difficult to reach. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that due to the nature of psychology, it was difficult to provide objective results associated with their work. This was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who suggested that sport psychology as a profession was "pretty poor at producing outcomes and tangible evidence" (Interview 3). In Steve's own words:

> This becomes a challenge because how do you review what you have done? You can review it completely based on outcomes, but again this is not necessarily the best process to go through. So that is a big challenge. (Steve, Interview 3).

Indeed, the questions regarding an ability to demonstrate impact prove to be very difficult to answer, especially during the initial applied experiences. The difficulties that the practitioners faced within this area were further exemplified by Steve who reflected on their failure of securing an applied position at an interview due to a question regarding their ability to demonstrate effectiveness:

> I was asked, "if the chief executive officer of the organisation would come in and ask you to justify why they were paying you £50K, what are you giving me for that £50K?" I cannot remember what I have said but the person interviewing me did not like my answer. Unfortunately, I did not get the job, but this experience got me

> thinking. Yeah, from a sport psychology point of view how do we evidence the impacts that we are making (Steve, Interview 3).

The nuances of demonstrating impact were further exemplified by Amy, who concluded:

> The performance factor is the main thing, but there are other factors that contribute to that. So, psychology is just one of them, and it is difficult to objectively say this is working, I am a good practitioner. So, I am finding it challenging to evaluate how I am doing. If I do not have a massive performance impact. I would hope that I have some kind of impact on performance or wellbeing, but actually, someone said that the other day, "It is not because of you if they are successful and it is not because of you if they are not." That actually resonated with me because I actually found it quite challenging to detach myself from their performance, if that makes sense. When that person said that to me, that really resonated with me because it is really easy to say that athlete was performing amazingly, it is all because of the work I was doing with them, but it is not. Ultimately it can be very easy to say that the athlete is not performing well and all the work that we were doing is not effective, and it is all my fault. So, both of them are very dangerous and not very helpful. (Amy, Interview 4).

Such sentiments, therefore, demonstrated the incredibly difficult position that the practitioners found themselves in, highlighting the pressure of needing to objectively justify one's existence within the sporting organisation. While the practitioners were reluctant to associate the effectiveness of their services directly in accordance with athletes' performances, they were unaware of other methods of presenting the impact of their work. The lack of preparation to meet the demands of their work further exemplified the underlying factors contributing towards the experiences of *reality shock.*

Practitioners found themselves in a state of flux, where on one hand they were determined to demonstrate the impact of their services and on the other they felt uncomfortable to suggest that the athlete's success was purely down to sport psychology support. Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who suggested:

> So, if I can speak generically about sport psychology, we are not good at championing the work that we do and shouting about it: "look I am doing a good job!" I think we get trained, and certainly I was trained, to not take credit for other people achievements. So, if I will work with someone who will win a medal at the Olympic Games there is no way I would come up and say that this medal was because of me. (Steve, Interview 2).

It was apparent, therefore, that throughout their training the practitioners developed an approach to their practice that was not focused on gaining recognition for the effectiveness of their work. However, it was clear that the practitioners were not prepared to deal with the consequences of such an approach to practice. Indeed, while the practitioners were trained to work in the background, they often were at risk of their work

being unnoticed. This was best explained by Steve, who reflected upon their experiences of working with an injured athlete:

> Being an effective sport psychologist is not necessarily about getting recognition. I think it is about having a positive impact on the athlete. So, did I have a positive impact on the athlete during their rehabilitation process? Absolutely! If you ask the coach if I was even involved, they will say no. Probably if you will ask the athlete, they would say no as well. (Steve, Interview 5).

Such sentiments were echoed by Alice, who recalled:

> I am not often at the centre of things, and *[I do not]* put myself in those positions. So, I am not at the same level as the coach, and I would not put myself at the front. I would put myself beneath the surface a little bit. (Alice, Interview 7).

The reflections provided by Steve and Alice were generally reiterated by all practitioners interviewed in this thesis, who collectively believed that the biggest strength of an effective sport psychologist was their ability to work in a collaboration with other stakeholders and have an indirect impact on the athlete. Such sense making was particularly apparent during the early stages of their careers, where the practitioners believed that their role should have not evolved around gaining recognition. However, the practitioners quickly recognised that such an approach could lead to a termination of their contract as the key decision makers might not be aware of the work carried out in the background and therefore not able to justify the salaries of sport psychologists.

Therefore, it was evident that the practitioners faced a dilemma regarding how best to approach their work in a manner that would allow them to be true to their own beliefs and values, but also that would allow them to survive in their role. Indeed, while navigating these job insecurities, the practitioners were faced with the challenges of how they were perceived by the key stakeholders within the organisation. Such pressure was best described by Amy, who highlighted:

> Because it is such a small sport the athletes are your key stakeholders as well. There are 30 athletes on the Olympic and Paralympic programme, so, you do not want the reputation that the athletes think that you are shit. Because if they do then they would not like to work with you and if they do not want to work with you then you are probably not going to retain your job! (Amy, Interview 7).

As such, it was apparent that while the practitioners were reluctant to chase recognition, they also were aware of the danger of their work being overlooked. Several practitioners reiterated their concerned regarding being perceived as someone who is not doing anything and just spends time in the environment. Such a sense making was particularly amongst the practitioners who worked alongside stakeholders reluctant to engage with sport psychology. Indeed, these practitioners recognised that in order to change the perceptions of the stakeholders they were required to demonstrate the impact of sport psychology support, and therefore gain some sort of recognition for their practice.

While grappling with the *reality shock* experienced due to the *challenges of demonstrating impact* the practitioners strived to find a way of enhancing their job security. One of the most effective strategies to achieve such objectives was presented by Steve, who recalled:

> If you want to be effective you need to make sure that the work that you are delivering is aligned to the objectives and the goals of the sport. So, it is not for me to come into sport and say to the performance director these are your goals, these should be your targets. If we have goals and targets from the sport, the performance director or whoever then we know what we are working towards. For me this is one of the biggest things, to have goals and targets, regardless of what they are. This is the best way for you to see if you are having an impact. Also, you can then get some feedback. You can see if the things that you deliver have an impact. So, the clarity in goals is a big thing! (Steve, Interview 2).

Steve continued:

> If you will be able to agree at the start on how we *[the sporting organisation and the key stakeholders]* will know if you had an impact. If you can identify what will start to change, what are you going to see *[because of your work]*. If you will be able to do that early on, then actually you do not need to go and chase the recognition. So, if I will talk about the example that I have used before regarding the team that brought me in as a consultant. At the start of this process, we had a six-month period and I said to the coaches: "Okay when the tournament finishes, we will sit down and have a discussion if I had an impact or not." Also, I identified aspects that they would see during that tournament that would make them think that I was successful. By doing this, we had a very clear plan and the outline of the key things that this team will be able to do if I would deliver more role and do my job successfully. So, then I did not have to go and chase recognition because actually we asked the sport psychologist to come in and help us to have a team that will do X and Y and you know what during the games, we can see them doing X and Y and that is the approach that I am trying to take. (Steve, Interview 2).

As such, it was apparent that striving towards meeting the goals and objectives of the sport allowed the practitioners to overcome the experiences of *reality shock* and demonstrate impact of their services. However, while several practitioners recognised the merit of such an approach, it needs to be highlighted that only Steve was able to work in that manner. Indeed, it was clear that such an approach to sport psychology delivery was a luxury and not a norm and most of the practitioners were embedded within organisations that lacked clearly defined plans for athletes' development. In addition, as discussed earlier within the present chapter, most of the practitioners felt that they were employed to tick a box on the requirements of the corresponding governing bodies. As such, in many instances, the practitioners found themselves working in organisations who did not know how they could use the support of a sport psychologist. This was best explained by Jake:

> The sporting organisations may not be quite sure what they want form you. They want sport psychology, but they do not know how to use you as a resource. I mean, I have been trusted to make those decisions. I do not think I have ever been told what to do by a coach or a staff member. I always felt like I was leading it and driving it. Also, I think that coaches are sure on what they do not want from the psychology delivery. Particularly at the high-performance end. At least that has been my experience. Talking to other people their experiences may suggest that the performance directors know what they do not want but they are not necessarily clear on what they want. (Jake, Interview 2).

The sentiments just outlined capture the accounts of the most experienced practitioner sampled within the present thesis. As such, while they provide an insight into the realities of applied sport psychology practice, they do not outline the experiences of trainee and neophyte sport psychologist. Indeed, similarly to Jake, practitioners at the early stages of their career where often tasked to lead the consultancy process. The biggest difference between Jake and other practitioners sampled within this thesis, however, is the fact that Jake was the only practitioner with a full-time employment at a university. As such, while faced by the dilemmas of applied practice, Jake's evaluations of their job security were significantly different compared to other practitioners. More specifically, at the early stages of their career the practitioners sampled here did not have any other employment within sport psychology to fall back on, also at that stage of their development they were not prepared to operate effectively at the sporting organisations. It was clear, therefore, that the trainee and neophyte sport psychologists often found themselves under constant pressure to find ways of justifying their position. Also, the practitioners repeatedly faced a challenge that was not discussed with them during their time at the university. Therefore, the *challenges of demonstrating impact* further intensified the negative emotions experienced as a result of *finding one's place.*

Overall, throughout the interview process it was apparent that practitioners lacked control over their job security within sporting organisations. Often, their position depended on the results of the athletes that they supported, and the practitioners were under constant pressure to justify their existence. It was clear that throughout their career the practitioners felt uncertain about their position, acknowledging that they could lose their job at any time. As such, the sentiments just outlined further exemplify the dilemma inherited within applied sport psychology practice. Indeed, while the practitioners collectively reiterated that their role should not be influence by gaining recognition and that some of their best work can be done in the background without stakeholders' awareness, they also recognised the danger of their work going unnoticed and the significance of how they were perceived in the sporting environment. Also, while struggling to demonstrate the objective results of their work, the practitioners strived to align their work to the goals of objectives of the sport their supported. However, while some practitioners experience success within such an approach, most of the practitioners highlighted a lack of direction from the sport and limited awareness of the key stakeholders of how sport psychology could be incorporated into the training programmes. As such, it was apparent that the practitioners often found themselves under immense pressure to withstand demands of operating within elite sport and often experienced high levels of anxiety. Therefore, the nuances of demonstrating impact were one of the main factors affecting practitioners' sense-making of their time in context, playing a key role in influencing their actions within applied settings. Such sense making and

actions are discussed in more details in the following sections of the present chapter where greater attention is given to outlining practitioners' development and their increasing ability to deal with the *reality shock* experienced in the initial stages of their career.

4.4. Experiential learning

Reflecting on their career stories, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis acknowledged the significance of developing their experience as applied practitioners, identifying the importance of "learning on the job" (Beth, Interview 6) as a critical aspect of their professional development. Indeed, it was evident that exposure to applied settings played a vital role in practitioners' ability to make sense of the contextual and situational factors encountered within sporting organisations. As such, the superordinate theme of *experiential learning* serves to further enhance the understanding of applied sport psychologists career stories and their perceptions of the day-to-day realities of practice. The subthemes of *increased understanding of sporting context, weighing up the outcomes of interactions with the stakeholders, demonstrating high levels of commitment,* and *significance of positive working relationships* are presented next to capture the development of practitioners' sense-making of the nuances of applied practice, illuminating the significance of applied experience and exposure to the daily functioning of sporting organisations.

4.4.1. Increased understanding of the sporting context

The stories of practice shared within the superordinate theme of *reality shock* demonstrated that while entering sporting organisations as an early career sport psychologist, the practitioners felt overwhelmed by the day-to-day functioning of such settings, highlighting the turbulent nature of working along with a range of contextual stakeholders. Reflecting on their initial experiences, the practitioners emphasised the significance of experience in their ability to deal with the demands of the applied practice, with Dan recalling:

> I did not have any real experience. I did not have anything to work off, I just walk in cold trying many different things and developed, and got a lot of experiences over time. I probably learned in the rawest way of not having a lot environment to pick up from. (Dan, Interview 1).

The significance of maximising learning opportunities while being part of applied settings was further reiterated by Alice, who acknowledged:

> I think that you learn when you are on the job, and that was my first kind of learning experience. So, when I reflected, I knew when I kind of gone wrong in that kind of position. (Alice, Interview 1).

In a similar vein, Beth highlighted the importance of learning on the job as part of their professional development as a practitioner:

> I think that you progress on the job you know. I think that this has fast-tracked me even more just because of the experience that I was exposed to within the sport, then all of the experiences that you could not have predicted happened, and I have learned many things. So yeah, I think that, yes, you can go away and get all the

> degrees and all the theories and all of that, but it is the actual applied experience that is so priceless you know. (Beth, Interview 6).

Indeed, all practitioners sampled within the present thesis identified obtaining actual applied experience as being a vital component on the journey towards professional competence and their ability to operate effectively within applied settings, with Tom suggesting:

> Yeah, qualification is one *[thing],* but the breadth and depth of experience are crucial factors. I think that just experience, I know that it sounds like a very broad term, but yeah, the experience of working with different populations, working with organisations in a different role. So, within *[Olympic sport]* I was working within the pathway and the academy athletes, and at the football club, I am also working within the academy. So, I did not necessarily have exposure to working with performance directors directly or the top of the system or the medal-winning athletes, for instance. So, when now I am getting a bit of exposure to that, this would dictate my experience. (Tom, Interview 6).

As such, it was apparent that all practitioners sampled within the present thesis valued their time spent within sporting organisations, identifying it as one of the most significant factors within their professional development. More specifically, the practitioners acknowledged that while the knowledge and understanding of sport psychology theory was an essential component of their role, they also reiterated the importance of applying such knowledge into the applied situations. To achieve this several practitioners reiterated the significance of learning how each organisation functions. Therefore, as the practitioners progressed in their career, they started to place greater emphasis on spending time within their applied settings and understanding the bespoke detail of their respective organisations.

Practitioners' efforts to spend time within the organisation and learn about the environment were best described by Tom, who reflected on their efforts to immerse themself into the functioning of the sporting organisation:

> I remember pre-season standing by a pole, and I was not doing any psychology, I was just there helping out. I was picking up cones. I was trying to immerse myself in the environment and become a part of the staff. I tried to become a normal member of staff, rather than an add on to what they already had. I think that this helped me, on reflection, that helped just to muck in and be part of the programme. Being open to doing stuff that I didn't think was sport psychology. (Tom, Interview 1).

Such sentiments were echoed by several practitioners who collectively acknowledged that they invested a significant amount of time to understand the people they were working alongside and understand how they behaved in certain situations. All participants collectively identified their efforts of getting to know the environment as a process that allowed them to "see similar patterns and see similar cases*"* (Dan, Interview 7). This was particularly apparent in an interview with Dan, who reflected on the process of making sense of encountered situations:

> I think that the best way to answer that is the conveyer belt in a factory, I suppose. The conveyer belt goes around, and it is about watching it and understanding the order. Understanding when things happen, at a certain time, and when do the things happen at a certain time. Then you can place yourself with the conveyer belt at the right time. I think that probably this is the best way of looking at it. (Dan, Interview 4).

The reflections presented by Dan can be seen to outline the development of the practitioners of the present thesis. Indeed, all practitioners interviewed here echoed Dan's reflections exemplifying how their increased ability to understand the day-to-day functioning of the sporting organisation-- in terms of stakeholders' routines and timetables-- improved their capability of incorporating sport psychology services into the training programmes. Indeed, while this was an area that the practitioners struggled with at the start of their career, it was evident that they enhanced their ability to work alongside other professionals as they gained more experience.

It needs to be highlighted that while such development was most apparent during practitioners' early stages of their career, such learning continued throughout their professional journey. Indeed, regardless of their experience, the practitioners reiterated that they were paying significant attention to the environmental factors each time when entering a new organisation. Indeed, all participants sampled within the present thesis highlighted the unique nature of each sporting organisation. More specifically, the practitioners reiterated the danger of assuming that organisations within the same sport (i.e., football) might possess the same general characteristics. Instead, all practitioners highlighted the importance of paying attention to "how *[each]* context functions*"* (Jake, Interview 3). In one such example, Steve suggested:

> It is about doing it *[service delivery]* in a slightly different way and appreciating and understanding that every sport is different. *[Understanding]* that some sports would like to sit in rooms with spreadsheets for 5 or 6 hours to capture learning and others would like to have a chat over a coffee here and there to progress over the months. (Steve, Interview 3).

The importance of understanding each context was further exemplified by Tom, who reflected on his experiences of delivering sport psychology services within football and Olympic sport settings:

> The Olympic sports had psychology for a number of years. So, we went to *[an Olympic sport],* and they had psychology for 15 years before we went in there. We might deliver it slightly differently to how it was delivered before, but they know all the fundamentals and all the other things that have been put in place. (Tom, Interview 1).

> In *[the Olympic sport]*, you were going to a place which was pretty psychological-minded and had a good understanding of what psychology was, and how they wanted to use it, the staff is already educated. So, we are working at a higher level, so we were able to educate them on attachment styles and more. (Tom, Interview 2).

> Olympic sports are much more multidisciplinary and integrated in what they do. So, they are happy that there are different people and different expertise and then bringing that together to work as one. Whereas football is pretty much, "We have done this for 20 years, why would we change that?" So yeah, very different in those two in that respect, in football you are starting from a much lower level than in the Olympic sport. (Tom, Interview 2).

While the sentiments presented by Tom came at an early stage of the interview process, it needs to be highlighted that at this time they had nearly two years of applied experience behind them. As such, it was clear that during that period Tom developed an ability to recognise differences between the settings they were embedded in. Such development and impact of *experiential learning* was apparent amongst all practitioners recruited within the present thesis. More specifically, it was clear that with the development of their own applied experience, the trainee and neophyte sport psychologists started to highlight similar aspects of their role to the ones discussed by the more experienced practitioners. As such, when reflecting upon different periods of their respective timelines, the trainee and neophyte sport psychologists started to echoed reflections made by Steve regarding the importance of understanding stakeholders preferred ways of working.

Upon attempting to comprehend practitioners' *increased understanding of the sporting context,* it became clear that with enhanced experienced the practitioners started to pay an increased attention to their ability of working alongside a range of diverse individuals. Indeed, despite the turbulent nature of their encounters with contextual stakeholders on occasions, all practitioners reiterated the importance of their interactions with the stakeholders, highlighting the significance of learning from mistakes. In one such example, Dan reflected on their early career interactions with coaches within their applied setting:

> I definitely said things in the past that I should not have at some point, being part of the conversations that I should not have been, and I have definitely asked questions where the other person just looked at me like, "why you are asking that?" (Dan, Interview 5).

Indeed, several stories of practice illuminated the significance of trial-and-error approach to the interactions with the stakeholders as an essential aspect of professional development within applied sport psychology. Several practitioners expressed that such an approach was "priceless" in their development and allow them to improve their practice, with Steve reflecting:

> I had a conversation with the coach, I was very direct I asked them x, y, z. I was really on point, and I actually didn't get any buy-in. So, actually reflecting on those experiences and actually spending time reflecting on those experiences and then actually spending time trying to identify how I could do this differently? How could I have a conversation with this coach differently? What could I try that would work differently? I think that through different experiences and through different people and through trial and error and failing – let us be totally honest I have failed so many times in those conversations – through that process you learn those kinds of soft skills of development and how you influence people. How do I get someone to

> buy into me? How do I get someone to buy into what I am trying to do? (Steve, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was apparent that the exposure to a range of interactions with contextual stakeholders was an essential component in practitioners' ongoing journeys of professional development. While such interactions often lead to the experiences of *reality shock,* all practitioners reiterated the importance of learning from all their encounters within the sporting context, regardless of whether they were positive or negative ones. Indeed, all practitioners exemplified instances where they dedicated a significant amount of time to reflections on their interactions with the contextual stakeholders. Indeed, it was clear that despite the encountered challenges associated with *finding one's place* the practitioners showed an incredible level of dedication towards self-development and self-improvement. As such, the practitioners strived to understand what they do well in their interactions with the stakeholders, but also what they could do differently and how they could improve.

In addition, despite the apparent resilience from the contextual stakeholders to engage with the sport psychology services, the practitioners identified these individuals as an asset that could contribute towards their own professional development. As such, while dealing with their own insecurities and *experiences of self-doubt,* the practitioners demonstrated high levels of willingness to spend time with more experienced individuals to enhance their own practice. Such an approach was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who recalled:

> If I will speak with the coach who had 20 years of playing experience at the top level and talk to them for a half an hour once a week, what can I learn? What can I take from them? I work with people of high quality, and I am trying to learn everything about them so whether it is a coach or a practitioner I am trying to learn whether it is the commitment, work ethic, technical knowledge, how they approach situations, their different thought processes I will always try to look for these and I will always seek feedback from those people. I was fortunate I was able to observe four or five quality practitioners as I was early in my training in different environments. So, I observed the first-team psychologist at a football club, I managed to observe guys working in international sport, people that worked in Olympics for 20 plus years and those insights were very useful. (Steve, Interview 1).

Taken collectively, the reflective accounts illustrated that throughout their career, practitioners were constantly striving to develop their abilities to work more effectively alongside the stakeholders coexisting within the applied settings. While continually reflecting on their interactions with the stakeholders, the practitioners also paid significant attention to developing their understanding of the individuals they work alongside. Several practitioners reiterated the importance of "learning about the individuals" (Alice, Interview 5) who form the multidisciplinary team. The significance of paying attention to the way the key stakeholders perceive given situations was particularly evident in interviews with Alice, who several times highlighted this aspect of applied practice:

> What is the most important, is knowing the individuals that are within this environment. If you do not know the individuals, even if you know the environment perfectly, but you do not know the individuals, you will not be able to work with them, because they will not work with you. (Alice, Interview 5).

> I think that is really important to understand other people's beliefs and values and how they look up to them *[in terms of their actions]*. We are very different, and we will need to work together at the end of the day. Some people do not have the same values, and we need to find a way of working together because we are in the same environment. I think that in those situations when someone has a different opinion of what sport psychology is and how it looks like. I think that for me is that understanding of their point of view and where they are coming from. (Alice, Interview 7).

The reflections shared by Alice, therefore, captured the process of *experiential learning* and practitioners enhanced ability to cope with the *reality shock* experienced during their initial encounters within the sporting organisations. Indeed, when initially shocked by stakeholders' reluctance towards sport psychology and different ways of working, with experience the practitioners learned to understand such situations. More specifically, when initially phased by the demands of *embracing an uncertain career* and *working alongside allied professions,* it was apparent that with experience the practitioners learned not to take such encounters personally. Also, the practitioners learned to accept the fact that different stakeholders coexisting within the same sporting setting "had their way of doing things" (Dan, Interview 4). Such sense making of the contextual aspects of applied practice helped the practitioners understand that while some practitioners were reluctant to work in collaboration in the particular moment in time, that did not mean that their perceptions could not be changed. To influence contextual stakeholders' perceptions, therefore, the practitioners demonstrated an impressive determination to understand how the stakeholders approached their roles and responsibilities and what their looked to achieve in their work. Based on such information, the practitioners looked to adapt their services to suit the stakeholders needs and align their services towards the outcomes expressed by the stakeholders. This, in turn, allowed the practitioners to overcome some of the *challenges of demonstrating impact* discussed earlier within the present chapter, and therefore overcome the negative emotions associated with the *reality shock.* While the significance of practitioners' *passion for sport and working with people* will be discussed in the concluding section of the present chapter, it needs to be highlighted here that the process just outlined would be difficult to achieve without such passion.

Another significant aspect developed as a result of the *experiential learning* that took place throughout practitioners' career was their enhanced understanding regarding "how the leadership works, who is in charge of what, how the training gets organised, and how the communication is established between the coaches" (Jake, Interview 3). Such an approach allowed the practitioners to understand where "the power was held and where the influence was held" (Jake, Interview 1). Indeed, several stories of practice shared within this thesis demonstrated that as the practitioners progressed through their respective careers, they started to pay more attention to understanding the organisational hierarchy within their applied settings and looked to identify who controlled the environment. This was particularly evident in interviews with Dan who acknowledged that it would be "stupid to ignore *[stakeholders]* power and control" (Dan, Interview 5)

highlighting the importance of having "an awareness of the person in power" (Dan, Interview 5). Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Tom who acknowledged:

> They *[academy manager]* have an overall say on the processes and procedures and how we train and the sessions that we run and the culture and environment we want to develop (Tom, Interview 7).

However, while such sentiments were echoed by all practitioners sampled within the present thesis, it needs to be highlighted that the practitioners acknowledged the danger in assuming that the power always lay with the manager or performance director, and such individuals were making all decisions. For example, Jake reflected that they operated within environments where "influence would come from all different sources" (Interview 3), and certain professionals had "an unpredictable impact" (Interview 3). In Jake own words:

> I have seen some very ineffective performance directors, and I have seen some extremely effective performance directors. I have some performance directors that distribute power amongst their team, and I have seen performance directors that hold to every ounce of power that they can to stop anyone else from having any type of the influence. I think that those positional power relationships matter but they are not always what they seem. (Jake, Interview 3).

Jake further reiterated the significance of understanding means of influence by reflecting:

> I always remember one situation I was in, where a nutritionist had a really negative impact on the situation. That was quite unpredictable and unexpected. So, that would affect everything in that environment. They would drop in for half a day and you know create havoc just through one or two conversations that they may have, and it would have a lasting effect on that situation. So, even when you say that the performance director would have more power, the sources of influence would come from all different sources, depending on that context, with certain professionals having an unpredictable impact – often positive and occasionally negative. (Jake, Interview 3).

Such sentiments presented by Jake, the most experienced practitioner within the present thesis, further reiterated the significance of *experiential learning.* Indeed, while other practitioners spoke with a lot of detail about the importance of recognising the key decision makers, demonstrating their development and *increased understanding of the sporting context,* only Jake went to a greater depth while discussing the issues of power within the sporting organisations. It was apparent, therefore, that with experience, Jake learned to look beyond the obvious individuals associated with an ability of making the key decisions and started to recognise different means of influence.

Similarly, it was also apparent that as the other practitioners progressed through their career, they also started to pay attention to what was "going on between individuals within the context" (Jake, Interview 3). For example, Amy recalled how they were conscious in addressing their disagreements with the performance lifestyle advisor as they were "really, really pally with the performance director" (Interview 7) as they knew each other for a long time. Once again, however, while it was apparent that the practitioners

started to recognise the significance of such relationships between the stakeholders, the greater amount of detail regarding this area was presented by Jake. For example, Jake recalled:

> I worked quite effectively with a physiotherapist and a strength and conditioning coach, in one situation. In a sort of relatively short period of time, after we started working together, the physiotherapist had an influence over the availability of performers for selection. That lead to a breakdown in relationships with one of the coaches, which meant that working collaboratively with the physiotherapist and that particular coach would be much more challenging because the coach lost trust with that particular practitioner. So, that dynamic nature makes a big difference. (Jake, Interview 3).

It was clear, therefore, that an ability to see and understand the contextual and situational factors inherited within the sporting context were correlated with practitioners' level of experience. Indeed, interviews with Jake explored the issues of influence within sporting organisation in a greater detail compared to less experienced practitioners. From such a perspective, therefore, it was clear that practitioners sense making of contextual and situational factors evolved as a result of *experiential learning.* This, in turn, further enhanced their ability to navigate the nuances of the applied sport psychology associated with demonstrating the effectiveness of their work and subsequently increasing job security. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners started to recognise how to position themselves within the sporting organisations and how to behave around certain individuals. Several practitioners echoed the sentiments produced by Amy and Jake, highlighting the importance of adapting their behaviours to contextual situations. As such, it was apparent that practitioners engaged in strategic actions to overcome the challenges encountered within applied settings and ultimately enhance their survival within the sporting organisation.

Overall, the sentiments outlined here demonstrate that in order to cope with the *reality shock* experienced during the early stages of their career, the practitioners strived to enhance their understanding of the sporting setting and people operating within that particular context. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners looked to spend more time within their respective environments to understand better the day-to-day functioning of the settings they found themselves in. This included understanding the stakeholders operating within the sporting organisations, increasing an awareness of how the decisions were made and who had the most influential voice within the environment. As a result of such *experiential learning,* the practitioners develop a high level of contextual understanding and enhanced their ability to act in accordance to specific demands of each applied setting. Greater detail regarding such aspects will be presented in the following sections of the present thesis by discussing practitioners' efforts of *weighing up the outcomes of interactions with the stakeholders, demonstrating high levels of commitment,* and increased recognition of the *significance of positive working relationships.*

4.4.2. Picking your battles

The analysis of practitioners' career stories demonstrated that due to the demands associated with *working alongside allied professions* they were reserve to challenge the opinions of the key contextual stakeholders during their early careers. Indeed, the reflective accounts presented within the superordinate theme of *reality shock* illustrated that practitioner's reluctance to express their opinions were underlined by

their perceived lack of ability to work alongside a wide range of stakeholders and a limited number of job opportunities. However, as the practitioners progressed through their careers and developed their understanding across various sporting environments, they recognised the significance of putting their opinions forward, even if that could potentially lead to a heated debate. Practitioners sampled in the present thesis realised that confrontational conversations were a part of the elite environment, and stakeholders often had disagreements on how to put the athletes in the best position to succeed. Indeed, several practitioners recalled that to become an important member of a team of practitioners, they had to be prepared to suggest alternative ways of doing things and be willing to challenge others' opinions. When making sense of their applied experiences, practitioners realised that elite environments valued individuals who had different opinions, provided a different way of thinking, and challenged existing approaches. For example, Steve reflected:

> People working in high performance need to be comfortable in dealing with and managing disagreements. People need to be willing to raise their thoughts and challenge others, and they need to be willing to be challenged. I think that high-performance sport is not a place to work for someone who cannot be challenged and that cannot challenge other people. Fundamentally, if you put things forward and people do not agree, and you cannot understand that then you will take a lot of things personally! If you have a multidisciplinary team meeting and you have a representative of each discipline, you may have 10 or 11 people there. You will not have 10 or 11 people agreeing with you and each aspect. So, it is a challenging place to work and a challenging environment, I have been in multidisciplinary team meetings where practitioners had completely polar opposite views. So, you know there is a high level of conflict. You have a physiotherapist who wants to manage the situation one way. You have a strength and conditioning coach who wants to measure the situation completely differently. You know you have a doctor who wants to measure it completely different. So, you have a lot of conflict in terms of what is going to be the best for the athlete. (Steve, Interview 4).

Such sentiments were further exemplified by all practitioners within the present thesis who collectively expressed that due to increased exposure they started to perceive challenging conversations as a “form of positive discussion about alternative ways of doing things” (Steve, Interview 4). Thus, conflict was perceived as a “healthy and useful thing” (Steve, Interview 4) that facilitated alternative ways of thinking. Such discussion amongst world-class and highly passionate colleagues was identified as an important element of the elite environment that allowed practitioners to consider the best course of action for a particular athlete or a team. Indeed, several practitioners reflected that in order to push themselves and continuously enhance the performances of athletes, they were required to engage in challenging conversations to find the most appropriate solutions and best decisions. Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Alice, who recalled:

> I think that this is a part of being part of the elite environment. So, this is the biggest organisation I have been working for so far, and the elite environment needs people that can be open and honest. The elite environment needs people that are

> willing to check and challenge. So, we are almost like a family in the way that we work. You need to be able to disagree on something, but then still be able to work together. Still build work through that and still have a strong relationship, because you spend so much time together. So, all those things are part of being in an elite environment. (Alice, Interview 4).

The significance of expressing alternative opinions and engaging in a discussion was further reiterated by Steve, who acknowledged:

> I think I also been in teams where there was no conflict and no disagreement. However, I would say that they were probably less functioning teams. So, I would say that level of disagreement at some stage or some form of positive discussion about alternative ways of doing things can be positive, I suppose. One of the key things about that is people that are willing to challenge when it is appropriate. (Steve, Interview 5).

This quote, therefore, demonstrated that as the result of *experiential learning,* the practitioners developed their understanding of the value of expressing alternative opinions. One of the most significant aspects of such learning was practitioners enhanced ability to handle the challenge sensitively to make sure they did not "damage the rapport and trust" (Jake, Interview 7) of the contextual stakeholders. As such, it was apparent that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they develop their ability to assess the applied situations better and make more effective judgements. More specifically, all practitioners highlighted how they progressed from avoiding challenging stakeholders' opinions towards identifying the right moment for expressing alternative opinions. This was particularly evident in an interview with Tom, who recalled:

> At times, I probably refrained from challenging *[stakeholders]*, I probably held back on some things. So, *[academy manager]* has strong beliefs about certain things. I know that from the way that he works that those things are based on their own *[athletic]* career. I think that a lot of their decisions can be biased by their view of the world. So, I know that it is helpful to challenge sometimes, but I cannot be challenging them all the time because then they may think that I am only challenging. (Tom, Interview 7).

Such sense-making was particularly evident in interactions with key stakeholders (e.g., managers, performance directors) as they were the ones who were renewing or terminating practitioner's employment contracts. For example, Alice reflected on their interactions with an academy manager:

> I think that sometimes there were things that I have disagreed with, but our interactions were slightly different because of that position. If there was something that I have disagreed with a coach we would probably have that conversation, whereas if that was with the academy manager, I was trying to shy away from it a little bit and see what you can do around it to support it, I would probably never let it *[positive working relationship]* be at risk by not challenging everything. (Alice, Interview 7).

The reflective accounts just outlined demonstrated that due to an *increased understanding of the sporting context*, practitioners increasingly recognised that they were "picking their battles" and "learning what things were worth fighting for and what things were worth leaving" (Alice, Interview 7). In one such example, Tom reflected on their experiences of working with a head coach:

> They *[head coach]* used to blow his top quite a lot with the players, which I knew was quite detrimental to the things that I wanted to achieve. However, my ability to challenge them on that was pretty much zero. That was a way of protecting this relationship by not challenging them on the things they were doing. I remember one game where at half time they completely lost it with the players and told them what they thought about them and upset one of them. I knew at that point that I needed to stay out of the way because anyone who would challenge them at that point would receive the same treatment. So, I knew at that point that it was not right to challenge them on it. (Tom, Interview 7).

It was apparent, therefore, that *experiential learning* played a key role in practitioners' sense making of the encountered contextual and situational factors within their respective settings. More specifically, as a result of *increased understanding of the sporting context* and the people operating within it, practitioners developed an ability to predict stakeholders' reactions to certain situations. The reflections shared by Tom are an excellent example of such sense making by the practitioners. Indeed, while at the beginning of their career, and their relationship with a coach, Tom could express their opinions in an inappropriate time, with experience Tom learned when to "stay out of the way" (Interview 7).

The interpretations of reflective accounts shared within the present thesis, therefore, provided an insight into the way the practitioners think in action, exemplifying the factors that they consider when making decisions in practice. Indeed, it was apparent that as the practitioners progressed in their careers, they developed their professional knowledge and the awareness of the situational contexts. More specifically, several practitioners acknowledged that as a result of their exposure to applied situations they develop their professional judgement and awareness of the best course of action in given situations. Such sense-making was particularly evident in the stories of practice produced by Alice:

> I think that I was at the point when you how to prioritise things and risk assess things. So, is this actually having a detrimental effect on x, y, z etcetera? If not, is it worth picking a battle on? Whereas if that had a detrimental effect on a player or the environment, those type of things, then this was something worth looking at and exploring further. (Alice, Interview 7).

As such, the practitioners collectively exemplified how with experience they learned to "weigh up the outcomes" (Alice, Interview 7) of conversations with the stakeholders. Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Jake, who recalled:

> I think what you then have on top of that are those, what I would call "grey areas decisions" were you going, "Okay, I will make a judgement that this decision and this route will have these outcomes and that is preferable to going this route. That

> will have these resulting outcomes, which are less attractive than the other or less aligned with the context that you are working in." So, I think that you always make those subtle decisions regarding how you are practicing. (Jake, Interview 5).

Therefore, it was apparent that the level of accumulated experience played a key role in practitioners' interactions with contextual stakeholders. Indeed, it was clear that during the early stages of their career, the practitioners were somewhat naïve in their communications with key contextual stakeholders, assuming that they will be open to meaningful conversations about their practice. With experience, however, the practitioners increased their awareness of the job insecurities inherited within professional sport, realising that all practitioners, regardless of their role and experience, where in a vulnerable position and at risk of losing their job. Such awareness, consequently, influenced practitioners' ability to predict the potential outcomes of their interactions with a given stakeholder, and therefore, their actions. In particular, such sense making enabled the practitioners to avoid encounters leading to *experiences of self-doubt,* which were discussed in the earlier sections of the present chapter. In addition, an increased ability of picking battles provided the practitioners a platform for *forging positive relationships* with contextual stakeholders.

Interestingly, it became apparent that the practitioners did not only pay a significant attention to potential outcomes of their conversations, but also gave a substantial attention to the conversation setting. In one such example, Tom recalled:

> I think that all of those relationships there is an element of when and how I challenge them. So, in a group space in a public meeting, I do not think that this is the best place to do it because certain dynamics make it a difficult conversation when you are doing it in a group. So, it will be much more after a meeting when I do not agree with something or when I think that certain things should be changed or would benefit from being changed. I would have a conversation with them *[academy manager]* about this afterwards and do it that way so I guess that in a way I am trying to protect the relationship in that respect by going look probably not here not right now, but I will speak to them about this later. (Tom, Interview 7).

The significance of setting was reiterated further by Tom, who acknowledged:

> So, there was a good example of this today, and they *[academy manager]* were talking about the importance of doing extras *[additional training sessions]*, and they said something on the lines of, "you should be doing two hours on your crossing and two hours on your finishing". I knew that they were over-exaggerating, and this was almost unrealistic. However, they were publicly addressing the group, and I did not think that it was necessarily appropriate to challenge them on this there. If I know that the decision is not made then and there and this is just a conversation I would not contribute. I would hold back on my opinion and make that point later. I probably smiled at that time, but again in my head, this is not a massive deal I was just thinking come on you are exaggerating again. But then I thought that I had to raise their awareness of that and for me to address that in the office was an appropriate thing to do. Because it was not a

> massive thing, but I just wanted them to realise that if they continue doing that, people will not find this attractive and achievable. So yeah, I thought that this was the most appropriate way to go about this. (Tom, Interview 7).

This was echoed by Dan, who reflected:

> I think that it like I said before it is timing, knowing when to challenge people and the tone. I am always calm, so the tone of how you do it like people are always high or low in a football environment, whereas I would say that I am quite consistent. I think that it helps when you frame things. So, some people may pull someone to one side and give them some feedback whereas others may just call them out in front of the whole room, embarrass them, or do something that is obviously met with disagreement and defensive as people see that a threat and an attack. I do not think that any psychologist works like that and I hope they would not because you are shooting yourself in the foot before you have even said anything. (Dan, Interview 3).

Finally, Alice expressed how the setting of the conversations influence their interactions with the contextual stakeholders, Alice acknowledged:

> I think that the environment that you are in is something that you need to take under consideration. When I am at the first-team training ground, there is no way you want to get in any kind of confrontation with someone because that looks really unprofessional in front of the key stakeholders. You need to know how and when to have those conversations. So, even the environment you are in plays a role in whether or not you have those difficult conversations with people. So, I think that you need to think about how you present the academy when you are at the first-team training ground. You do not want your chief executive officer walking in and seeing the academy members having a major disagreement that may become more emotionally charged than intended. So, I think you need to take this under account because you have to present the academy in a positive light in front of these key stakeholders (Alice, Interview 2).

It was evident, therefore, that the practitioners sampled within the present thesis learned how to acknowledge several factors when making decisions about their interactions with key contextual stakeholders. It became increasingly clear, therefore, why the practitioners interviewed here seemed to place significant emphasis on the importance of their past applied experiences, identifying them as essential factor in enhancing their professional development. Indeed, as a result of having previously encountered a range of different situations and challenges, practitioners learned to better navigate their current applied contexts more effectively by judging when and where to engage in challenging conversations to achieve desirable outcomes. More specifically, the practitioners developed an ability to pay attention to who else other than the person they wanted to talk to were present in the environment. This was evident in both Tom's and Dan's reflections who described how they avoided challenging the stakeholders in front of players and other practitioners.

The interpretations just outlined also demonstrate the significance of job security, which was a significant factor influencing practitioners' actions throughout their career. Indeed, it was apparent that while the practitioners looked to achieve desirable outcomes as a result of their interactions with the key stakeholders, ultimately, they did not want to risk their own position within the environment. Several practitioners spoke about the significance of maintaining positive working relationships with key stakeholders and judging if certain interactions may damage these relationships. Such sense-making was best described by Jake, who suggested:

> What you are doing, you are managing risk. So, most of the times you think right ok is this the best time to raise this issue. Especially when it is really obvious who is the key decision maker in this situation. Then, you have to read them and their current state and make a professional judgement. Whether this is the right time or whether you are being foolish in trying to address something that is openly critical or challenging at that point. You know you got to apply some basic common sense and understanding that moment and how this person is and how amenable they may be to a challenge. If you cannot do that, you can get yourself in hot water, where you needed to be a bit more conscious, and you were not at the right time. (Jake, Interview 7).

The reflections shared by Jake, therefore, once again reiterated the significance of *experiential learning* within applied sport psychology. Indeed, it was clear that the professional judgement described by Jake was very difficult to develop within the classroom environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that upon leaving the university the practitioners were not prepared to make such decisions and they only developed this aspect of their practice following the increased exposure to contextual and situational factors encountered within the sporting organisations.

Overall, the sentiments outlined demonstrated that due to increased understanding of their respective settings and applied situations, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis identified the significance of expressing their opinions and challenging the perceptions of others. It was apparent that the practitioners were required to develop their ability to make professional judgements and identify when and how to challenge. Several practitioners reiterated the significance of "picking their battles" and "weighing up the outcome" (Alice, Interview 7) of their interactions with the stakeholders. From such a perspective, it was apparent that the practitioners paid significant attention to the setting and timing of their conversations with the stakeholders and learned to identify what was worth challenging and what was not.

4.4.3. Being seen to do a "good" job

Stories of practice presented earlier within the present chapter illustrated the complexities associated with practitioners' ability to demonstrate impact of their services. While striving to understand how the practitioners managed to overcome such challenges and deal with the negative experiences of the *reality shock*, the subordinate theme of *being seen to do a "good" job* became of a significant importance. Indeed, while all practitioners sampled here spoke about the importance of going "above and beyond" (Dan, Interview 7), the true meaning of such reflections was uncovered by understanding practitioners' initial experiences. This was particularly evident in an interview with Dan, who reflected;

> Instead of coming in just one day a week or two days a week, I was there 5 or 6 times a week for 8 or 9 hours a day. I spent a lot of time just being in and around the place and the players, writing notes and reflections. So basically, I was spending time at the football club instead of my family and my girlfriend. (Dan, Interview 7).

While Dan's reflections can be seen as an example of a practitioner's desire for continuous learning and self-improvement, it was apparent that Dan's actions were also aimed at establishing oneself within the organisation. Indeed, while struggling to demonstrate the impact of their services, it was clear that practitioners strived to demonstrate their willingness and commitment to the stakeholders embedded within their respective organisations. Several practitioners exemplified how they dedicated a significant amount of time to their applied positions despite working on voluntary basis. Similarly to Dan, several practitioners reiterated that applied practice was taking centre stage within their lives, highlighting that often they were required to sacrifice their social time in order to practice. Such high level of dedication was particularly evident in an interview with Alice, who reflected on their early career experiences:

> I started working at a football academy on a voluntary basis. The training ground of that club was two hours drive from my home. So, I was traveling three days a week, one full-day and two evenings. So, I would work a full day at work, and when I would finish, I would get into my car and drive there *[football club]* to do my extra hours there. So, I would get there, and I would not be finished till 10/11 at night and then I will be at 5 am in the morning at work. So, I remember being absolutely exhausted at that time. (Alice, Interview 1).

The commitment described by Alice was echoed by several practitioners who anticipated the benefits of "going an extra mile" (Beth, Interview 5) on their career progression and job security. This was particularly evident in an interview with Amy, who recalled how they strived to be perceived as someone who was committed to their professional role, in Amy's own words:

> I was at a wedding. It was probably around 7 p.m. on a Saturday when I got a text from one of the coaches saying, "I cannot get hold of your supervisor and this athlete needs to talk to a psychologist as soon as possible!" I felt that I needed to show that I was willing to help this athlete, that I am someone who is willing to contribute to the team and be there, be available. (Amy, Interview 5).

The reflections shared by Amy illustrated an incredible level of dedication to the role. Indeed, it was clear that regardless of timings and events in their private lives, the practitioners were prepared to answer work related messages and make themselves available for all requests made by the stakeholders. It became clear, therefore, that the practitioner's willingness to demonstrate high levels of commitment to their respective roles was underpinned by developing a positive image in the eyes of key decision makers. Indeed, it was apparent that as a result of *experiential learning* and recognition of the *influences from above,* the practitioners understood the significance of being perceived as a valuable member of the multidisciplinary team. As such, the practitioners strived to present themselves in a way that would further their career opportunities.

It is here, an *increased understanding of the sporting context* played a key role in influencing practitioners sense making of the encountered situations. More specifically, due to their increased experience, practitioners identified that long working hours were an integral part of an elite sport, and this was something that they needed to accept if they wish to work at this level. More specifically, while describing the commitment towards their role, the practitioners often reflected on their experiences of working alongside stakeholders who were perceived as leaders in their respective fields. Within such reflections, the practitioners recalled that professionals within the elite sporting environments value hard work and commitment, striving for innovation and constant progress. Also, the practitioners reiterated that practitioners who did not share such values and did not demonstrate the required attitude did not last long within elite sport and tend to be moved on quite quickly. Such sense making of their time in applied context was described by Alice, who reflected upon their efforts to "match" (Interview 3) commitment of the coaches they worked alongside:

> I think that you can see coaches going to extra games and watching the first team games, even if they are not getting that payment for that because they are just trying to push their development and push themselves on that journey. I think that if I want to be immersed into the sport as much as I can, and coaches will go to the first team games, I need to go to those games, watching how the games unfold, and learning about the game. I did not come from the playing background, so I want to go and learn and develop that way. Like I said coaches would be in long days just trying to develop themselves, and yeah physiotherapists will do the same, and sport science will do the same. I think that when you in the same boat all together you do drive each other on because this is what you expect from each other and you do not want to let each other down is some way. (Alice, Interview 3).

Similar conclusions were made by Steve, who reflected on how they found themself operating alongside highly experienced and renowned professionals. Embedded within such setting practitioners recalled how they found themselves in a "stretch territory" (Steve, Interview 2) where they did not want to let people down and wanted to ensure high quality of the services that they provided, with Steve reflecting:

> I was at the holding camp. Everyone out there was so passionate, and you could tell that they were so committed to delivering their best performance! So, you do not mind waking up at 5 a.m. and working all the way through till 10 p.m. because you are a part of the culture where everyone turns up! You know that everyone is prepared to work hard! So, when I was in that holding camp, I was reading journal articles if I had free time. I may be working 13 hours a day, and I will get home, and I will read journal articles. Once we got back from a practice competition at 1 a.m., and I read two journal articles and went to bed at around 2.30 a.m. I was so motivated to develop and learn because I was surrounded by people at an incredible level. (Steve, Interview 2).

Therefore, practitioners' actions were underlined by their desire of being perceived as someone "doing a good job" (Alice, Interview 2). Indeed, the practitioners' reason that by creating an image of a

hardworking individual they will enhance their chances of remaining in their role and/or progressing their career. As such, the practitioners hoped that their professional commitment would be recognised and valued by the key decision makers within their respective settings. An example of such sense making was best articulated by Tom, who reflected:

> I sort of went on the basis of if I can demonstrate my value, if *[stakeholders]* will see value in this, then they may create a position for me. So, it was always around trying to do a good job really. I always thought that if I would do a good job if I worked hard and showed a willingness to positively impact their environment, that was the only way I would ever get an opportunity and a full-time position. (Tom, Interview 1).

The reflections shared by Tom echoed across all practitioners sampled in this thesis. Several practitioners associated their commitment and hard work with the concept of "doing a good job" and viewed it as the best way of demonstrating their value. The career stories presented by Dan were the best example of such sense making. As mentioned earlier, while volunteering at a football academy, Dan was prepared to be in the environment nearly every day of the week to create an applied opportunity for themselves. It needs to be highlighted here that such effort on the part of the practitioners often resulted in desirable outcomes. Indeed, Dan was rewarded with a part-time contract and progressed to a role of an academy sport psychologist. Therefore, the willingness of demonstrating high levels of commitment to the role in most cases resulted in desired career progression, either directly at the organisation the practitioners were embedded within or other sporting settings.

However, while the commitment towards "doing a good job" (Alice, Interview 2) often led to anticipated positive outcomes, in some instances, practitioners' also spoke about experiences where the stakeholder interactions were negatively impacting upon their self-perception. Such situations, in turn, led the practitioners to question their position within the sporting organisation. Indeed, it became apparent that the practitioners interviewed here started to question their level of commitment dedicated to their role. More specifically, whilst during early stages of their career, practitioners were prepared to dedicate countless hours towards their role, with experienced their sense making began to change. More specifically, the practitioners started to recognise that such levels of commitment had a negative effect on their well-being. This was particularly addressed by Beth, who recalled:

> To be honest, I think it was coming from my partner because they felt frustrated that I was always doing work when I should not be, and I am on the phone when I should not be. So, why they are ringing me when I should not be working? So, my partner helped me realise that I should not be doing it *[working extra hours]* and because this had an impact on us, I felt that I need to make a change. I realised that I put myself out far too much than I should for this job. (Beth, Interview 2).

Therefore, while the subordinate theme of demonstrating high level of commitment to the role illustrated the strategies adopted by the practitioners to overcome the demands of applied sport psychology, the sentiments shared by Beth shined a much more negative light. Indeed, it was apparent that Beth started to question the sacrifice that they were making. More specifically, while working on a part-time contract, Beth

was required to travel to the training centre located eighty miles away from their house. Due to the travel distance required, Beth rented a room in a house share close to the training centre and stayed there two nights a week. As such, Beth began to recognise the constraints of their role and the impact on their personal life. In Beth own words:

> I do not want to say that this is a job you cannot do if you want to buy a house or start a family, but I think that to start with you need to make some sacrifices to get the foot in the door. So yeah, I think that it is a very hard profession to get it going and get it off the ground, because it is not as clear as the clinical psychologist where you go into a role of an assistant psychologist for a year and you get paid and then you get your doctorate. With this *[applied sport psychology]* you can be here, there and everywhere and this can be a strain. (Beth, Interview 2).

Such a perspective, therefore, raised several questions regarding the support available for the practitioners who often my find themselves overwhelmed by the demands of their role. While the early career practitioners are in a position to rely on their supervisors, the qualified practitioners received limited support regarding these aspects of their role. Finding solutions to such questions, therefore, holds the potential for enhancing practitioners' well-being and ultimately would ensure that practitioners would remain in their role.

Overall, the accounts here outlined serve the further reiterate the significance of *experiential learning* on practitioners' sense making. Indeed, it was apparent that as a result of greater experience the practitioners started to recognise the importance of how they were perceived by the contextual stakeholders. To influence such perceptions, the practitioners strived to replicate the behaviours depicted by the other professional embedded within their respective organisations. Indeed, the practitioners wanted to reflect the characteristics of the environments they were practicing within in terms of dedication and knowledge. Such sense-making had a significant impact on practitioners' actions and motivated them to meet all stakeholders request, work outside the contracted hours, attend extra events and continually strive for self-development. Therefore, it was apparent that the practitioners sought to establish a reputation of knowledgeable, hard-working and dedicated practitioner capable of delivering high-quality services. Indeed, it was evident that the practitioners believed that such representation in the eyes of the key contextual stakeholders would allow them to either progress their career, in terms of securing a paid position and/or a full-time role, or would allow them to establish themselves as an important member of the multidisciplinary team. As such, the contextual stakeholders played a significant role in shaping practitioners' attitude towards their role and responsibilities. In particular, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis strived to gain or regain social recognition from the key contextual stakeholders.

However, it was also apparent that with experience the practitioners started to recognise the threats of demonstrating high levels of commitment to the role in terms of their well-being. This potentially resulted from greater awareness of work-life balance following first professional experiences and/or developments in practitioners' personal lives. Indeed, while going through the timeline of their professional career, the practitioners started to discuss aspects associated with buying a house and starting a family. Therefore, it was clear that the practitioners' realised that the level of commitment demonstrated during the early stages of their career was unsustainable and could prevent them from achieving personal goals outside their

professional life's. Such a realisation, however, posed additional challenges as the practitioners were phased with finding alternative ways of demonstrating their value and developing professional career. The sense making of this evolving challenge is presented in the next sections of the present thesis where greater attention is given to practitioners developing abilities of navigating the dilemmas of applied sport psychology.

4.4.4. The significance of positive working relationships

The analysis of practitioners' reflective accounts demonstrated that as they progressed in their career, they started weighing up the outcomes of interactions with the stakeholders. Indeed, while the practitioners were initially reluctant to challenge the opinions of the key stakeholders, with experience they develop an ability of expressing alternative views. While the theme of *picking your battles* illuminated several key factors underlying practitioners' sense-making of encounter situations, interpretations of career stories also demonstrated the significance of positive working relationships. Indeed, all practitioners collectively reiterated that strong relationships with the stakeholders allowed them to express alternative opinions more directly. This was particularly evident in an interview with Dan, who reflected how they were resistant and hesitant to disagree with the academy manager because they felt that their relationship was "quite distant" (Interview 1) to start with. However, as the relationship developed over time, Dan was more comfortable challenging whatever they thought was necessary. Such sense-making was reiterated by several other practitioners, with Alice reflecting:

> I think that these relationships are so essential to be able to challenge people and remain in that good position that you got with them. For example, we have a new U18 coach, and I had a relationship with them already, and now I can challenge them more because we are already in this place, which is really beneficial for this age group. I can say, no, I do not agree with this, and we can have this type of conversation. (Alice, Interview 3).

As such, all practitioners reiterated that positive rapport with the stakeholders changed the perceptions of challenging conversations. More specifically, while the practitioner's suggestions could often be perceived by the stakeholders as criticism, a positive working relationship changed the interpretations of these conversations. Indeed, several practitioners recalled how due to an increased understanding of the sport psychologist's role, the stakeholders were more open to considering alternative ideas.

It was apparent, therefore, that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they recognised the value of working relationships and dedicated significant attention towards fostering positive interactions. Indeed, while at the start of their career the practitioners often expressed their opinions without fully introducing their role to other stakeholders, as they progressed in their career, they focused on spending more time with the stakeholders before making suggestions. Such a sense-making was particularly apparent in Tom's reflections:

> The ways they *[head coach]* went about their business, I did not feel that this *[expressing alternative opinions]* would be very helpful for our relationship at the time. So, I suppose that there is an element of that in there to try to foster this

> relationship first before I started challenging them on any of the ways that they went about their business. (Tom, Interview 7).

Therefore, it was apparent that the practitioners learned to be more patient with their interventions, and they developed an ability to recognise how key stakeholders may receive alternative suggestions. Indeed, whilst practitioners were striving to make an impact and demonstrate their value, they also recognised that their eagerness may often have contrary results. As a result, the practitioners learned to adopt a more long-term approach to their interactions with the stakeholders, making sure they built positive rapport before engaging in difficult conversations. In one such example, Dan recalled:

> Over time, I was able to develop relationships with the coaches. So, I would say probably now I have a good relationship I would pretty much go to any coach, any full-time coach, and challenge them on anything I wanted to talk about. Pretty much whatever I wanted, and they would understand that. (Dan, Interview 1).

As such, it was apparent that as a result of an increased engagement with key stakeholders, practitioners were able to develop greater trust in the relationship. More specifically, while during the early stages of the consultancy process the stakeholders could view practitioners' comments as a personal attack and criticism, with time they understood that such interventions were aimed at enhancing the training programmes and ultimately the development of the athletes. In addition, as a result of greater rapport, the stakeholders often looked for the input from the practitioners, asking them about their opinions and suggestions.

The significance of trust was reiterated by all practitioners sampled within the present thesis. As mentioned earlier, as a result of *increased understanding of the sporting context* and greater awareness of the demanding nature of professional sport, the practitioners recognised that key stakeholders operating within elite sport were understandably protective of their practices and did not want to be perceived by others in a negative way. Therefore, the practitioners started to understand why the stakeholders initially did not welcome their input regarding the roles and daily responsibilities assumed by others within the organisation. Also, as a result of such *experiential learning,* the practitioners recognised that positive working relationship played a vital role in their ability to challenge stakeholders approaches to their work. This was best explained by Jake:

> I think that over time you can take more risks because the relationship is more established. So, they have a lot of examples where you have demonstrated that they can trust you. Therefore, you are challenging something that might not be out for grasp but would benefit potentially form being a challenge, does not break that trust and does not break this rapport, and it may be even enhanced by that. (Jake, Interview 7).

As such, it was evident that the practitioners strived to develop an image of an ally and someone who was striving to support the stakeholders in their role. Therefore, the practitioners looked to establish safety within the relationship to make sure that the stakeholders did not feel threatened by alternative suggestions. To achieve this, the practitioners often offered supportive comments and words of encouragement towards the stakeholders to ensure that they were demonstrating their support.

Whilst it became apparent that the positive working relationships with key stakeholders allowed the practitioners to express alternative opinions, such actions also played a key role in enhancing practitioner's ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own work. Indeed, it was evident that a prolonged engagement with key stakeholders and efforts to build positive rapport played an important role in practitioners' effort of enhancing stakeholder's knowledge and understanding of sport psychology. As such, with time the stakeholders were able to better understand the objectives of practitioners' work, and what they were seeking to achieve within their respective roles. Such an impact on practitioner's role was best explained by Steve, who recalled:

> If you have good relationships with people, then it is the importance of your voice of your opinions, with your professional knowledge and your professional skills. *[If you have good relationships]* then people will listen to you because they actually think, "Aww yeah, this guy, yeah, I got on with him really well, they actually know what they are talking about. I have seen the value of their work. I have a great relationship with them. So, I will listen to what they have to say." I think that this is key for me. (Steve, Interview 5).

As such, because of their positive rapport developed with the stakeholders, the practitioners were able to enhance the importance of their opinions in the environment. Indeed, while at the start of their career the practitioners faced some challenges with integrating sport psychology into the training routines at their respective organisations, they realised that working relationships allowed them to overcome the encountered obstacles. Such an evolution within practitioners' thinking was exemplified by Alice, who suggested:

> I would say that having those relationships with those people in the environment is the most important thing because if people do not buy into you and what you are trying to sell and what you are doing you are not going to get really far. (Alice, Interview 4).

Positive working relationships, therefore, became a crucial aspect of applied sport psychology practice. Indeed, as the practitioners progressed in their career, their sense-making of encountered situations was predominately directed by efforts of forging positive rapport with key stakeholders. Several practitioners reiterated that because of the relationships they felt more included in the work that the stakeholders were doing. As such, the practitioners found it much easier to express their opinions and felt as they were able to have a greater impact on athletes' development and performances.

In addition, several practitioners reiterated how a positive rapport with the stakeholders allowed then to put their "own stamp on things" (Alice, Interview 4). More specifically, the practitioners were able to implement their own programmes at the sporting organisations and encourage other professionals to modify their approach to training sessions. This was particularly evident in an interview with Tom, who acknowledged:

> I feel like what helped me in that position was creating a good relationship with the coach. So, creating a good relationship with the coach where they valued my input,

> I think that helped me gain credibility, and therefore sport psychology gained credibility. (Tom, Interview 1).

This was echoed by Alice, who also reiterated the benefits of positive working relationships with key stakeholders:

> The things that you want to implement are based on that relationship. Obviously changing the programme here *[football academy]*, if I did not have this relationship *[with the academy manager],* I would not be able to do that, because (A) I would not have the ability to go and talk to academy manager about changing the programme and (B) they would not have that trust in me that I have the ability to do that and implement that. (Alice, Interview 6).

Therefore, it was evident that the practitioners recognised the significance of having the key decision-makers' support within their respective roles. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that the support from key contextual stakeholders allowed them to influence the organisation's wider functioning. This was particularly evident in an interview with Beth, who reflected that the head coach ran things past them and asked for their advice. As such, the support of key stakeholders made it much easier for practitioners to integrate sport psychology into the sporting organisation's day-to-day functioning.

The importance of developing positive working alliances with key decision-makers was reiterated by all practitioners sampled within the present thesis. Indeed, relationships with such individuals seemingly allowed practitioners to gain greater recognition within the organisation and increase the acceptance of the sport psychology services. Such sense-making was particularly evident in the reflective accounts produced by Alice, who acknowledged:

> Having this good relationship is also very important as well to have those conversations to be honest and open. So yeah, we have a very good communication pathway, and they *[academy manager]* also put a lot of value on the psychology, and they will challenge coaches that do not put that much value on it. So yeah, that is another very important thing to have. (Alice, Interview 3).

As such, it was evident that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they were deliberately seeking support from the key decision-makers within their respective settings. In one such example, Alice reflected how the support from the academy manager allowed them to implement the sport psychology programme while working with part-time coaches:

> This is where I had really good support from the academy manager. We would do workshops; they would take place for the first 15 minutes of training so they would let me do my own input with the coaches before the session. This would take place and that little tiny bit of time over time drips in, and they make some kind of adjustments, a lot of them got thinking, and then you get questions coming to you. I think that really helped, being able to have that support from the academy manager to say, “Yeah, they can miss the first 15 minutes of training to have that

> conversation." This was absolutely valuable, and I think it was one of those things that help to change their perceptions *[about sport psychology]*. (Alice, Interview 1).

It needs to be highlighted that in the absence of such support from key stakeholders within the organization, practitioners felt they would not be able to fit in sport psychology sessions into the existing schedules. Indeed, any changes to the timetabling are often subject to an approval from the person in charge of the programme (e.g., academy manager, performance director). Therefore, without the support of these key individuals, practitioners are often unable to secure the necessary time to consult with the athletes and coaches. Also, while this was something that the practitioners were not aware of during the early stages of their career, it was evident that they developed an awareness of such factors as they gained more experience in the field.

The benefits of the support from the key stakeholders were further reiterated by Alice, who reflected on their relationships with the head of coaching:

> The head of coaching is very receptive to what we do there *[football academy]*, and they are very encouraging to make sure that coaches work with us and ask us questions in regards to session design, planning and delivery of sessions and things like that. (Alice, Interview 5).

Therefore, as the practitioners progressed in their career, they looked to use the support of the key decision-makers to enhance their influence on the delivery of the training sessions. Indeed, several practitioners reiterated the importance of sport psychology principles being introduced during the training sessions to better prepare the athletes for the demands of the competition. The positive working relationships with the key decision-makers and the support from these individuals played a vital role in practitioners' ability of achieving such objectives. These was best described by Dan, who reflected on the changes to their status at the sporting organisation:

> The U14 Coach stepped up to the lead phase coach, and the U16 stepped up to the lead Youth Development Phase, and we got quite a good relationship. So, I kind of moved up with them in a way in that we kind of on this journey together. I think that this is the best way of looking at it they are in the new job and yeah my job has not changed. I am kind of coming up with them, so it is giving me a bit more influence. Now I can use those relationships in a better way because now I am in a more powerful position, and I think that I have more power through those individuals *[to influence other coaches]*. (Dan, Interview 4).

Such accounts illustrated, therefore, the impact of developing positive relationships with key stakeholders. Indeed, it was apparent that due to their rapport with the coaches in leadership positions, Dan gained greater recognition amongst other members of the multidisciplinary team. In particular, Dan reflected on their relationships with the part-time coaches who saw them as a key member of the sporting organisation

The analysis of career stories shared within the present thesis, therefore, demonstrated the benefits of adopting a "top-down" approach while incorporating sport psychology into the daily routines of the sporting organisations. More specifically, it was apparent that the practitioners were striving to develop positive

working relationships with the people at the top of the organisations (i.e., sporting director, head coach, performance director) as this allowed them to work more effectively with the stakeholders lower down the organisational hierarchy (i.e., coaches, physiotherapist). This was best explained by Tom, who acknowledged:

> We are looking to work with people on the top to shape and formulate some of their ideas or how we develop players and how psychology plays a part in this process. (Tom, Interview no).

Such an approach was further reiterated by Alice, who reflected:

> I think you would like to influence top down in any way. So, you would like to influence the whole *[organisation]* in that kind of in an ideal world. If you could influence the technical director or the chief executive officer, knowing that the whole system from the top down… Because if you had that influence from top-down and it would influence from the bottom up and from the top down. If you would have that unbelievable environment culture and the individuals that make that up and would be working to the same aims and objectives. So, in an ideal world, you can have the influence right through the system. (Alice, Interview 5).

Taken collectively, it was apparent, that the positive working relationships with the key stakeholders played a vital role in practitioners' ability to meet the demands of their role. Indeed, as the practitioners progressed in their career, they realised that the relationships with the key decision makers allowed them to have a great influence on the daily processes of the organisation. More specifically, the practitioners recognised that informal conversations with the stakeholders allowed them to introduce their role and explain the objectives of the sport psychology support. Also, the practitioners were able to establish safety within the relationship by demonstrating that their comments were aimed at enhancing training programmes and athletes' performances, rather than criticism of existing procedures. As a result, the practitioners were able to express their opinions more freely and be more direct with the communication. While such an approach had a positive impact on the service delivery, several practitioners reiterated the benefits of forming positive rapport with the key decision makers within the environment. Indeed, the support of the key stakeholders allowed the practitioners to overcome the challenges of applied practice (e.g., negative perceptions regarding sport psychology) and enabled them to incorporate sport psychology into the daily functioning of the organisation much easier. As such, all practitioners sampled within the present thesis invested a significant amount of time in developing working relationships with the stakeholders operating within their respective settings.

4.5. Forging positive relationships

The superordinate theme of *experiential learning* discussed earlier within the present chapter demonstrated how a due to an enhanced exposure to an applied context, the practitioners learned to navigate the demands of applied sport psychology. In particular, the subordinate theme of *significance of positive working relationships* highlighted the benefits of rapport with the key decision makers on the practitioner's role. Whilst such findings hold significant implications for the discipline, the contribution of the present thesis also lies in shining light on practitioners' actions aimed at developing positive working relationships.

Indeed, it was apparent that as a result of an ongoing sense making of contextual and situational factors encountered within sporting organisations, the practitioners strived towards *forging positive relationships* within their respective settings. More specifically, it was apparent that as a result of *experiential learning,* the practitioners engaged in conscious actions of *manufacturing opportunities to engage with the stakeholders*. Also, the practitioners understood that an achievement of the desirable objectives within their role required *being flexible and adapting to the individual.* Finally, while often speaking about their frustrations that stemmed from working alongside a wide range of stakeholders, the practitioners reflected upon their increased ability of *managing the self* within various interactions. All these subordinate themes are presented in the following sections of the present chapter, illuminating the professional growth on the part of the practitioners since their initial applied experiences.

4.5.1. Manufacturing opportunities to engage with the stakeholders

The interpretations of practitioners' efforts of *finding one's place* showed that upon leaving university they were unsure about the objective of their role. While such understanding evolved around delivering workshops and holding one-to-one consultations with athletes, most of the practitioners were unaware of the wider requirements of their role within the sporting organisation. However, in the later stages of their career, the practitioners perceived relationship building as a central aspect of their role objectives. More specifically, while progressing through their respective timelines, the practitioners started to speak about the importance of spending as much time as possible with the stakeholders and holding various, often unrelated to sport psychology conversations. As such, it became apparent that with experience the practitioners "made a conscious effort" (Tom, Interview 5) of *manufacturing opportunities to engage with the stakeholders.* In one such example Tom reflected:

> It is about giving myself those self-reminders to go in and check-in. "How are things with you mate? How is the family blah blah blah?" Just to make sure that you have that contact because that is how you maintain that relationship. (Tom, Interview 5).

It needs to be highlighted that the accounts just presented described Tom's interactions with a coach reluctant to engage with sport psychology services. While struggling to hold any meaningful conversations regarding psychological profiles of the players, Tom purposefully strived to facilitate interactions with the coach. Reflecting upon their actions, Tom explained how they hoped that such an approach would eventually change the coach perceptions and create opportunity to discuss work related issues.

The proactive approach to forming interactions with the stakeholders was further exemplified by Jake who described their actions within applied context. In Jakes own words:

> So, *[you need to]* to be the first person who is around in the morning and the last one that leaves. So, that gives you more opportunities to engage with people in a. This provides you with these opportunities to discuss things with people. (Jake, Interview 1).

As such, it was evident that the practitioner's actions were purposefully directed towards spending time within the environment to engage in informal conversations with the stakeholders. Several practitioners

acknowledged how they wanted to be perceived as someone who is easy to talk to. As such, the practitioners strived to be approachable and ensure that the stakeholders were comfortable to discuss with them all aspects of their life, often unrelated to their role within the organisation.

These reflective accounts, therefore, demonstrated how practitioners engaged in strategic actions aimed at seeking an opportunity to spend time with the stakeholders. In particular, it was apparent that the practitioners seek to use their *increased understanding of the sporting context* to achieve the objectives of their role. This was best described by Alice, who reflected upon their conscious decisions to place themselves within the environment in a particular place and time:

> So, it is like people doing different shifts at work, and you know when people get in, and because we work in the same setting, we know when people get in and go home. So, it is quite easy to pick up the routines that people are in. So, you kind of know what time people go in and you know what time people have breakfast, and then we go to lunch together, and training is at a certain time and walking in and out, you all be on a coach on the way to and from the game. So yeah, you pick up the routines that are in the workplace. So, if I want to speak with someone, in particular, I need to make sure I go to breakfast at the same time and make sure I go to lunch with them at a certain time. Then, I can have that conversation, but I think it is more about being efficient with the opportunities there (Alice, Interview 3).

Alice continued:

> Sometimes, if you need to speak to someone from the strength and conditioning team, you know that they have a gym session between this time and that time, and they are leading that. So, it is good for you to go in and be part of that *[gym session]* and be around the gym when they are doing that session, and then you can chat to them after that. (Alice, Interview 3).

Thus, it was apparent that the practitioners looked to mirror stakeholders' schedules as a means of creating opportunities for interactions. Indeed, all practitioners echoed the sentiments provided by Alice exemplifying how they strived to replicate stakeholders' routines. One of the most important strategies adopted by the practitioners included accompanying stakeholders during periods when they were taking a break from their daily responsibilities (e.g., planning and analysing training sessions, delivering or taking part in training sessions). During such breaks the stakeholders often went to a canteen for a cup of coffee and often looked to take the mind of their work. As such, these moments created a valuable opportunity of engaging in informal conversations and strengthening the rapport with the stakeholders. It was apparent, therefore, that the practitioners purposefully aimed to place themselves within given settings within their applied environments.

The rationale of facilitating engagement opportunities outside the scheduled training sessions and handing around specific facilities was further explained by Alice:

> I will quite often sit in a public area when I am working in a day. People who are just walking around can just like be dropping in because you are sat in a canteen or whatever, they will just come and have a chat because you are there. Coaches are

> exactly the same, every member of staff member if they will see someone in a public place they will generally, they are used to that exposure, so they would come and sit and have a chat and think about that. So, I would say that this is another way, I suppose, of recognising it *[creating an opportunity for interaction]*. (Alice, Interview 5).

The reflections shared by Alice, therefore, further demonstrated practitioners' professional development and ability to make sense of the contextual factors encountered within applied settings. Indeed, it was clear that the practitioners learned to maximise the time available within their respective organisations to interact with the stakeholders and form positive working relationships. Such reflections, therefore, were opposite to the ones voiced during the early stages of applied career, where the practitioners expressed their concerns associated with limited time available to consult with the athletes. Although, the reflections just outlined come from the period of Alice's career where they were embedded with a sporting organisation full-time, other practitioners adopted similar approach despite working on a part-time or consultancy basis. Thus, the practitioners prioritised the time of manufacturing opportunities to engage with stakeholders, realising that such an approach would allow them to have an indirect impact on the athletes. As a result, the practitioners became much more relaxed about the limited time available to them within the sporting organisations.

The significance of identifying when and where to spend time within the environment was further reiterated within sentiments shared by Tom:

> So, for instance, during training I could just sit in the office, but I would go out and watch training and stand next to the manager, or make sure that I would spend some time stood next to the manager during the training session, or I would come in half an hour before the training session started, or if I were meeting with a player, I would come in an hour earlier. So, I would have a half an hour prep in the office, but that would be half an hour sat with the manager in the office and just have that informal conversation. (Tom, Interview 1).

This was echoed by Jake, who reflected on some of the actions they engaged in to spend more time with the athletes and facilitate stronger working relationships:

> I remember one hockey team there were some key people on that team that were unsure about sport psychology I just hang around at the bar and I had a chat with them about nothing, just being normal and then out of the sudden they were more open into my input. (Jake, Interview 1).

As such, it was apparent that as the practitioners progressed in their role, they developed their approach to service delivery accordingly. Indeed, in the early stages of their career, practitioners were focused entirely on delivering sport psychology content. As such, all of their conversations within the environment were focused on educating stakeholders on the principles of sport psychology services. However, as the practitioners learned about the *significance of the positive working relationships* in the later stages of their career, they started to pay a greater attention in developing positive rapport with the stakeholders. The reflections shared by Tom presented the amount of thought that the practitioners began to put into this aspect of their role.

While the process of developing rapport with key stakeholders became of apparent importance within the sense making of the practitioners, it was also evident that such objectives were also difficult to achieve. Indeed, acknowledging the fast-paced nature of the sporting settings, the practitioners reiterated the challenges to finding time for interactions with the stakeholders. As such, on many occasions the practitioners were required to show high levels of creativity to facilitate such opportunities. In several examples, therefore, the practitioners spoke about the importance of engaging with the stakeholders outside the day-to-day working context. In one such example, Amy reflected:

> I think that there was one occasion when I had a specific agenda, and I wanted to meet up with them *[coach]* and have a chat with them about something, and I asked them to go for a run because it felt like the best environment to do it. I realised that I got to know them a bit better outside that formal work context and yeah when I moved to *[city]* I probably initiated it and said that we should go for a run. I tried to go on a run with the coach as much as I could. I knew that I needed to build a relationship and get to know them, but then it also turned into having some really good conversations, and I guess delivering psychology on the run. When you are on the run together, you are in that environment where it is not intentional, and you are not sat in from each other face-to-face and have to make eye contact. Yeah, it's a very informal environment where you do not feel under pressure to look someone in the eye, and I think you also take yourself from that office environment. (Amy, Interview 4).

Similar sentiments were presented by Jake who recalled an incident where they could not 'get hold off' a performance director within the environment that they were operating;

> In one particular situation, I was working in it was incredibly clear where the power was and who the influential people were, and they were incredibly difficult to sit down and have a meeting with. So, my strategy was to ask them for a favour and the end of a training day occasionally to give me a lift to a train station, which was my way of travel to this particular workplace. That gave me 20 minutes in the car to try to influence them, and if I would ask them for 20 minutes meetings, they would never say yes. So, I engineered a situation where we had a conversation, and it quite often ended up in a conversation that would last an hour, hour and a half, because we would sit at the train station mid-conversation until we would finish that conversation. They were open to having that conversation, it was just finding a way to access their time, this was a key thing, and then you can make a massive impact. So, it was just manufacturing a situation where you can access their time, you need to establish methods by which you can become a part of their role. (Jake, Interview 1).

Therefore, it was apparent that the practitioners developed an ability to facilitate interaction opportunities, even if it meant engaging in actions outside the normal working context. Such sentiments demonstrated that in order to meet the requirements of their role, the practitioners often needed to develop skills that have not

been highlighted during their professional training. Indeed, all practitioners sampled within the present thesis reiterated the significance of interpersonal skills and personal characteristics within applied sport psychology practice. As such, it was apparent that as practitioners progressed throughout their career, they started to pay an increased attention to soft skills such as verbal communication and active listening. Indeed, the practitioners looked to reflect on their interactions with the contextual stakeholders aiming to develop their personal attributes that would allow them to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people.

Also, the ability to engage in strategic actions of building relationships was particularly evident in practitioners' efforts of attending social events outside the working environment. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged a unique opportunity surrounding such events to engage with the stakeholders at a different level. The practitioners reiterated that usually the stakeholders were more relaxed on such occasions and were more willing to engage in informal conversations. As such, many practitioners prioritised social events as one of the most important opportunities to build rapport with the stakeholders. In one such example, Beth acknowledged:

> If there were like any social things that the staff was doing, I would go and stay till the end, we got on great, and we build better relationships, or I felt that our relationship got stronger because of doing those socials. I think those time in terms of the social they were so important because that is when the relationship would change so like I would be going in the next day, and I would be like their best mate. (Beth, Interview 7).

Similarly, Dan reflected on their rationale behind attending social events at the organisation they were employed:

> Developing that relationship is also getting involved with the staff and being part of a wider community. So, I can put in that category Christmas meals and end of season night out. I feel that it is important to show your face at those events and that you want to be part of it. Because the people that are not going to those events, maybe they are perceived as someone who does not want to be part of the team. We would laugh and relax, and we will build relationships with each other. (Dan, Interview 7).

As such, it was apparent that the practitioners made a conscious effort to attend such events with an objective to build positive rapport with key stakeholders. Indeed, while speaking about social gatherings, all participants acknowledged such events as representing another working setting. Therefore, while such events might be seen as an opportunity to relax and enjoy free time with one's colleagues, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis viewed them as an occasion to strengthen their rapport with various stakeholders. Such a sense-making was particularly evident in the latter stages of practitioners' careers, where they started to recognise the significance of social gatherings within their professional role and responsibilities. Indeed, many practitioners expressed how each conversation held a potential for helping them achieve the objectives within their roles. For instance, interactions during events outside the working context provided a unique opportunity to engage with stakeholders. This, in turn, allowed the practitioners to incorporate sport

psychology into the daily routines of the organisation. As such, it became apparent that informal conversations with stakeholders held a potential of enhancing the effectiveness of the service delivery.

Throughout the data collection process, all practitioners sampled within the present thesis reiterated the importance of connecting with the stakeholders at a human level. More specifically, whilst practitioners were striving to establish themselves as an expert in the field and develop a reputation of a knowledgeable individual, in the later stages of their career they realised the value of normal conversations. Therefore, the practitioners continually highlighted the importance of speaking to the stakeholders about topics such as weather, movies, and news from a range of subjects. As such, it was apparent that the practitioners strived to get to know the stakeholders better to foster a positive relationship. In one such example, Steve reflected:

> The other thing is I hang around, and I speak with them *[coach]* as a person. So, I am not going anywhere near sport psychology. So, just talk to them as a human being talk to them as a bloke ask them about their dog. So, all of the things that you need to build rapport with someone. If they want to bring psychology and what I do, then great crack on, but I would never bring that up with them if they would not bring it up with me. (Steve, Interview 1).

Such sentiments were echoed by all participants sampled within the present study who collectively expressed the significance of knowing someone outside their role and understanding their experiences. This was particularly evident in an interview with Tom, who reflected:

> I think that one of the first conversations that we had, we were sat in a dugout, and I had asked them *[youth team coach]* how old they were when they made their debut. They told me a little bit about this and that they were 17 and the conversation developed from that. So, I asked them how it was making a debut at 17 and just being a bit curious how did they find the transition from the youth team to the first team, and then it just developed from there. (Tom, Interview 5).

Several practitioners acknowledged that informal chats about stakeholders' interests and past experiences allowed them to create a "safe territory" (Tom, Interview 5) where people could engage in a normal conversation. Indeed, it was evident that such an approach allowed the practitioners to overcome some of the barriers and misperceptions associated with sport psychology. In one such example, Steve recalled:

> I have been reflecting on it a lot at the moment. I was fortunate to be in Australia for the Commonwealth Games, and I had a lot of you know a ridiculous amount of informal psychology-based conversations with people. In fact, I went to the zoo with some of the athletes and coaches, and we talk about absolutely nothing to do with performance, we talk about all the stuff you see in the zoo. At the back from that when we came back from the zoo, we all went out for dinner, and we had a really good time, and again we did not talk about anything related to sport. The next day the coach that I really have not done any work with - very resistant to sport psychology - but I just had a really a nice day with them the day before. They came

> over and started to talk to me, asking me for my opinion about something that they were doing in the training session. They even changed part of their training session and part of their plan based on my input. This is a guy that I have not done any work with whatsoever and they are actually the person that I saw the other day for 5 minutes. It turned into two hours of conversation. They were asking for input for their whole programme and asking whether it is going to develop all of the psychological characteristics they are looking for. They have an athlete that is performing on a Saturday. Now that I know that athlete, I recommended that they run that session on a Wednesday or switches this session to something that would build their confidence or should be pushing them a bit more suddenly they are completely engaged, and for me, it is because I have spent a day with them talking about nothing. (Steve, Interview 4).

Although the sentiments just outline do not describe conscious actions performed by the practitioners, they illustrate the learning process and the development of strategic approach for forging relationships. Indeed, while Steve simply attended the zoo with the other members of the team, they quickly realised the impact of such activity on their relationships with the coach. More importantly, Steve suddenly found themselves in a position to impact the design and delivery of the training sessions, something that they were not part of prior to the visit to the zoo. Such events, therefore, played a key role in shaping practitioners' sense-making of encountered situations and encouraged them to employ strategic actions with a view to *manufacturing opportunities to engage with the stakeholders*.

While all practitioners collectively reiterated the importance of getting to know the stakeholders they were working with, they also highlighted the benefits of allowing others to get to know them. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners recognise the significance of stakeholders buying in to them as a person. This was summarised by Steve, who recalled:

> I think that with the challenging environments and challenging individuals, this is about okay you might not like sport psychology, but I don't need you to buy into sport psychology, I want you to buy into me, and actually, when you buy into me, you may then ask about my opinion. So, rather than me coming in and saying what the sport psychology research suggests and we should do x, y, z I am actually getting into a position where I can influence more yet not basing everything on research, but they bought into me as a person. (Steve, Interview 1).

Such sentiments further reiterated the significance of *experiential learning*. Indeed, it was apparent that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they realised the value of personal characteristics. More specifically, rather than demonstrating their knowledge of sport psychology research, the practitioners strived to demonstrate to the stakeholders that they were a trustworthy, positive, and passionate person. Also, the practitioners tried to express their genuine interest in the stakeholders and that they cared about them as people.

Demonstrating an interest in the person that the practitioners worked with was an effective way of starting conversations. Indeed, the practitioners were able to engage the stakeholders in prolong discussions,

therefore, creating an opportunity to get to know each other better. An example of such a discussion was presented by Tom, who recalled:

> I mention things that they *[stakeholders]* are comfortable to talk about and topics that are non-threatening. So, by asking them "just tell me about your career", people may feel a bit threatened if you are asking about them, you know what I mean, if you are asking about them as a person rather you are asking about their experiences as a person. It is less personal and therefore it maybe a safer topic to start off. So, rather than trying to be a bit deeper and meaningful straight away. (Tom, Interview 5).

Therefore, the practitioners consciously looked to ask right questions to demonstrate an interest in the stakeholders and consequently foster a relationship. Asking about the stakeholders' prior experiences and professional journey was identified as a safe topic that stakeholders were willing to described at length. Several practitioners exemplified how they looked to find out more about stakeholders' career journey and how different experiences influenced their current role. Whilst adapting such an approach, practitioners strived to provide a space for the stakeholders to open up about their experiences and share their thoughts freely. As such, the practitioners consciously looked to utilise their listening skills as a means of showing an interest in the individuals they worked alongside and forge a positive rapport.

It was apparent therefore, that a strategic application of questioning and listening skills was an effective method of developing positive working relationships. Several practitioners reiterated how they planned their interactions with stakeholders and prepared their conversations. Indeed, practitioners exemplified how they approached conversations with pre-designed questions. Seeking greater insight into the stakeholder's role was one of the most frequently used strategy of demonstrating interest in other roles and responsibilities. In one such example, Jake reflected:

> Certainly, one of the things that I found over the years was having an interest in what they *[coaches and other professionals]* are doing. So, proactively asking questions about the things that they are doing being inquisitive, not intrusive, but inquisitive about the things that they are doing. Something that I always say to people go research the sport that you are working in as much as you can, and there is plenty information out there, but the reason why you do that is not because you want to show off the knowledge of the sport, but because it allows you to ask the appropriate questions, which may be sensitive context. Specific questions to ask from someone who is not a specialist in that sport. (Jake, Interview 7).

As such, the practitioners invested their time in gathering the information about the sport and the individuals operating within it before engaging in conversations with key stakeholders. Indeed, it was apparent that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they started to use their knowledge and understanding of the sport to purposefully structure conversations with the stakeholders. Such an approach was best described by Jake, who exemplified:

> I would ask, you know, naïve questions that I would relate to what I was observing or what was going on. For example, hockey, whereas I may come in and say, "I never seen a pre-performance preparation done like that. What is the reason? Why do you do it like that?" So, you know, just something really naïve and based on the experience elsewhere. It helps build those relationships, you know, you need to know the sport to ask naïve questions. So, asking questions that somebody who is embedded in a situation all the time would not even consider asking, you know, someone who has a vast experience in the sport. They would just say to you well this is what happens. So, you actually don't consider yourself an expert on everything. You recognise others' expertise by asking them an educated naïve question, a dumb naïve question is just a dumb naïve question. (Jake, Interview 1).

From such a perspective, therefore, it became apparent that the questioning employed by the practitioners was aimed at demonstrating their recognition of stakeholders' past achievements. In particular, the practitioners looked to appreciate the knowledge and expertise of the people that they worked alongside. Therefore, as practitioners progressed in their career, they strived to acknowledge the expertise of the stakeholders embedded within their respective settings. Such an approach was aimed at developing rapport with the stakeholders and ensuring further conversations. Indeed, the practitioners understood that by constantly talking about sport psychology theory and research findings they may create barriers to their relationship with the stakeholders, who might not be interested in such information. Inversely, stakeholders were keen to describe their roles and provide an insight into their responsibilities. Therefore, as the practitioners gained more experience, such questioning techniques became one of the most important strategies of forging relationships with the stakeholders.

To enhance their questioning techniques further and increase interaction opportunities the practitioners invested a significant amount of time in gathering information about the stakeholders from various sources. Indeed, several practitioners expressed how they looked to build their understanding of the individuals they were working with by sourcing materials available online. Such actions were particularly apparent in the initial stages of entering a new environment. However, several practitioners acknowledged that they purposefully followed the stakeholders on social media to get an insight into their lives outside the sporting context. In one such example, Jake reflected:

> There is another individual that I am working with, and this is where social media can help you, for a change, you can see their activity on social media. So, by following people on Twitter, you can get an insight into what fires them up in life, what they engage with. So, this particular client they are an average supporter of a particular football club. So, again I can get a greater rapport and trust by understanding what their interests are, what they get excited about in life, and tapping into that to be more effective. So, it is essential to take that inquisitiveness about other people and openness to understanding the realities of everyone's world. (Jake, Interview 3).

Therefore, the information gathered from online sources allowed the practitioners to engage in further discussions with the stakeholders. Indeed, social media post were often a very good conversation starters and a way of developing rapport. Several practitioners acknowledged how they purposefully asked about stakeholders' experiences of certain events that they posted online to engage in conversation unrelated to job profiles and responsibilities. While the practitioners reiterated that within such interactions, they did not want to create a friendship with the stakeholders, they all collectively highlighted the importance of coming across as friendly and easy to talk to. Such sentiments, therefore, further reiterated the significance of practitioners' ability of utilising their interpersonal skills to develop positive working relationships.

Taken collectively, it was evident that the practitioners of the present study engaged in a range of strategies to engineer opportunities to interact with the contextual stakeholders. All practitioners reiterated the significance of demonstrating an interest in stakeholders as a person and engaging in normal conversations not related to sport psychology. Such an approach was identified as an effective method to developing common understanding and ultimately better working relationships. This was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who acknowledged that simply spending time with a coach in an informal setting enhance their ability to work collaboratively. As such, it was evident that the practitioners looked to manufacture such opportunities for interaction by strategically deciding where to spend time within the environment. This included having breakfast and lunch with the stakeholders; walking together to and from the training sessions; and standing next to the stakeholders during training sessions. It was also evident that the practitioners looked to engage in interactions with the stakeholders outside the work context. This included going together for a run, asking for a lift to a train station and attending social events. As such, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis looked to manufacture opportunities to find a way to access stakeholders time and become a part of their role. Also, the practitioners planned their interactions with the stakeholders in advance by obtaining various information about them from a range of sources. Such information, in turn, influenced practitioners questioning during conversations. Indeed, the practitioners purposefully asked a variety of questions to demonstrate their interest in stakeholders' roles and responsibilities as well as their lives outside the sporting context. During such interactions, the stakeholders strategically used their soft skills to facilitate conversations with the stakeholders and build positive working relationships.

4.5.2. Being flexible and adapting to the individual

Another important factor identified by the practitioners in their quest to develop positive working relationships with key stakeholders was an ability to adapt to their preferred communication styles. Indeed, the practitioners reiterated that each stakeholder within an environment possessed a different way of processing information and sharing ideas. As such, it was apparent that in their efforts of developing rapport with key stakeholders, the practitioners looked to understand different communication styles within the organisation. This was particularly evident in an interview with Amy, who reflected on their interactions with a performance director:

> So, we would have a little chat about how was your weekend and things like that, but they are someone who is straight to a point. Right, I need to talk to you about this let's sort this out. So yeah, purposeful. (Amy, Interview 7).

Amy continued:

> When they *[performance director]* asked me a question, I try to be honest and try to be direct and to the point, which I have been terrible at doing so far. They are straightforward and to the point, and I think they work well with direct people who are to the point. So, just try to kind of mirror this style, if you like. (Amy, Interview 7).

As such, it was apparent that upon understanding stakeholder's communication tendencies, the practitioners looked to align their own communication accordingly. Indeed, it was evident that practitioners strived to mirror the stakeholders preferred ways of communication to forge a relationship with the stakeholders. Several practitioners reiterated that the stakeholders in leadership positions often preferred analytical communication favouring short and direct conversations. While working with such individuals, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis purposefully adapted an analytical approach to problem-solving, ensuring the conversations never went of topic. Therefore, it was apparent that such actions were a conscious strategy of meeting stakeholders' expectations and demonstrating desirable behaviours.

The significance of understanding stakeholders preferred communication styles in the workplace was further exemplified by Jake, who recalled:

> There are different ways of challenging people. Some people need a drip-feed because they cannot cope with a straightforward challenge where you challenge with questioning. In contrast, some other people you can have those long conversations where you are constantly asking them to justify what they are doing and look for alternatives, and you know problem-solve with them. Then others there is no way they are going to cope with that you just need to drip-feeding how effective do you think that is today and let them think about that and then make sure you will go back to them and ask them again – did you think about what I asked you last week? So, drip-feeding it and adapting a slow-burn approach really. (Jake, Interview 1).

Jake continued:

> So, what that means in real terms when I developed as a practitioner, is I need to adapt and adjust to someone I am working with in relation to their preferences and the things that make them more open to the input that I may have with them. (Jake, Interview 1).

Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that everyone they worked with was different and required a unique approach. It was apparent, therefore, that in their interactions with the stakeholders, practitioners paid a significant attention to their listening skills, striving to understand the people that they worked alongside. Also, all practitioners collectively identified such processes as an essential aspect of their role. Therefore, it was apparent that the practitioners consciously reflected on their interactions with key stakeholders and strived to enhance their ability to engage in different types of conversations in terms of questioning and providing information to ensure they were accommodating stakeholders' preferences.

Throughout the data collection process, the practitioners exemplified the importance of understanding how different individuals within their setting function and how they relate to other people. Indeed, the practitioners acknowledged the danger of adapting a single approach to service delivery, recognising the limitations of such an approach in the process of developing positive working relationships with a range of stakeholders. Instead, the practitioners suggested that an effective sport psychologists should possess an ability to work with a range of individuals and adapt their practice to meet stakeholders' individual needs. Therefore, the practitioners interviewed as part of the present thesis acknowledged that their actions shifted depending on who they were working with. In one such example, Dan reflected:

> I do not think that you ever stretch from who you are as an individual you just maybe adaptable. So, if a coach is very sociable and very loud and maybe you can take a step back and allow them to be who they are and maybe vice versa if the coach is the other way. So yeah, I think that your approach and who you are do not change, and it is just in the moment you may think, "aww yeah, I need to step back and allow them *[stakeholders]* do their thing, or I need to drive it here to see if they will come with me, or see if they will take a step back". So yeah, I think that it is in the moment decision. (Dan, Interview 2).

The reflective accounts, therefore, illuminated that the practitioners strived to develop positive working relationships with the stakeholders by providing them with an opportunity to express themselves. This was particularly evident in an interview with Jake, who recalled:

> So, I worked with one performer in particular who had a very short attention span. So, I will catch them on a poolside be very enthusiastic and excited about the things that they just have done, do a 2 or 3 minute job with them and then move on because this was as much as they could cope with, but if I went in with a much calmer approach, they would look at me in a strange way. Whereas when I would go in a more enthusiastic attitude, they would connect to me straight away and they would be more open and engage in the things that we were talking about, and you made it, you moved a step forward. But if I asked them to come for a meeting for like 40 minutes which could be my way of working with people, I could take them two steps backwards if that makes sense? (Jake, Interview 7).

Jake continued:

> So, some performers would require me to be more high energy and where I could, I would do that, and it would pay a dividend and other performers I needed to be much calmer, and I guess more patient. So, they were more conscious of people and how they evaluated situations, whereas others were much more open to new experiences. (Jake, Interview 7).

The practitioners' approach to interactions with different stakeholders, therefore, was a conscious strategy of fostering a positive rapport. Indeed, the practitioners recognised that without such an approach they would struggle to achieve the desirable goal of positive working relationships. More specifically, communication

styles and interactions opposed to stakeholders' preferences could be perceived in a negative way and result in negative opinions regarding the sport psychologist. For instance, an engagement of a stakeholder with a short attention span in long meeting could lead to a loss of interest, boredom, and a lack of learning. Thus, practitioners had to be careful in designing their interactions to ensure they were not developing a negative perception of themselves and their services.

The interpretations of reflective accounts, therefore, demonstrated the significance of adapting a flexible approach to interactions with the stakeholders. Indeed, it was apparent that practitioners were required to develop a range of communication skills and possess an ability to identify when and how to use different communication styles to forge a relationship with the stakeholders. Also, while reflecting on the interactions with a range of contextual stakeholders, several practitioners compared themselves to a chameleon. In one such example, Dan acknowledged:

> I am more aware that I need to be the chameleon, so when you are in the environment to be in a certain way. So, it is not to be fake, but it is about adapting who you are to meet the needs of the environment. (Dan, Interview 4).

Such sentiments demonstrated that in order to develop a positive rapport with a range of contextual stakeholders, practitioners were required to blend seamlessly into the social environment of the sporting organisations. Indeed, the practitioners paid significant attention to social cues and adapt their behaviours accordingly. It was evident, that as practitioners progressed in their career, they developed an ability to mould themselves into specific social situations and interactions. Several practitioners reiterated how they were either leading conversations and asking probing questions or were reserved and focused on listening depending on who they were interacting with.

The process of mimicking behaviours or shaping interactions allowing stakeholders to express themselves was a conscious strategy aimed at making sure the stakeholders felt positively about the practitioners. Also, it was evident that the practitioners possessed high levels of self-monitoring skills. Indeed, the story of practice illustrated that the practitioners were constantly assessing their own behaviour to ensure they were creating the desired image in the minds of the contextual stakeholders. In one such example, Tom reflected on their interactions with a coach:

> Clearly, something that was very important to them *[coach]* was hard work and work rate. So, if you will always form a conversation around psychology, I was always very wary not to make it too fluffy. There needs to be an element that psychology is not fluffy and supportive, and it is about how we challenge the lads *[players]* and how do we push them. (Tom, Interview 5).

Tom continued:

> I think that in this relationship I did not want to be perceived as wishy-washy and what I mean by that I did not want to be perceived as fluffy whereas I know that I can be a bit more fluffy with others staff members. I kind of got a feeling that if I were fluffy about it, they *[coach]* would not be interested. So, there was always an element of me, I would talk about psychology in a different way. So, it would be

> more about resilience and toughness rather than self-care and self-awareness. So, our conversations would always be about those challenging things rather than anything else. (Tom, Interview 5).

As such, the practitioners constantly analysed their behaviours to make sure that they acted in accordance with stakeholders' expectations. Indeed, several practitioners echoed sentiments made by Tom, reiterating the importance of directing behaviours and responses towards stakeholders' preferences. It became apparent, therefore, that the practitioners often where saying what the stakeholders wanted to hear. Indeed, the practitioners were highly attuned to the need of getting along with the contextual stakeholders and forging a positive working relationship.

The efforts of creating an image of a like-minded individual and someone who is easy to get on with was particularly apparent in the early stages of fostering a relationship with the stakeholders, with Steve recalling:

> In the new relationship, try to come across as engaging and listening and hearing what the coach is saying and then work with them. With a new relationship with that you need to show some element of willingness, I suppose, that you are willing to meet the coach and engage with the coach in what it is they are looking from you. (Steve, Interview 5).

As such, when attempting to develop relationships upon entering a new environment, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis looked to show some level of agreement with the stakeholders. This was further explained by Steve, who recalled:

> I had requests for me to work with an athlete that the doctor thinks may be suffering from a clinical psychology issue. So, that is, of course, out of my skill set *[as a sport psychologist]*. The coach wanted me to have a conversation with an athlete just to see what I thought. I am not a clinical psychologist, so I cannot deal with clinical psychology problems. I made that pretty clear to the coach, but they were still keen to get my opinion from a psychologist's perspective, even when this is not a clinical psychologist perspective, and just talk to the athlete about performance and see if the clinical issue potentially emerged. If that were a coach that I had a longer-term relationship with, I would not do that because I would know the outcome of this session. But I had this conversation with the athlete because that fosters that better relationship with that coach. (Steve, Interview 5).

Therefore, the practitioners strived to be flexible in their approach and accommodate stakeholders request in their efforts of forging positive working relationships. Such sense making was particularly evident during the early stages of working relationships when either the practitioners or the stakeholders entered the environment. During this period, the practitioners paid significant attention to demonstrating to coaches and other stakeholders that they were on board with their methods and things that they were trying to achieve in their role. Indeed, several practitioners reiterated the significance of demonstrating that they were buying-in

into the stakeholders and their ways of working. Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Jake, who reflected:

> I think that in most situations, you demonstrate supportive behaviour and that you are singing from the same hymn sheet. The majority of the time and that enables you to be a critical friend and be more effective. So, if you are demonstrating that you are on board with everything that is going on the majority of the time, then your impact on something that might be open to critique. So, that supportive emphasis the majority of the time, then this critique can be perceived in a way that is intended rather than taken as a criticism. (Jake, Interview 7).

Such an approach to interactions with coaches and other stakeholders was particularly evident in the way the practitioners' asked questions and presented an argument. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that as they progressed in their career, they become more aware of how they interact with the stakeholders and how they put their messages across. Alongside this increased experience, practitioners started to recognise the most appropriate timing of interactions and paid greater attention to the language they were using. More specifically, they looked to ensure that the style of questioning was not critical, and they were not coming across as judgemental.

The approach to practice just outlined was echoed by several practitioners who collectively reiterated the significance of framing the conversations in the right way. Also, such sentiments highlighted the importance of *experiential learning*. Indeed, it was clear that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they developed an ability to challenge the opinions of stakeholders while maintaining an image of a supportive individual. More specifically, with experience, practitioners learned to imply potential consequences of certain actions and behaviours that stakeholders were demonstrating without directly addressing the issue. Thus, practitioners started to act strategically in the way that they formed conversations. In particular, the practitioners recognised the value of delivering the message in a certain way, closer to stakeholders' expectations. In one such example, Steve reflected on their interactions with a coach:

> I know that I need to frame that discussion *[in a certain way]*. I need to frame that conversation with them in a slightly different way to ensure that the message they hear is the message that I am trying to put across. So, there is not me challenging or criticising you, this is about how do we maximise what is going on for that athlete. (Steve, Interview 1).

The significance of framing conversations in a particular way was further exemplified by Dan, who reflected on their interactions with a coach:

> I was quick to adapt my thinking and behaviour to get the best out of the things I believed in. So, to work around them *[coach]* and I suppose that you are a bit fake, but for me, I was just being clever and adapting to what I need to do in my work and in that relationship. *[For example]* I would say I have a workshop slot in the afternoon and I would tell them *[coach]* what the title was and what I was doing and then I would frame it in a way that it was something that they wanted to do and

> they believed in. So, I would be like, "aww we are developing hard work and resilience." Because I know from this week in the training session and the game, they said that the boys did not work hard enough and were all lazy and rubbish. So, I was framing it in that way to them knowing that they would not be in the session and they would not know what has been said, because again their behaviours and actions, they did not care about developing the boys the same way as the part-time coach did. So, they *[part-time coach]* was in every workshop and in every session, they were in every analysis session. So, they knew what has been said. So, you kind of play the game around that. Whereas in the actual workshop we have discussed, "okay, you were accused of not working hard enough. Tell us what you think." It was more of a reflective session and what they believed was hard work and what was not and helping them understand what we believed it was and us understanding what they believed it was and then working together for the best of the players and the best for the team. So, yeah that is definitely an example of playing the game and working around the relationship and kind of just being clever, I suppose. (Dan, Interview 4).

As such, it was clear that the practitioners strived to present themselves as a supportive individual working towards the same agenda, despite, at times, holding opposing views. Indeed, while the practitioners recognised the importance of weighing up the outcomes of the interactions with the stakeholders, they strived to be seen by the stakeholders as someone who they could trust. To achieve this, the practitioners tried to avoid disagreements that could damage the working relationship with the stakeholders. Therefore, on many occasions, the practitioners were required to protect their image and refrain from making their observations and thoughts public. Instead, the practitioners looked to adapt the service delivery in a way that simultaneously allowed them to achieve the objectives of their role and maintain a positive working relationship with the stakeholders. Several practitioners referred to such an approach as to working around the stakeholders and navigating the encountered challenges rather than trying to address them directly. It is here the practitioner's ability of *being flexible and adapting to the individual* were particularly apparent. Indeed, it was particularly noticeable that in potentially confrontational situations, the practitioners were prepared to adapt their interventions and manipulate the information that they shared with the stakeholders.

From such a perspective, it was evident that when *being flexible and adapting to the individual* that the practitioners were working with, they were ultimately "playing a game" (Dan, Interview 5). Several practitioners acknowledged that they were required to present themselves as a supportive and like-minded individual when working with the stakeholders. In one such example, Dan recalled:

> The coach had a positive relationship with me because I made them feel good about themselves whenever I spoke with them. So, then we would work closely together, or I would be able to get away with things because they felt that I was doing a good job and that they had a good connection with me. (Dan, Interview 7).

This was echoed by Beth, who reflected on their relationships with a coach:

> So, what I do when I go in in the morning if I have not been for the rest of the week I would go straight to the coach and have a chat with them before I even put my bags down. So, I will go into them and ask them how they were doing and how the last week went and are there any updates that I need to know of, and then when they talk, I try to act as I really care. So, that is what I do. (Beth, Interview 2).

Beth continued:

> I would go to them *[coach]* with my ideas and ask for their advice. So, I would ask what to do to build this relationship. I would ask for their advice, so what did they think of this or is there any way I could make this better. Because then they are getting input, but then again, I am going to them to show them that I value their input, you know what I mean—making them feel needed and valued. (Beth, Interview 2).

Therefore, it was clear that the practitioners engaged in a range of actions to accommodate stakeholders' individual needs. In particular, it was striking how much time, energy and effort the practitioners dedicated towards acknowledging and complementing stakeholders' work. It was apparent, therefore, that the practitioners strived to reassure stakeholders about the value of their expertise. Such actions were particularly evident in practitioners' interactions with stakeholders who either needed or responded well to such validation. Indeed, the practitioners were highly skilled at recognising which stakeholders were receptive to feedback and alternative opinions and who reacted to such suggestions in a negative way. Such understanding of stakeholders' personal characteristics and preferences allowed the practitioners to shape their own behaviours and forge positive relationships.

It became obvious, therefore, that as the practitioners progressed in their careers, they developed an ability to navigate working relationships with a range of stakeholders and use each situation to their advantage. Indeed, whilst practitioners were not required to adapt to all stakeholders they worked alongside, they recognised that such an approach held a significant benefit for their role. For instance, Beth described how their efforts of forging and maintaining a positive working relationship with a key contextual stakeholder allowed them to enhance the effectiveness of the service delivery:

> I can use them *[coach]* to my advantage, maybe in certain aspects playing to their ego. So, then I get out from them what I need to do. That sounds really negative and a really bad way to do it, but if it means that I can do my job better, then I will do it. (Beth, Interview 7).

As such, it was clear that the process of *being flexible and adapting to the individual* allowed the practitioners to fulfil the objectives of their role. Indeed, practitioners' actions allowed them to ensure that the stakeholders were more open to their input and suggestions. For example, several practitioners reiterated that without the groundwork leading to positive working relationships they would not be able to enhance their contact time with the athletes and make changes to the delivery of the training programmes. Also, the practitioners collectively reiterated that by *being flexible and adapting to the individual* they were able to ensure the key stakeholders were more open to accepting their existence within the sporting organisation.

Practitioners' actions of building rapport with the stakeholders, therefore, were one of the most effective strategies to overcome stakeholders' negative perceptions regarding sport psychology and increase the importance of such services within the environment.

Taken collectively, it was evident that the practitioners sampled within the present thesis looked to adapt their communication style and ways of working to stakeholders' preferences and expectations. Several practitioners reiterated the significance of operating at the same level as the stakeholders and mirroring their actions. To achieve this, the practitioners were required to be flexible and constantly adjust their practice to meet the individual needs of a wide range of individuals that they worked alongside. It was evident that such actions looked to ensure a better connection with the stakeholders and ultimately foster positive working relationship. It was also apparent that practitioners strived to demonstrate a level of support and agreement with coaches and other stakeholders' philosophy of practice and ways of working. Indeed, the practitioners looked to demonstrate that they were on the same page as the stakeholders and could be trusted. To maintain such an image, practitioners ensured that they were not critical, judgemental, confrontational and argumentative in the interaction with coaches and other stakeholders. Indeed, it was evident that the practitioners paid significant attention to the timing of their interactions with the stakeholders and the language that they were using in such encounters. Several practitioners expressed the importance of framing the conversations to present them as a supportive and like-minded individual. This was particularly evident in an interview with Dan, who described how they worked around the coach rather than directly challenging their methods and ways of working. Indeed, several practitioners reflected that they were required to play the game to ensure that they could achieve the objectives of their role.

4.5.3. Managing the self

The stories of practice shared within the present thesis demonstrated that the practitioners strived to establish and maintain positive working relationships with various contextual stakeholders. To achieve this, practitioners engaged in a range of strategies and actions to create an image of supportive and like-minded individuals. However, it needs to be highlighted that the practitioners encountered a range of challenges during this process that tested their deeply held believes and values. Indeed, several practitioners expressed their frustrations associated with working with a range of stakeholders. However, all practitioners reiterated the importance of controlling their emotions and trying to act rationally. In one such example, Dan reflected on their frustrations associated with their effort of creating an open and honest culture within their organisation:

> We were all sat in the classroom with all the staff, and one of our ideas was to have something on the wall and have an expectation board. So, players, staff and parents, because we have parent and player code of conduct, but there is no staff code of conduct. So, it was all about trying to reach certain standards or be accountable for certain things and we kind of planted the seed and then let the conversations go and the academy manager leading it – people digging each other out but at the same time they were not because they were not mentioning any names. So, it was more of like a conversation, and for me, it was a bit frustrating because my personality came across, I wanted it there and now – I wanted the expectations to be laid down and people to start being honest and people to start calling each other out. But I kind of

> had to hold myself in and not rush things. I think the way we left it – and to be honest, I am not happy about it – they *[academy manager]* just said to us that we would just pick it up on Monday's meetings, which is a bit vague, and it is not set in stone. (Dan, Interview 2).

Dan continued:

> I was kind of thinking with my head rather than my heart…but for me, it is all about head and heart. I understand the pros and cons of both I just want to have things done there and then, but I understand that people need to go away and think about it because we have been sat in the classroom for six hours. So, maybe it was not the best thing to do it then because you will not get the best out of it just because the way people are, so it was frustrating, but I could understand that and see both sides of it. (Dan, Interview 2).

Such sentiments were echoed by several participants who collectively acknowledged the importance of taking a step back from emotionally charged situations and thinking rationally. In one such example, Alice reflected on a situation where they refrained from engaging in a challenging conversation with a key stakeholder:

> There were occasions when a coach said something that I have fundamentally disagreed with, and I disagree with the delivery of it. On one occasion, I was almost really angry with the way they presented this *[full-time team talk] and* what they were trying to get across to the players. I thought it was very damaging to some of the players in the room in terms of their overall self-esteem and I thought it was an overall wrong way to go about the messages they were sending. In that situation, it has the potential to cause a really big clash between them and myself. However, I was able to take a step back and almost have a conversation about the way it was presented *[full-time team talk]* in a much more calmer and diplomatic way rather than it being straight after the incident where I was quite emotional from it and they *[coach]* was quite emotional from it because it was at the back of real low of our season where we had a really heavy defeat, which was one of the biggest in the club history for the U18. So, it was a really profound moment, resulting in a lot of emergency work in many different areas. At the time, I thought because it was such an emotional thing that me acting emotionally in that situation would not be beneficial. Would it change the action of the coach? I do not think it would. It would not take back those things that they said, and it will not change it moving forward because I know the coach and I know that me saying something would not sink in that well, to be honest. Also, I knew that if I would have this response in that situation and I would say my thoughts and feelings at that time, I would have been in that emotionally charged state, and they would be in that emotionally charged state, and they would get really defensive. I think that this would damage the relationship long term. (Alice, Interview 2).

The reflections presented by Alice, illustrated the significance of *experiential learning* in practitioners' day-to-day interactions with contextual stakeholders. More specifically, it was apparent that as the practitioners developed in their career, they enhanced their ability to manage themselves despite being annoyed, frustrated, or upset as a consequence of stakeholders' behaviours. Describing such development within their practice, Alice recalled:

> I think that this is something that is developing, and it has developed over time. I think that in the past I would either not say anything or I would go the other way and said something that would not be beneficial to that situation at that time. So, I might give that emotionally charged response and get quite angry about the situation and get quite confrontational. I think I would go one of two ways. So, I would ignore it completely, or I would go the other way and have a really emotional response to it, which would damage the relationship. (Alice, Interview 2).

It was evident, therefore, that since entering sporting organisations for the first time, practitioners learned to deal with applied situations in a much calmer and composed manner. More specifically, in the early stages of their applied careers, the *passion for sport and working with people* played a key role in practitioners' sense-making of encountered situations. Whilst being determined to contribute towards the development of the people they supported, the practitioners sampled within the present thesis often failed to consider the wider implications of their behaviours. In particular, the practitioners paid a limited attention to how their behaviours could be perceived by the stakeholders embedded within the applied settings. However, it was clear that in the later stages of their career, the practitioners started to identify their ability of *managing the self* as the key aspect of their everyday practice. An example of such learning was best described by Alice, who reflected on their approach to dealing with a disagreement with a coach:

> A couple of days later, we had a conversation where it was not directly addressing it. So, I did not say when this happened, I did not go back to that, but we discussed how a player might feel when something similar may happen and we have discussed it in that scenario kind of way. I felt that this helped to present it so that I was hoping to raise the issue, but not be confrontational with it and not like almost attacking them *[coach]* with what I thought had happened, and I disagreed with it. I was not trying to make a big deal out of it and presenting it a slightly different way where it was not directly addressing that situation, but it was drip-feeding something in that made them reflect and think about things that have happened previously. So, in that situation, they may have gone against what they think is right because of the emotionality of the situation, they were very upset about the defeat. I think that it was one of those situations where you have to be able to hint something *[suggesting an alternative]* without being too direct and confrontational about it. I think that this was a good way to presenting it in a way that I think made them think about what they have done without being directly argumentative about it and that was my intention and the decision-making process I suppose that I wanted to avoid that confrontation because I know that this would not be beneficial to the players or to anyone if the coach and I have had a massive falling out. This does not help

> anyone in any way. Definitely, you do not want two people in this environment to be falling out and holding a grudge against each other. (Alice, Interview 2).

Alice reflections on their development as a practitioner was reiterated by all practitioners sampled within the present thesis, who collectively expressed how with experience they started to pay greater attention to how certain responses could impact their position within the sporting organisation. In particular, the practitioners realised how their actions could influence the relationships with the contextual stakeholders. As such, it was evident that the practitioners learned how to control their emotions in the interactions with the contextual stakeholders. In one such example, Alice recalled:

> I am trying to manage that in that way. Sometimes, when the conversations are becoming a bit heated, just try to take out that steam out of them and then actually think about it rather than react emotionally from the situation. (Alice, Interview 6).

As such, the practitioners started to analyse the consequences of their actions within the applied settings. While maintaining their passion for working with people and desire to make a positive contribution towards athlete's performances, the practitioners also strived to maintain positive working relationship with the contextual stakeholders. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that while they were required to challenge stakeholders' ways of working and express alternative opinions, they needed to ensure they never lost the trust of the people they worked alongside. Therefore, as the practitioners progressed in their career, they develop self-monitoring skills to regulate their emotions and behaviours in response to encountered situations. More specifically, the practitioners developed an ability to monitor the situations and reactions to modify their own behaviour. Indeed, while *being flexible and adapting to the individual,* the practitioners strived to regulate their emotions and behaviours depending on the people or situation.

It was apparent, therefore, that as a result of *experiential learning,* the practitioners developed an ability to deal with applied situations diplomatically and logically. In one such example, Steve reflected on their sense-making of receiving feedback:

> The key is really to understand what your emotional response to this constructive feedback is because my initial response to constructive or any potential negative feedback is the emotional response, which for me is to disengage. But once I control that part of my brain and once I let that part of my brain do what it needs to do and go back to the logic mode. (Steve, Interview 3).

Similarly, Tom recalled how they managed themself in meetings and responded to the opinions of coaches and other stakeholders:

> There is an element of sometimes biting your tongue, and within that, you can become quite frustrated by the conversations that are going on. So, someone may say, "aww they *[players]* are just mentally weak" and I know that this is not true and within these situations, you feel the urge to respond and say, "that this has nothing to do with mental toughness." But I would say something on the line of, "I can see where you are coming from, but I do not agree as there are multiple things

> going on," rather than saying, "you are wrong, or this is rubbish." (Tom, Interview 7).

As such, it was apparent that the practitioners recognised that emotionally charged reactions to applied situations may have a detrimental effect on their efforts of developing and maintaining the positive working relationships. Therefore, while disagreeing with stakeholders' opinions, the practitioners developed an ability to manage their emotional reactions to encountered situations. As a result, they were better equipped to express alternative opinions without coming across as critical and judgemental. Several practitioners reiterated that an ability to remain calm and composed in emotionally charged situations was one of the most important skills within effective sport psychology provision.

Indeed, several practitioners highlighted that while disagreeing with the stakeholders, they were required to maintain their "professional guard" (Amy, Interview 7) without revealing what they truly thought about the situation. Such an ability, therefore, allowed the practitioners to better navigate the encountered applied situations and meet the objectives of their role. Indeed, on one hand, the practitioners were able to provide an alternative voice, which was an important and valued skill within sporting organisation, while protecting the positive working relationships with the contextual stakeholders. Such sense-making was particularly evident in an interview with Alice, who recalled:

> I think that when that relationship is at risk, you need to take a step back and you need to consider all of those things and evaluate around all of those elements as well. (Alice, Interview 7).

Such sentiments were echoed by Amy, who reflected on their approach to dealing with challenging interactions with stakeholders:

> Like I said before, I think not letting my guard down like never be angry at someone at the moment. I would never do that and do my best to get on with everyone and when it is appropriate to give that honest opinion, but not because this is something that is stressing me. Yes, I do believe that there is something that is fundamentally not right but also, I know that this is coming from me as a person, and I am getting stressed and anxious about this. So, I cannot let this impact my work. (Amy, Interview 7).

As such, it was apparent that in order to maintain the positive working relationships with key contextual stakeholders, practitioners were required to regulate their frustrations in their interactions with others. Several practitioners reiterated that they had to make sure the emotions were not getting better of them, and they were "maintaining a professional face" (Amy, Interview 7) in their encounters with contextual stakeholders.

The process of dealing with emotionally charged situations was best described by Jake, who was the most experienced practitioner sampled within the present thesis. More specifically, while reflecting upon the challenges of developing and minting a positive working relationship with a range of contextual stakeholders, Jake reiterated the importance of understanding people. In Jake's own words:

> I think that I am relatively an expert in reading other people and where they are in a particular moment in time. I think that one thing that I am particularly good at, which I think is a strength of mine, is that I am prepared to ask a question that may be confirmatory of how someone is feeling, and I would not necessarily shy away from that. So, I would often ask questions that would not be upsetting, but it would help me to access the emotional state of an individual… So, I get a sense of someone feeling under pressure or if someone is more reserved than normal. I may then say… you know, a question how the week has gone for them and try to start to understand what is going on behind that impression that I may get from the non-verbal communication and the sense that I get about them. So, I think is one of the big benefits of being inside of context with people instantly rather than working with an individual performer via email, or Skype where you do not have access to that information. So, I think that this can really play to your advantage as a support system when you are in the context with them. (Jake, Interview 5).

Jake continued:

> So, it is about reading people and understanding the nuance of their experiences and what they are really feeling. You can then sense the reason why they are behaving and responding *[in a particular way]*. So, I think that most people will have a moderate to high level of emotional intelligence and an ability to recognise that someone is annoyed or angry with them. So, you know… that sort of ability to respond appropriately when taking under consideration other people. (Jake, Interview 5).

It was clear, therefore, that with greater experience, the practitioners started to pay more attention to the emotional states of stakeholders. More specifically, practitioners enhanced their ability to pick up emotional cues and better understand the needs and concerns of other people. As explained by Jake, in the later stages of their careers, practitioners were better prepared to recognise and interpret the nonverbal cues to understand emotional experiences of others. It is here, practitioners' efforts of spending time in the environment and understanding individuals they work alongside proved to be of key significance. Such time invested in forging relationships with the stakeholders, in turn, enhanced practitioners' ability to understand and manage their own emotional states. Indeed, it was clear that as a result of prolonged reflections upon their interactions with contextual stakeholders, the practitioners were better prepared to connect to their own emotional experiences. As a result, the practitioners could better recognise their own emotional triggers and enhance their own emotional self-control. Therefore, as the practitioners progressed in their career, they were better equipped to stay calm and poised even in highly pressurised and stressful situations.

Drawing on Jake's experiences, it became clear that an ability of *managing the self* was a vital component of effective sport psychology provision. Such an ability enhanced practitioners' credibility within the environment and contributed towards the development of trusting, honest and positive working relationships with key contextual stakeholders. This was apparent in one of Jakes's reflections regarding the post-competition review process with an athlete:

> When they *[athlete]* reviewed the event and their experiences, they said it was very nice for them that I was there because I was calm and that made them feel calm. So, I guess that this is emotionally contagious. You can demonstrate that you are calm and relaxed, and this can have an influence on others. So, if you can put that attitude and demonstrate that skill set, you are basically able to control yourself. Basically, you are trustworthy. I spoke with number of people about this, and they told me that they struggled when they are in a competitive situation to not act like a spectator. So, this professional distance is very important in this situation as you are there to do a job. You are not there to be a spectator. So, you are in a working mode and in a working context. This is something people struggle with. They celebrate when the performers celebrate, and yeah OK, you can do that, but you know you need to be careful that you do not get down when they get down. I learn this from a coach early on and they were incredible at this and very consistent in the way that they responded *[to different situations]*. Their messages around those things made sense because they were not related to the emotion. So, either really high or low emotions in a competitive environment. There was a congruence between the messages they were sending and the way that they responded in a competitive environment. So yeah, I can see that in myself. (Jake, Interview 7).

However, while all practitioners strived to self-monitor their reactions to encountered situations and control their emotions, such an approach was often difficult to maintain. Indeed, several examples shared by the practitioners demonstrated how they struggled to suppress their initial reactions and maintain the desired expression. In one such example, Amy recalled:

> There were examples where I snapped a little bit and, in this context, where there were other people as this was sport science meeting. So, I think that in this example I allowed this professional face to slip a little bit because I was like why performance lifestyle is being brought into it and I got really annoyed about it and I kind of cut off someone when they were talking about it but other than that I just try to keep professional. (Amy, Interview 7).

Therefore, it was apparent that controlling one's emotions was not a straightforward process and the practitioners often encountered a range of challenges in their interactions with the contextual stakeholders. Consequently, practitioners were often required to seek additional support outside the context of their work setting to manage themselves and their practice better. In one such example, Amy reflected:

> My emotional outlet is another psychologist in *[city]* who offers me some emotional support because I cannot get that through anyone in *[sport]*. I would not like to talk to people in this context about how I feel, and it sounds a little bit extreme. Still, through the *[sporting institute]* we have like counselling support, and I am aware that this situation was quite stressful for me. Although I feel much better about this, I still think that I might go and talk to someone who is completely unrelated to the situation where I can offload a little bit because I just do not have

> anyone to offload to here and yeah I have been thinking about this in the last few weeks. I think it might be a smart decision that will allow me to manage my emotions better outside the context so I will be better when I am in the context to not be getting emotional. I will be able to maintain my professional face. (Amy, Interview 7).

Overall, the sentiments outlined reiterated the significance of maintaining positive working relationships with contextual stakeholders. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners looked to control their emotions during their interactions with the stakeholders and ensure that their frustrations did not drive them. Several practitioners acknowledged that as they progressed in their careers, they learned how to understand their own emotions and act logically, rather than having an emotionally charged response. As such, the practitioners developed an ability to maintain a professional face and refrain from expressing their true emotions and thoughts. However, the reflective accounts regarding practitioners' ability of *managing the self* further exemplified the challenges to practitioners' well-being. While, similarly to Beth, Amy had access to professional support both inside and outside of their applied context, it needs to be highlighted that such situation was an exception rather than a norm. As such, the accounts presented within the present thesis pose additional questions for the governing bodies and professional institutions within applied sport psychology, encouraging them to consider available support for the practitioners striving to meet the demands of their role.

4.6. Conclusion

The objective of the present chapter was to present practitioners' sense making of their career stories to illustrate the contextual and situational factors impacting upon their actions within sporting organisations. Significant attention was also given to enhancing an understanding of how applied sport psychologists experience their interactions and relationships with the key contextual stakeholders. The superordinate theme of *finding one's place* demonstrated a range of unexpected challenges faced by the practitioners in the early stages of their career. Several of these challenges were associated with the demands of working alongside a range of stakeholders. Such factors encountered within applied setting, in turn, led to experiences of *reality shock* and various negative emotions. Therefore, the account of practice outlining the initial applied experiences presented such period in practitioners' career as particularly daunting. Indeed, it was clear that the practitioners experienced high levels of stress that stemmed from the pressures of forging a career with applied sport psychology.

Considering the encountered challenges, it is here the significance of practitioners' *passion for sport and working with people* became apparent. More specifically, it started to become clear that such passion was not only a source of motivations that encouraged the practitioners to pursue a career in applied sport psychology, but also played a key role in practitioners' ability to remain within the profession. Indeed, all practitioners reiterated how they were willing to overcome the encountered obstacles to forge a career that they would truly enjoy. Also, several practitioners reiterated that they would not be able to demonstrate the same level of resilience and dedication while striving for a career outside sport. As such, *passion for sport and working with people* has been identified as one of the key aspects underlying practitioners sense making of applied situations.

The perseverance on the part of the practitioners started to bring anticipated rewards. More specifically, due to an extended engagement with applied situations, practitioners developed their knowledge and understanding of sporting context and people operating within it. Such *experiential learning*, in turn, played a vital role in practitioners' ability to overcome the initial *reality shock* and lack of preparation for the demands of applied practice. As a result, the practitioners became better equipped to deal with the challenges of working with a range of stakeholders. In particular, the practitioners enhanced their ability of forging relationships within their respective settings. As a consequence of such actions the practitioners managed to enhance the importance of their voice within the sporting organisations.

The *experiential learning,* therefore, was a key aspect impacting upon practitioners' sense-making of their interactions and relationships with contextual stakeholders. Indeed, it was clear that practitioners thinking evolved as a result of enhanced applied experiences. Such a progress was particular apparent in practitioners sense making of challenging key stakeholders and gaining social recognition. More specifically, while in the early stages of their career the practitioners were reluctant to express alternative opinions, in the later stages of their journey they understood that the elite sporting settings valued individuals who could articulate a different point of view. Also, while being reluctant to chasing recognition during initial experiences, with time the practitioners understood the importance of their image in the eyes of key contextual stakeholders, striving to be perceived in a certain way.

The actions resulting from *experiential learning* may hold a particular significance within sport psychology, illustrating strategies that practitioners could adapt to enhance their ability to survive and strive within applied context. More detail analysis of such strategies is presented in the following sections of the present thesis were working of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) and Goffman (1966) are utilised as a theoretical lens enhancing the interpretations of practitioners' career stories.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter's main objective is to theoretically analyse and interpret the participants' lived experiences of practice presented within the previous chapter. To achieve this, Kelchtermans' inter-related writings (e.g., Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2018) were utilised as a theoretical lens to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of practitioners' subjective understandings of situational and contextual factors encountered within everyday practice. While Kelchtermans' work originated within the context of classroom teaching, as outlined previously within Chapter 2, a variety of ideas have been successfully used by scholars of coaching science (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015) and applied sport psychology (e.g., Rowley et al., 2018). This is not to suggest that Kelchtermans provided the best or only way to examine the social complexity inherited within applied sporting context, however, such an approach echoes the belief that Kelchtermans' workings hold a potential for facilitating theory building efforts around this topic (Rowley et al., 2018).

To enhance the analytical clarity, the present chapter has been divided into three subsections, which correspond to different categories of practice proposed by Kelchtermans (2018), namely: narrating, navigating, and negotiating. Such a structure serves to highlight how practitioners' self-understanding develops over time, as well as simultaneously influences their actions and professional choices across time. It is anticipated that this approach will enhance readers' understanding of how the practitioners perceived certain situations, interpreted them, and decided upon what to do and how to act accordingly. In order to fully appreciate the micropolitical reality of applied sport psychology contexts however, readers of the present thesis are encouraged to acknowledge the inextricably intertwined nature of these three key processes. Furthermore, whilst the discussion offered here centres around the professional experiences of applied sport psychologists specifically, the interpretations presented here do not solely aim at unpacking and theorising practitioners' experiences within the field of sport psychology alone. Instead, this chapter strives to advance the broader understanding of the micropolitical aspects of practice within sporting organisations. To achieve this, the career stories shared by the practitioners sampled within the present thesis have been interpreted from more than a multi-theoretical and multi-disciplinary perspective.

5.2. Narrating

The preceding chapter outlined a range of events, situations and encounters shared by practitioners in relation to their respective timelines of applied practice. Such accounts captured the different phases of practitioners' careers, providing a detailed picture of contextual and situational experiences. Drawing on the work of Kelchtermans (2018), it was apparent that while talking about their job experiences and professional lives, the practitioners interviewed within the present thesis were engaged in a process of 'storytelling'. Also, it was clear that the descriptions of time, place and people involved in different events were not a simple representation of facts. Instead, the practitioners presented their sense-making of encountered situations often explicitly expressing any corresponding emotions experienced in practice at that time.

To enhance an understanding of practitioners' subjective understanding of situational and contextual factors encountered within everyday practice Kelchtermans' 'personal interpretative framework' (2005,

2009a, 2009b) was utilised as a theoretical lens to support both data collection and subsequent data analysis processes. Within the framework, two different, yet interconnected components, were identified. The normative, evaluative, and motivational ideas that constitute one's sense of self at a particular point in time were characterised as one's 'professional self-understanding'. Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) identified five components that collectively comprise one's 'professional self-understanding', these are 'self-image' (i.e. "the way teachers' typify themselves as teachers" p. 261), 'self-esteem' (i.e. "the teacher's appreciation of his or her actual job performances" p. 262), 'task perception' (i.e. "the teacher's idea of what constitutes his or her professional programme, his or her tasks and duties in order to do a good job" p. 262), 'job motivation' (i.e. "the motives or drives that make people choose to become a teacher, to stay in teaching or to give it up for another career" p. 262), and 'future perspectives' (i.e. "teacher's expectations about his or her future in the job" p. 263).

On the other hand, an individual's 'personal interpretative framework' entails the professional know-how of 'subjective educational theory', defined as "one's knowledge and beliefs about how one can make teaching work" (Kelchtermans, 2011, pp. 121-122). 'Subjective educational theory' was described as a set of personal knowledge, individual insight and understanding derived from formal education, and beliefs, person-based and idiosyncratic convictions derived from various practical experiences, that individuals use to guide their decisions and actions in practice (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Also, 'subjective educational theory' represents an individual's perceptions of most appropriate actions in a given situation and underlines what individuals consider to 'work for them' or be 'true in practice'. As such, Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) suggested that 'subjective educational theory' reflects one's personal answers to the questions: "how should I deal with this particular situation?' (what to do?) and 'why should I do it that way?' (why do I think that action is appropriate now?)" (Kelchtermans, 2009a, p. 264).

Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) purposefully avoided any suggestion of identity within their workings, arguing that the term implied a static essence and ignored the dynamic and biographical sense of understanding (Kelchtermans, 2009a). Therefore, Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) rejected the notion of the real self, choosing to acknowledge instead that self-understanding is inherent within the act of telling, and can only account for associations made in accordance with contextual circumstances. Instead, Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) used the word 'self-understanding' to refer to both the understanding one has of oneself at a certain moment in time ('product'), as well as the fact that this 'product' results from an ongoing 'process' of making sense of one's experiences and their impact on the self. The aim of the present subsection, therefore, is to theoretically interpret the ongoing individual and collective sense-making, as well as the creation, recreation, and alteration of practitioners' normative beliefs.

5.2.1. The significance of self-understanding

At a fundamental level, practitioners collectively spoke about the significant impact of their earlier life experiences, highlighting how their prior desires to pursue an athletic career, had in turn led them to direct their passion and love for sport towards their professional careers within sport psychology. Such reflections can be seen to exemplify the practitioners 'job motivation' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) which is a conative component of 'professional self-understanding', in that it encapsulates what makes one to choose, remain in, and/or leave their chosen profession. Indeed, by adapting Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) interrelated writing as a theoretical lens, it became apparent that the practitioners' interests in sport

psychology were sparked by their desire to enhance their athletic performances and understand the principles associated with consistent and sustainable high-performance levels. It became clear, therefore, that sport participation and interest in elite athletic performance were crucial factors that encouraged practitioners to pursue a career in applied sport psychology.

Several authors within sport psychology literature highlighted the significance of prior sport participation on early-career practitioners' perceptions of their role (e.g., Cropley et al., 2007; Rowley et al., 2012; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock et al., 2008). Indeed, these auto-ethnographical accounts of practice illustrated that while aspiring to become a professional athlete, practitioners cherished an opportunity to work with elite athletes and support them in improving their performances (Cropley et al., 2007; Rowley et al., 2012). In one such example, Cropley et al. (2007) reported that the first author's personal athletic experiences, both at amateur and professional level, gave them first-hand knowledge of the demands placed on elite athletes. Such experiences of challenges faced by sport performers encouraged the first author to pursue a career in sport psychology and support the next generation of athletes in their pursuit of personal and professional development (Cropley et al., 2007).

Scholars have reported similar experiences within the sports coaching literature (e.g., Potrac et al., 2013; Purdy & Potrac, 2016). For example, Purdy and Potrac (2016) presented lived experiences of an athletics coach who, after failing to achieve their dream of competing at the Olympic Games, looked to fulfil their ambition in a coaching role. From such a perspective, the authors highlighted that while falling short on achieving sporting aspirations, the athletics coach felt that they had an unfinished business in sport and a transition into coaching fitted with their view of themself at that moment in time (Purdy & Potrac, 2016). Similarly, Potrac et al. (2013) reported that upon realising that professional playing career was out of their reach, the first author craved involvement in football. Also, the first author reflected that a coaching role served to fulfil their ego and provided them with a source of pride. In the first author own words, "I felt like a member of a special club, I wore the kit; I was a part of the inner workings. Friends and family were impressed. Dad was pleased for me. I was happy." (Potrac et al., 2013, p. 79).

Similarly, reflections shared within the present thesis illuminated that while falling short of achieving initial sporting aspirations, the practitioners enjoyed operating within sporting settings in a different capacity. Indeed, love of being involved in competitions, a desire to work within a fast-paced environment and performing under pressure were crucial aspects inspiring practitioners to enter the profession. Several practitioners expressed that while working within sporting organisations they experienced high level of job satisfaction and enjoyed overcoming the challenges encountered in such settings. As such, it was apparent that while the practitioners were able to deliver psychological services in various settings (e.g., business, education, arts), their primary preference was always likely to involve working within the sporting industry.

While such sense-making provided a more comprehensive understanding of practitioners' 'job motivation' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b), the interpretations of practical experience can be enhanced further by drawing on teachers' prior experiences as pupils (Kelchtermans & Deketelaere, 2016). Although the differences between experiences of playing sport (which is non-compulsory) and teachers' experiences of being pupils (which is compulsory) are acknowledged, the in-depth exploration of experience may hold

significant implication in developing an understanding of practitioners' 'self-understanding'. More specifically, scholars in education suggested that teachers' negative experiences throughout their education may strengthen their motivation to build positive relationships with their pupils (Kelchtermans & Deketelaere, 2016). Indeed, Kelchtermans and Deketelaere (2016) suggested that teachers might be motivated to develop such positive relationships to help pupils avoid similarly negative school experiences to those which they once had themselves. From such a perspective, it may be suggested that due their own negative sporting experiences, such as a lack of sport psychology support during engagement with competitive/grassroots sport, and disappointment in not fulfilling their own sporting careers (i.e. falling short from becoming an established professional athlete and competing at the highest level), practitioners instead looked to provide high-quality services to ensure that sport psychology was not ignored during athletes' current sporting journeys. As such, by drawing on the literature from other discipline, it became apparent that practitioners lived experienced shaped their beliefs that sport psychology support was an essential component of athletes' development which could hold a career-defining and/or life-enhancing impact.

Also, scholars in education recognised that teachers' practice starts quite early in their lives, and that beginning teachers effectively start their careers with about 15 years' worth of experience in school as pupils and students themselves (Kelchtermans, 2018). As such, it was suggested that as a result of this 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Kelchtermans, 2018) teachers develop a particular understanding of the job, as well as of themselves as potential future teachers. Research in education, therefore, provided a novel theoretical lens that informed the sense-making of career stories shared within the present thesis. From such a perspective, it was evident that the practitioners sampled within the present thesis, may have in fact, developed conative views and beliefs as to what it means to be a sport psychologist throughout their own prior sporting experiences. As a result of 'apprenticeship of observation' (Kelchtermans, 2018), practitioners entered the accreditation process and their respective professional roles with a personal system of knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, the multidisciplinary analysis performed here illuminated that early life experiences played a significant role in shaping practitioners' person-based, idiosyncratic convictions, ultimately shaping their 'task perception' and wider 'subjective educational theory' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b).

Continuing to follow the lead from scholars in education, sport psychology practice can be compared to teaching by recognising the two professions' moral dimension. Indeed, the moral aspects of teaching received a significant amount of attention in educational literature (cf., Ayers, 1993; Goodlad et al., 1990; Jakcson et al., 1993; Noblit & Dempsey, 1996; Noddings, 2005). Scholars in education suggested that teaching should be understood as a moral activity (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002) or moral endeavour (Fenstermacher, 1990), underlined by a relationship between two or more individuals with a view to changing the behaviours of others to attain the desired end. From such a perspective, it was recognised that teachers' actions are always underlined by matters of what is fair, right, just, and virtuous (Fenstermacher, 1990). Also, it was argued that teacher's morality was underlined by their concern with the "preservation, growth, and shaping of an acceptable child" (Elbaz, 1992, p. 422). Thus, it was recognised that teaching practice is characterised by a moral commitment to care (Fenstermacher, 1990).

Studies investigating moral aspects of teaching practice recognised that teachers often act like mothers to nurture students' whole character and their overall growth as a person (Isenbarger & Zembylas,

2006; Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Vogt, 2002). Such personal care demonstrated by teachers is underlined by their ability to deal with students as whole human beings and responding to them as emotional, moral, social, cultural, and cognitive beings (Rosiek, 2003). According to this approach, "a true caring relationship depends on a teacher's ability to identify and meet students' needs and is affirmed by students' confirmation of that caring" (James, 2012, p. 166). As a relational phenomenon, caring demands that the teacher knows students well enough to be able to effectively respond to their needs, desires, and struggles (Vogt, 2002). According to Nodding (2012), a caring relationship requires "motivational displacement" (p. 772), whereby teachers are prepared to replace their own needs and desires with those of their students.

By drawing upon research in education, the similarities between the moral aspects of teaching and sport psychology practice became apparent. Indeed, it was clear that practitioners felt personal responsibility for the people they supported, and grounded their decisions and actions in practice on their moral responsibility and duty of care towards the athletes they worked with. All practitioners sampled here reiterated the significance of helping people develop and supporting them in their efforts to become the best version of themselves. Practitioners expressed that they experienced considerable job satisfaction, and a sense of achievement and pride when observing athletes accomplishing their goals and achieving success. However, whilst practitioners strived to support athletes in overcoming issues related to sport injury, performance failure and overthinking, they also looked to help the athletes deal with more general negative life events such as family issues, relationships with parents/partners and low social support. Therefore, the practitioners cared for athletes' holistic development, providing support regarding all aspects of athletes' life. Such an approach was particularly evident in the reflections provided by those practitioners working with youth athletes. For instance, Alice expressed how they looked to support youth athletes to compete at the highest level possible and ensure that they would be successful in business, education, or other areas of life if falling short of achieving their sporting dreams.

The sense-making of practitioners lived experiences can be further supported by drawing on the sport psychology literature. More specifically, several publications acknowledged the moral dimension of practice and the significance of establishing a caring and empathetic relationship with clients (e.g., Andersen, 2009; Chandler et al., 2014; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Sharp & Hodge, 2011). Also, it was acknowledged that sport psychology provision is a value-laden and ethical endeavour (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). It was recognised, therefore, that sport psychologists often form caring, noncontingent, and positive relationships with athletes, providing them with space to express their weaknesses, doubts, and fears (Andersen, 2009). Caring and an unconditional positive regard were identified as the most fundamental values that all sport psychologists should embrace (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). As such, sport psychology support was compared to caring, people-oriented professions such as medicine or psychology (Chandler et al., 2014).

The multidisciplinary analysis adopted within the present thesis, therefore, identified practitioners' moral values and beliefs as vital aspects shaping their 'subjective educational theory' and 'task perception' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). More specifically, by drawing on education and sport psychology literature, the interpretation of practitioners' reflective accounts demonstrated that their personal answers to the questions: "how should I deal with this particular situation? (what to do?) and why should I do it that way? (why do I think that action is appropriate now?)" (Kelchtermans, 2009b, p. 264) were underlined

by their desire to act in keeping with the best interests of the athletes they worked with. Whilst their answers to questions such as: “What must I do as a proper sport psychologist? What are the essential tasks I have to perform in order to have the justified that I am doing well?” (Kelchtermans, 2009b) were underlined by value-laden choices, moral considerations, and the practitioner’s perceived duty of care.

While the moral dimension of sport psychology provision played a key role in practitioners’ sense-making of encountered situations, the career stories presented within this thesis also demonstrated how they started to recognise the importance of attempting to incorporate sport psychology provision as part of the day-to-day functioning of the sporting organisation. Indeed, all practitioners reiterated the importance of such an approach in attempts to help enhance the psychological development of the athletes. Practitioners strived to move away from working in isolation, delivering workshops and consulting with athlete’s one-to-one, instead seeking to work with various stakeholders in a collaborative manner. This included educating coaches on the sport psychology principles, supporting them in session design, and coaching interventions. Such sense-making was particularly evident in Alice's reflective accounts, who articulated their efforts to increase coaches’ awareness of psychological characteristics that they want to develop within the athletes, reinforcing the psychological aspect of sporting performance.

Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) conceptualisation of ‘self-understanding’ as both ‘product’ and ‘process’ of sense-making, served to recognise that with experience and prolonged engagement with an applied context, the practitioners’ ‘task perception’ started to shift towards the importance of working in collaboration with other professionals (e.g., coaches, physiotherapists, sport scientists). Indeed, as practitioners progressed in their career, they started to recognise that their goals and norms of supporting athletes to fulfil their potential (the ‘what?’) could arguably be best achieved by working ‘through others’ (the ‘how to?’). This was particularly evident in the interview with Dan, who reflected upon their realisation that psychology, instead of going from them to the athlete, could be better going through a coach and have a broader impact. Therefore, upon entering the sporting organisations, practitioners understanding of sport psychology intensified, modified, strengthened, and was challenged as a result of encountered applied situations (Kelchtermans, 2018).

While several practitioners spoke about their relative success of integrating sport psychology into the daily routines of their respective organisations, they also experienced a range of barriers and less positive encounters with contextual stakeholders. Several stories of practice illustrated that stakeholders were often seen to be reluctant to work in collaboration and/or did not possess the required skills for collaborative work. Such narratives illuminated the significance of interactions with key stakeholders on practitioners’ sense-making of everyday practice realities. It is here some of Kelchtermans ideas played a key role in enhancing an understanding of practitioners’ professional self. More specifically, upon analysing teachers' narrative biographies across a multitude of educational settings, Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) emphasised the inter-personal and relational nature of the profession, highlighting the influences that other social actors (i.e., students, parents, principals) could have upon a teacher’s sense of self. As such, Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) suggested that ‘professional self-understanding’ is not only influenced by the individual’s perception of themselves in their working role at a particular moment in time, but also by how they believe other people perceive their qualities and capacities within that role.

Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) ideas, therefore, help to underline the impact that interactions with stakeholders can have on the way sport psychology practitioners were found to view themselves within their own respective professional roles here. The interpretations of career stories from a perceptive of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) writings, therefore, revealed that the key contextual stakeholders influenced the way that practitioners self-evaluated their 'self-esteem' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). As such, it became apparent that the balance between 'self-image' (what one is doing?) and 'task perception' (what one ought to be doing?) was influenced by feedback received from contextual stakeholders and the way practitioners' job performances were perceived by others. It became evident, therefore, that negative public judgement associated with stakeholders' misperceptions of sport psychology had an especially devastating impact on practitioner's 'self-esteem' (Kelchtermans, 2009b). Such a negative impact of stakeholders' interactions had a particularly damaging impact in the early stages of career. Indeed, when entering the sporting organisations for the first time, practitioners did not feel at ease in their role, often were overthinking their interactions with the contextual stakeholders and questioned their abilities as an applied sport psychologist.

Similarly, contextual stakeholders' negative perceptions regarding the significance of sport psychology provision impacted the practitioner's 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005; 2009a; 2009b). Indeed, *working alongside allied professions* was often characterised by stakeholders passing on athletes and paying 'lip service' rather than working in collaboration. Such interactions led the practitioners within the present thesis to develop a self-perception of being a 'bolt-on service' and serving to 'tick a box' on governing body requirements. This was particularly evident in practitioners' reflections regarding their experiences of working with stakeholders who in their mind had good knowledge and understanding of sport psychology principles, with Alice articulating their frustrations associated with working with a coach who completed a master's degree in sport psychology. It was clear, therefore, that stakeholders played a significant role in practitioners' sense-making of their time in context, influencing how they perceived applied situations and guided their actions within their respective settings.

Also, the ideas discussed within educational literature recognise the significant influence of contextual stakeholders' perceptions regarding sport psychologists' role on practitioners 'future perspectives' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, the sense-making of lived experiences within the present thesis, revealed how practitioners recognised that to remain in their role and progress their careers, they were required to demonstrate the impact of their work to key decision makers with their respective organisations. As such, it was evident that the early stages of practitioners' careers were characterised by a quest for social recognition and a desire to develop a positive 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) in the eyes of the key contextual stakeholders. Indeed, it was clear that practitioners sampled here possessed high levels of awareness as to how key stakeholders might judge their actions within the applied context, with practitioners adopting a future-oriented and self-preserving perspective within their interactions. Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) ideas regarding 'future perspectives', therefore, helped to understand how practitioners' actions in the present were influenced by their expectations about career progression, with several practitioners emphasising that they strived to be perceived as doing a good job.

Overall, by drawing on the work of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) it became clear how practitioners of the present thesis discovered their deeply held normative beliefs, enhancing an understanding

of key aspects that mattered to them in their job. However, the interpretations outlined here also demonstrated that 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was not a static entity but a fluid construct dependent on changes in circumstances and practitioners' interpretations of events. Indeed, it became clear that while this framework guided practitioners' interpretations and actions in particular situations (contexts), at the same time, it was modified by and resulted from such meaningful interactions (sense-making) with that context. Therefore, it was apparent that 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was both a condition for, and result of, the meaningful interactions between the practitioners and the social, cultural and structural working conditions constituting their job context (Kelchtermans, 2009a). Similarly, whilst 'subjective educational theory' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was based on practitioners' early life experiences, it also involved a constant 'process' of judging and deciding upon the most appropriate actions in a given situation. The evolving nature of 'professional self-understanding' and 'subjective educational theory' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was particularly evident in practitioners' sense-making of 'task perception' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b).

The understanding of how practitioners use and apply the 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) in workplace context may also hold significant implications in enhancing an understanding of micropolitical aspects of practice within sporting organisations. Such an understanding, in turn, may provide a greater clarity regarding one's ability to engage in a process of judging and deliberation, reading the situations before deciding on which approach may be most appropriate (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Greater insight into such processes and the significance of the 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) on practitioners micropolitical actions are outlined in the following sections of the present chapter.

5.2.2. Inherent vulnerability of applied practice

To enhance an understanding of what contextual and situational factors are perceived to impact the actions of applied practitioners, the reflective accounts were also interpreted from a perspective of 'critical incidents', 'critical persons' and 'critical phases' (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996). Such sense-making demonstrated that practitioners found rather than made their respective working conditions (Kelchtermans, 2018). Within educational literature, 'critical incidents' were defined as "key events in an individual's life, and around which pivotal decision revolve. They provoke the individual into selecting particular kinds of actions, which lead in particular directions" (Sikes et al., 1985, as cited in Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996, p. 9). Scholars in education also suggested that 'critical incidents' represent the "complex interactions between teachers and their personal goals, norms, values, on the one hand, and contextual demands on the other" (Kelchtermans, 2009a, p. 38). Finally, Kelchtermans (1996) suggested that 'critical incidents' represent a turning point or key experiences in individuals' careers as they questioned the status quo and normal daily routines. As a result, such experiences were often associated with provoking emotions of distress, unease, doubt, and uncertainty (Kelchtermans, 1996).

By drawing on research Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1996), it was clear that becoming a member of an organisation was a 'critical phase' during which practitioners did not select the 'critical persons' (i.e., coaches and other stakeholders) that they were required to work alongside. Most importantly, practitioners did not control contextual stakeholders' past experiences with sport psychology and their

corresponding perceptions of the discipline. A similar argument can be made about contextual stakeholders' values and beliefs regarding athletic development and training methods required for performance excellence. Indeed, the requirements of *working alongside allied professions* demonstrated how practitioners were often required to work with stakeholders who evaluated situations from their own disciplinary perspective, which often resulted in disagreements over shared goals. Therefore, the present thesis supported previous findings reported within sport psychology literature, recognising that multidisciplinary teams' members may often approach problems from different perspectives and disagree on the most appropriate solutions (Reid et al., 2004). It was also apparent that the stakeholders possessed a range of misconceptions of sport psychology and were often reluctant to work in collaboration. As such, the interactions with key contextual stakeholders, especially during early careers, often challenged practitioners deeply held beliefs and normative views regarding the significance of sport psychology provision and its place within the sporting organisations' functioning.

It was clear, therefore, that the interactions with stakeholders often represented 'critical incidents' (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996) in practitioner's lived experiences. Also, it was evident that such interactions often triggered *experiences of self-doubt* and 'praxis shock' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). More specifically, upon investigating beginning teachers' career stories, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) recognised that a confrontation with the realities and responsibilities of being a classroom teacher often led teachers to question their beliefs and ideas about teaching, putting them to the test, challenging some of them, and confirming others. Within the present thesis, practitioners experienced a *reality shock* and felt that due limitations in their training they were left to 'sink or swim' upon entering the sporting organisations for the first time. Indeed, several participants questioned the pathway to becoming a sport psychologist, blaming their educational programmes for not providing an accurate portrayal of what they might reasonably expect. It was clear that the practitioners believed that their master's course did not teach them how to work in an applied environment. As a result, in the initial stages of their career, practitioners felt ill-prepared for the demands of service delivery and found themselves thrown into new and unexpected situations.

While the interactions with 'critical persons' (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996) often effected practitioners' 'self-esteem' and 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b), such negative self-evaluations were further intensified by the challenges of demonstrating impact. Indeed, the interpretations of reflective accounts illuminated that the practitioners were able to, only to a minimal degree, prove their effectiveness, with several practitioners reiterating that they were not able to take credit for athletes' achievements. The accounts of practice presented a range of complex factors which underlined performance excellence, highlighting how practitioners often found it challenging to point towards objective outcomes of their work. Here, similarities can be drawn to educational literature (e.g., Kelchtermans, 2009b, 2011). Indeed, scholars in education acknowledged that students' outcomes are only partially determined by teachers' actions, it may be difficult to prove the extent to which students' results can be attributed to teacher's achievements, and that it is equally challenging to know when the consequences of teachers' actions may occur and become visible to all (Kelchtermans, 2009b, 2011).

By drawing on teachers' experiences (Kelchtermans, 2009b, 2011), the interpretations presented here allow for a better conceptualisation of some of the challenges often encountered within applied sport psychology. Indeed, by drawing comparisons to teaching, it became apparent that practitioners interviewed

here possessed a limited ability to justify their contribution towards the pursuit of organisational goals (e.g., winning medals), and demonstrating that the performances of the athletes were directly linked to their actions. Such sense-making, therefore, helped to realise why the position of sport psychology within a sporting environment could be easily questioned, and could be seen to be particularly vulnerable when the organisation was required to make changes (Gilmore et al., 2018; Nesti, 2010). It also served to make a better sense of practitioners' lived experiences and enhance an understanding as to why practitioners were often seen to feel powerless, threatened and questioned by contextual stakeholders without being able to properly defend themselves (Kelchtermans, 2005).

The novel approach adopted within the present thesis to better conceptualise the day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology proven to be a source of fruitful findings. Indeed, the interrelated writing of Kelchtermans provided a theoretical lens to discover elements of practice hidden from previous lines of inquiry. In particular, by drawing on Kelchtermans ideas, it became apparent that practitioners' time in context was characterised by a sense of vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996, 2005, 2007, 2011). Despite the widely acknowledged challenges that sport psychologists may face in practice (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015), the concept of vulnerability has rarely been acknowledged or discussed extensively within the applied literature base (Uphill & Hemmings, 2017). This gap was recognised by Uphill and Hemmings (2017) who published critical reflections to "develop a clear picture about the construct of vulnerability and create a stimulus for research and debate on this topic" (p. 300). Vulnerability has been described from an 'etic' perspective that defines vulnerability based on genetics, and an 'emic' perspective that sees vulnerability as a facet of lived experiences (Uphill & Hemmings, 2017). From an 'emic' perspective, vulnerability is perceived as a human condition where all humans can be vulnerable (Uphill & Hemmings, 2017). Thus, it was suggested that sport psychology literature should acknowledge vulnerability as an experiential state that all practitioners might encounter (Uphill & Hemmings, 2017).

While the suggestions made by Uphill and Hemmings (2017) were recognised to resonate with the experiences of the practitioners sampled here, the present thesis followed the lead of Kelchtermans to better understand the concept of vulnerability. More specifically, while the interpretations of reflective accounts illustrated that practitioners experienced intense emotions of distress and self-doubt in their interactions with contextual stakeholders, it was also recognised that vulnerability should not be understood as a purely emotional state or experience, but rather as a structural characteristic of the profession (Kelchtermans, 2009b). Indeed, the interpretations of how *influences from above* could impact upon practitioners' sense-making revealed that during the early stages of their career, practitioners were not able to effectively influence the administrative and policy decisions of sporting organisations. This included the allocation of funding, which was directly linked to the number of job opportunities available within the applied sport psychology. It was evident that several decisions regarding practitioners' role and responsibilities (e.g., type of contract and working hours) were made by the senior management team within their respective sporting organisations. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that their destiny was in the hands of key contextual stakeholders (e.g., performance directors, chairmen, coaches) who often decided if practitioners' contracts were renewed or terminated. It was evident that the practitioners working conditions were largely

imposed on them as they were required to operate within sporting organisations with particular legal regulations, infrastructure, and staff population (Kelchtermans, 2009b, 2011).

This was particularly evident for practitioners working within Olympic sports, who expressed that their role was often dependent on the funding from governing bodies (e.g., UK Sport), which was related to athletes' performances that they supported previously. For example, in one of the interviews, Steve highlighted that their livelihood was defined by the people they supported and their corresponding sporting results (i.e., the number of medals). Reflecting on their experiences, Steve reiterated that if an organisation was required to make financial cuts, the position of the sport psychologists was the first to go. Such sentiments were echoed by Tom, who also recalled a situation where a senior sport psychologist lost their job due to the sport losing its funding. Indeed, UK Sport's (2019) role is to strategically invest National Lottery and Exchequer income to maximise UK Olympic and Paralympic athletes' performance. More specifically, the central funding is distributed to sporting National Governing Bodies (NGBs), allowing them to employ support personnel (i.e., world-class coaches, sport science and medicine practitioners) to work with the athletes and ensure that they are among the best prepared in the world. Such funding is awarded based on an Olympic cycle (four years), and medals measure the success won, the number of medallists developed, and the quality of systems and processes in place.

While several practitioners sampled within the present study worked in positions independent from UK Sport funding, they still experienced similar pressures. For example, Dan recalled that their football academy sport psychologist role was dependent on the first team's results. More specifically, Dan expressed how their position was 'on the line' due to the first team failing to gain promotion, which resulted in budget reviews and cuts across all football club departments. Similarly, Steve recalled how they lost their job at a football club academy due to a change of the first team manager. It was apparent, therefore, that the role of applied sport psychologists operating within sporting organisations was characterised by 'precariousness' (Kalleberg, 2009). That is, such work was "uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker" (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 236). Indeed, the present thesis echoed the recent developments within sport psychology literature that highlighted the "sacking pandemic" (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 272) and poor job security inherited within the profession (e.g., Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Nesti, 2010). In particular, sport psychology scholars acknowledged how often changes of the personnel within sporting organisations might negatively influence their own role as a sport psychologist, with them seen to be at the mercy of the new stakeholders coming in (Gilmore et al., 2018). Several scholars also reported that key decision-makers might often perceive sport psychology as common sense, and sport organisations can exist without it (Glimore et al., 2018; Nesti, 2010).

Therefore, the educational literature proven to be a fascinating conceptualisation tool that served to support the sense-making of lived experiences shared within the present thesis. More specifically, by drawing on Kelchetrmans and colleagues' ideas regarding 'critical incidents', 'critical persons', 'critical phases' and the notion of 'constructional vulnerability', it became clear that the development of practitioners' self-understanding and agency in their job was not simply a free and voluntaristic construction. Instead, interpretations from such a perspective revealed how practitioners were always required to deal with already existing conditions of their respective settings (Kelchtermans, 2018). Kelchtermans and colleagues' ideas, therefore, allowed for a more detail and nuanced understanding of practitioners' experiences of *finding one's*

place. Therefore, the novel theoretical perspective adopted here allowed for the discovery of vital elements of everyday practice that have not received any attention in the existing literature base. More specifically, the interpretations of career stories demonstrated how practitioners' ability to decide on what to do and how to act was never merely individual or idiosyncratic, but rather stemmed from the broader culture, institutional rules, and organisational structures in which the practitioners were embedded (Kelchtermans, 2018). This, in turn, illustrated several ambiguities inherent to the role of an applied sport psychologist, presenting practitioners' self-understanding as both a 'process' and a 'product', as situated between agency and structure, and as caught between intentionality and vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 2018). Therefore, the present thesis serves to have significant contributions to knowledge development within sport psychology and enhances the understanding of sport psychologist professional development (Tod & Lavalle, 2011; Tod et al., 2011; Tod et al., 2017).

5.2.3. Summary

The present section outlined the contextual and situational factors encountered by the practitioners operating within sporting organisations. The 'narrated' stories of practice shared here, illustrated the complex and problematic nature of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, the interpretations of career stories demonstrated that 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) developed both in relation to time (biography) and space (organisational context, social professional relationships with contextual stakeholders) (Kelchtermans, 2018). Also, it was apparent that such process was associated with a sense of ambiguity on the part of the practitioner. More specifically, it was clear that as the practitioners progressed throughout their careers, the way they conceived themselves in a particular point in time was both a 'product' and 'process' of interactive sense-making. As such, 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) continued to develop throughout practitioners' career and often looked or felt different over time (Kelchtermans, 2018). Also, it was clear that while 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) played a key role in determining practitioner's perceived 'agency' in their role (i.e., their ability to perceive situations, deliberate, judge and chose how to act). However, practitioners' self-understanding was never individual or idiosyncratic. Instead, it stemmed from the broader cultural and organisational 'structures' in which practitioners were situated (Kelchtermans, 2018). Finally, whilst their developing 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was underlined by the moral and ethical dimension of applied sport psychology practice, practitioners' decisions and responsibility for athletes were often out of their control. It was clear, therefore, that practitioners' 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was caught between 'intentionality' and 'structural vulnerability' (Kelchtermans, 2018).

5.3. Navigating

The objective of the present section is to further explore the apparent significance of time and space on practitioners' evolving sense of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). To achieve this, greater attention is given here to the concept of working conditions (Kelchtermans, 2009b, 2011). In particular, this subsection focuses on analysing how practitioners' developing 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was seen to impact upon their perceived ability to react to, deal with and adapt to their encountered working conditions. Such analysis, therefore, focuses on presenting how practitioners explored and recognised the complex realities of sporting organisations. Next,

the significance of deeply held normative beliefs is outlined, demonstrating how practitioners strived to preserve and protect their 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) in given conditions. Such contextual interactions have been defined here as 'navigating', which in the context of schools was metaphorically compared to "taking a sailing boat between obstacles (for example, people, regulations, organisational structures, and procedures, etc.), trying to find and use the wind to stay on course, or at least to keep the course in line with where one wants to go" (Kelchtermans, 2018, p. 238).

Therefore, by conceptualising the process of 'navigating' encountered working conditions, the present subsection aims to enhance an understanding of 'micropolitical literacy' (i.e., one's ability to effectively 'read' and 'write' themselves into the micropolitical reality of an organisation) and micropolitical action (i.e., actions that aim to establish, safeguard, or restore desired working conditions). Whilst research in sport coaching presented micropolitics as the strategies aimed at maintaining and/or advancing one's position within a sporting organisation (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones 2009a, 2009b, Thompson et al., 2015), this subsection looks to move such understanding beyond issues regarding job security and career progression. More specifically, 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) is presented here as the heart of micropolitical actions and practitioners' ability to 'navigate' the contextual and situational aspects of their role within sporting organisation.

5.3.1 Learning on the job

Investigating teachers experiences to determine the political aspects of teaching, Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1996) drew associations between micropolitical activity and perceived power position, with the latter referring to the subjective perception one has of their position on a continuum of powerful through to powerless. This continuum, in turn, was defined by teachers' sense-making of their own ability to establish their desired working conditions (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996). Also, the perceived power position was conceptualised in relation to three aspects of that position, namely: experiential power (i.e., job satisfaction); operational power (i.e., an ability to change the situation); and knowledge power (i.e., political acuteness). Drawing on these findings within the present thesis informed the interpretation process and help to recognised that practitioners' attempts of *finding one's place* were underpinned by asymmetrical power relationships. It was apparent that practitioners placed themselves lower down the power continuum and acknowledged that they were less influential than the team's senior members. Such sense-making of sport psychologists' experiences, therefore, echoes the findings documented in sport coaching literature, with scholars recognising key contextual stakeholders (e.g., head coach, manager) as being the ultimate arbitrators of the opportunities and resources available in the sporting organisation (Huggan et al., 2015).

While the working of Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1996) provided a fascinating theoretical perspective on the everyday experiences of applied sport psychologists, the suggested three aspects of perceived power positions (i.e., experiential, operational, and knowledge) seemed somehow limited in understanding how practitioners formed their perceptions of power-powerless continuum. To enhance such understanding, therefore, the interpretations within the present thesis were required to move beyond the educational literature. The interpretations of practitioners' perceptions, therefore, followed the lead of Feddersen et al. (2020) who investigated power relations during a change of culture in an Olympic sports organisation in the United Kingdom. Similarly to Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1996), Feddersen et al.

(2020) assumed that power to be both relational and capillary, emerging through continuous interactions. Also, whilst recognising that power is not a resource, Feddersen et al. (2020) drew on the work of French and Raven (1959) as a means of providing labels to better explain different bases of power. In addition, Feddersen et al. (2020) suggested that the terminology of power proposed by French and Raven (1959) allowed them to deal with a large amount of data collected during a longitudinal study.

Considering the longitudinal nature of the present thesis and a desire to better understand how sport psychologists perceive power relations, the current thesis adopted a similar approach to Feddersen et al. (2020) in using the workings of French and Raven (1959) as a conceptual framework. More specifically, the terminology and definitions proposed by French and Raven (1959) were utilised to better conceptualise the effects that accompany the use of power. The interpretations of practitioners lived experiences, therefore, focused on understanding the five bases of power, namely: reward, coercion, legitimate, expertise, and referent (French & Raven, 1959). It needs be highlighted, however, that this process focused on developing an understanding of power from the ground up, in that the interpretations focused on enhancing the understanding of practitioners' sense-making and were not aimed at solely labelling their experiences.

The approach just outlined played a vital role in enhancing the sense-making of practitioners' experiences of *reality shock.* More specifically, the experiences of practitioners' interactions with contextual stakeholders were understood from a perspective of 'expert power', which results from one's perceptions that the agent has some superior insight or knowledge regarding a particular situation and 'referent power', which is associated with seeing someone as a model worth emulating (French & Raven, 1959). Indeed, it was apparent that 'expert power' was primarily associated with practitioner's perceptions that supervisors and managers, due to their extensive experience, knew how to address given situations correctly (Raven, 2008). It became apparent, therefore, that contextual stakeholders' extensive experience as sport performers and/or coaches played a significant role in influencing practitioners' sense-making of their encounters with such individuals. This was particularly evident in Steve's sense-making who recalled that they did not have the right to disagree with a coach who played in the Premier League and had over 15 years of experience. In a similar vein, 'referent power' proven to be a fruitful analytical tool illustrating how practitioners' recognition of stakeholders' expertise and achievements, displayed in their admiration and desire to match stakeholders' knowledge and dedication. Indeed, several practitioners reflected how they were striving to match the coaches and professionals' efforts they work alongside, continually looking to develop their practice.

Practitioners' interactions with contextual stakeholders were further understood from a perspective of 'reward' (i.e., power whose basis is the ability to reward and positive intensive) and 'coercive power' (i.e., ability to apply punishment and undesirable consequences) (French & Raven, 1959). Analysis from such a perspective demonstrated how practitioners sampled within the present thesis recognised that their position was in the hands of the key contextual stakeholders (i.e., performance director, chairman, manager, head coach). It became evident, therefore, that practitioner's sense-making of their time in context was influenced by key stakeholders 'reward power'. Indeed, all practitioners reiterated how the key decision makers within their respective settings were in position of deciding whether or not to extend a practitioner's contract, provide more funding for sport psychology services and ultimately in deciding upon the future provision of sport psychology within that environment. Simultaneously, key contextual stakeholders were also able to

exercise ‘coercive power’ by terminating practitioners’ contracts or limiting their ability to be fully immersed in the environment. Such interpretations, therefore, provided greater conceptual clarity regarding the aspects impacting upon practitioners perceive power position. Also, by drawing on the different types of power (French & Raven, 1959), the present thesis provided a fascinating insight into the ‘knowledge aspects’ or practitioners ‘perceived power position’ (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996). Indeed, the interpretation of reflective account presented how practitioners desire to forge a career within applied sport psychology and remain in their roles was often influenced by their interactions with the contextual stakeholders, encouraging them to demonstrate compliance to stakeholders’ actions and avoid challenging their opinions (Raven, 2008).

Interpretations of career stories also demonstrated that practitioners were aware and accepted the contextual stakeholders' ‘legitimate power’, accepting their right to demand certain behaviours and actions while feeling obligated to comply (Raven, 2008). According to French and Raven (1959), ‘legitimate power’ is the most obvious form of power that stems from social norms which individuals must obey people in a superior position. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that they should fulfil coaches’ requests, as they oversaw the sporting environment's day-to-day functioning. This was particularly evident in an interview with Tom, who recalled how they felt obligated to deliver workshops requested by the head coach. It was apparent that coaches, by virtue of their position, could dictate the delivery of sport psychology provision and the practitioners due to their lower-level position were required to comply without question.

Following their initial presentation of five sources of power (French & Raven, 1959), Raven (1965) further identified ‘informational power’ as an additional distinctive form of power. According to Raven (1965), ‘information power’ represents an ability to influence based upon the higher power person possessing information that the lower power person is not aware of. Such informational power differences were also associated with possessing information about other people (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). Whilst the stories of practice shared within the present thesis depicted practitioners as holding lower power positions (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996) on all five bases of power reported by French and Raven (1959), they were often found to be in higher ‘informational power’ positions compared to other contextual stakeholders. More specifically, it was apparent that the practitioners paid significant attention to developing their understanding of the contextual stakeholders. As such, the information acquired about other stakeholders allowed the practitioners to give meaning to what to expect of the stakeholders and anticipate what may occur during the interaction.

Such sense-making of practitioners’ time in context may be supported by recent developments within sport psychology literature (e.g., Chandler et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2005; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; McDougall et al., 2015; Tod & Lavallee, 2011; Rowley et al., 2018). More specifically, scholars acknowledged that successful sport psychology provision goes beyond a simple implication of knowledge and technical skills, illuminating the importance of practitioners’ ability to understand the context in which one operates (Chandler et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2005; Fifer et al., 2008; Holder & Winter, 2016; Mellalieu, 2017; Winter & Collins, 2016). In particular, successful sport psychology provision was associated with the practitioner’s ability to acquire ‘contextual intelligence’ (cf., Sternberg, 1985; Terenzini, 1993). According to Brown et al. (2005), for sport psychologists, ‘contextual intelligence’ involves a knowledge of the culture and the context of the specific setting in which the practitioner operates, as well as the formal and informal

political structures—the decision-making processes and customs in a particular governing organisation—together with an understanding of values and attitudes of people at all levels of the organisation.

Whilst a limited number of studies within the sport psychology literature have focused on investigating 'contextual intelligence' directly, several publications have focused on exploring concepts and constructs associated with 'contextual intelligence' and developing contextually appropriate interventions (e.g., Mellalieu, 2017). Such line of inquiry has mainly focused on the significance of understanding the culture of the sport (e.g., Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Eubank et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010) and the political tensions that may arise within the sporting organisation (e.g., McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; McDougall et al., 2015; Reid et al., 2004; Rowley et al., 2018). In one such example, Fifer et al. (2008) documented that during the process of gaining entry, sport psychologists are required to assess the subculture of the sport, understand the politics of the organisation and be aware of the team dynamics. To achieve this, sport psychologists are required to learn who the decision-makers within the environment are, who the leaders are, and who the gatekeepers are (Fifer et al., 2008). More recently, when discussing the observational processes used by applied sport psychologists, Holder and Winter (2016) highlighted the significance of 'contextual intelligence' in understanding the sporting context structure in terms of key decision-makers and the sport's hierarchical structure. Finally, while reflecting on experiences of working within professional rugby union, Mellalieu (2017) highlighted the significance of possessing and developing 'contextual intelligence' in the process of effective service delivery within high-performance environments. More specifically, Mellalieu (2017) described how an awareness of various tiers of authority, line management and accountability that existed within the context of his applied practice allowed them to clarify working relationships with the various stakeholders regarding consent and sharing of confidential information.

Within the present thesis, the practitioners interviewed appeared to possess high levels of 'contextual intelligence' that developed in accordance with their own *experiential learning* process. Upon apparent recognition of the importance of 'contextual intelligence', practitioners reported that as they progressed through their careers, they looked to develop an understanding of the sporting and organisational culture before entering the environment. Several practitioners expressed how they researched the sport and corresponding stakeholders as part of their attempts to immerse themselves within the contexts of their applied work. Indeed, it was apparent that practitioners looked to demonstrate a genuine interest in the sport and the role of the stakeholders they were working alongside. This was particularly evident in an interview with Jake, who reinforced the significance of asking 'educated, naïve' questions as a method of acknowledging their own limitations and recognising the expertise of coaches and other practitioners. In a similar vein, Brown et al. (2005) highlighted the significance of practitioner's ability to learn the culture of a sport through formal study (i.e., reading, watching videos) and observation (i.e., attending training sessions and travelling with the team).

Indeed, it was also apparent that practitioners looked to immerse themselves into the environment and spend a significant amount of time within their applied settings. Such an approach allowed practitioners to develop an *increased understanding of the sporting context,* enhancing awareness of how environments functioned and make sense of daily routines. It was apparent that practitioners strived to develop their understanding of the timing and sequencing of the events and increase their awareness of who does what at which points in time. The significance of such formal and informal patterns was particularly highlighted by

Alice, who expressed how they looked to understand the routines of the stakeholders they worked alongside. Understanding how the system works was metaphorically compared to a conveyer belt in a factory. Several practitioners reiterated the importance of understanding the flow of information and events as integral to increasing an awareness of bespoke details inherited within each context. Here further comparisons can be drawn to Brown et al. (2005) framework of 'contextual intelligence' where the authors compared sport psychologists' ability to recognise patterns within an environment to a kayaker who instead of challenging the course of the river, uses knowledge of the currents and eddies to challenge energy and efforts to reach the destination.

Whilst an understanding of context was identified as an essential aspect of applied practice, several practitioners expressed the significance of understanding the individuals who coexisted within sporting organisations. It was apparent that as practitioners progressed through their careers, they started to pay greater attention to seeking to understand stakeholders' views, approaches, philosophies, and methods of practice. Indeed, the practitioners acknowledged that not all stakeholders operating within a particular environment shared the same values, and they were often required to work with individuals who held different opinions and beliefs. This was particularly evident in an interview with Tom, who expressed how their choices and rationale for suggestions and recommendations were underlined by stakeholders' values, predispositions, and prejudices. More specifically, Tom described that a head coach belief regarding work rate and commitment determined the topics of conversations focused on resilience and mental toughness rather than self-care and self-awareness. Such sentiments were echoed by all practitioners who collectively expressed that they paid significant attention to understanding stakeholders' preferred ways of working and whether they responded better to the informal conversation or formal meetings with facts and figures. As such, it was evident that the practitioners sampled within the present study possessed a good understanding of stakeholder's attitudes (Brown et al., 2005) and adopted a broader perspective (Brown et al., 2005) while making sense of their interactions.

Such an approach to applied practice allowed practitioners to recognise the 'structure' of their respective settings and understand which stakeholders were the 'leaders' and which were the 'followers' (Brown et al., 2005). It was apparent that practitioners demonstrated a good understanding of who were the key decision-makers, and whether the 'structure' of the organisation was rigid or flexible. This was particularly apparent in an interview with Jake, who reflected on their experiences of working with a range of performance directors who either rigidly made all the decisions within the environment or distributed the ability to make key decisions amongst all staff members. In a similar vein, practitioners looked to develop their awareness of their own agency and means of influence. Whilst recognising the significance of key contextual stakeholders (i.e., performance directors, managers, coaches) the practitioners sampled within the present thesis reiterated that influence could come from different sources, with certain individuals having an ability to have an unanticipated impact on situations. In one such example, Jake reflected on their experiences of working alongside a nutritionist who could have a negative impact on the functioning of the environment. Indeed, several practitioners acknowledged that they paid significant attention to understanding the links between stakeholders and the nature of their respective relationships also. Increased experience, therefore, enabled practitioners to better understand where the power and influence were held (Brown et al., 2005).

The analysis presented here demonstrated that in their efforts to 'navigate' the encountered contextual and situational factors of their role, practitioners looked to enhance their knowledge of the complexities of applied settings. Such sense-making on the part of practitioners can be understood from a perspective of 'perceived power positions' (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996), different types of power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965; Raven, 2008), and 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005). These interpretations, in turn, illuminate the significance of time and space within applied sport psychology practice. More specifically, while upon entering sporting organisations, the practitioners did not anticipate and understand certain aspects of sport psychology provision, such understanding developed over time as a result of accumulated experiences. The process of 'navigating' the encountered working conditions, therefore, was associated with the concept of *experiential learning* that took place throughout practitioners' careers.

Drawing upon educational literature, *experiential learning* and the professional development of practitioners sampled within the present thesis can be understand from a perspective of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Indeed, it became clear that as a result of their developing 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005) and enhanced understanding of different types of power (French & Raven, 1959), practitioners developed the 'knowledge aspect' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, it was apparent that with experience, practitioners were able to better acknowledge (see), interpret and understand (read) the micropolitical character of a particular situation (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). In other words, as a result of their own *experiential learning*, practitioners enhanced their political acuteness (Kelchtermans & Vanderbrghe, 1996). As a result, in the later stages of their careers, practitioners were better equipped to understand how and why political processes work the way they do. Indeed, it was clear that as the practitioners' progressed throughout their careers, they were able to theorise and reflect on their power position, which in turn, allowed them to conceptualise what was at stake in each encountered situation.

5.3.2. Strategies to gain a sense of professional self

Practitioners' ability to 'navigate' the workplace conditions can be understood further from a perspective of 'politics of identity' (Kelchtermans, 1996). Indeed, education research demonstrated that a socially recognised identity was identified as a highly valued working condition for any beginning teacher that effectively performs their job duties with feelings of satisfaction, joy, and personal fulfilment (Kelchtermans, 1996). Analysis of beginning teachers' career stories demonstrated that teachers often engaged in intentional actions or strategies to gain a sense of professional self, recognised by significant others (i.e., students, parents, principals) (Kelchtermans, 1996). This included striving for as many success experiences as possible and demonstrating one's competence to significant others (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, it was recognised that early-career teachers strived to do a good job and leave a good impression regarding their personal qualities (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Typically, such behaviours in the early stages of teacher's careers were associated with "working like hell", taking on extra duties to demonstrate professional competencies and willingness to be a team member (Kelchtermans, 1996, p. 309). In one such example, Kelchtermans (1996) documented early career teachers' efforts to secure lifelong assignment at a school, highlighting that in addition to taking up extra responsibilities within their role (e.g., provision of sport activities during school closure, organising fundraising activities for the school),

Chris (pseudonym) took on small repair and maintenance jobs at the houses of the principal and the school's board president.

Striving for social recognition, therefore, often had a micropolitical dimension (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) suggested that teachers, through micropolitical actions, strive to establish desirable working conditions, safeguard them when they are threatened and/or restore them if they have been removed. Therefore, micropolitical actions were defined "as those actions that aim at establishing, safeguarding or restoring the desirable working conditions" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 108). Micropolitical actions aimed at changing the situation and influencing working conditions were defined as 'proactive strategies' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), whereas maintaining the situation or protecting the teacher against external influences were associated with 'reactive strategies' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Within the school setting, an example of a 'proactive strategy' may include actions oriented at actively changing the dominant culture in the school, engaging in discussions with the principal and other team members, and proactively reacting to parents complains, whereas 'reactive strategies' may include avoiding adopting a stance as part of an ongoing conflict (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

Adopting theorising of Kelchetramns and Ballet (2002b) as a sense-making tool within the present thesis demonstrated that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they developed their 'instrumental' and/or 'operational' aspects of 'micropolitical literacy'. Indeed, it was clear that during early stages of their careers, practitioners proactively looked for opportunities to prove their competences to develop their professional self-confidence and gain social recognition from contextual stakeholders (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, practitioners strived to go above and beyond to demonstrate high levels of commitment to the stakeholders within their respective settings. Indeed, several stories of practice highlighted how practitioners often worked outside their contracted hours without additional financial compensation, in an attempt to meet all the contextual stakeholders' demands. In one such example, Amy recalled how, while being at a wedding on a Saturday evening, they were prepared to meet a coach's request and speak to an athlete who needed psychological support. Similarly, Beth recalled how they went the 'extra mile' and said yes to all the contextual stakeholders' requests, continually being available for phone calls. Finally, Alice reflected how they looked to mirror the coaches' behaviours within the football club and looked to attend first-team games in their effort to develop a 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) of being a dedicated practitioner striving for self-development.

Therefore, by drawing on ideas documented within educational literature, it became clear that practitioners engaged in micropolitical actions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) to be perceived by key contextual stakeholders as a reliable, hardworking, and knowledgeable sport psychologist. More specifically, it was apparent that practitioners' desires to demonstrate their commitment and knowledge was a 'proactive strategy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) aimed at changing stakeholders' perceptions regarding sport psychology and increasing their buy-in towards the services provided by the practitioners. In a similar vein, despite often holding different beliefs and opinions to contextual stakeholders, practitioners frequently refrained from challenging stakeholders' ways of working, engaging in a range of *reactive strategies* (e.g., being silent, avoiding comments), ensuring that they were not perceived as someone who was not pulling in the right direction. The subordinate theme of *picking your battles* demonstrated how practitioners often

refrained from expressing their true opinions in their interactions with key decision-makers. Several practitioners reflected that they were required to sensitively handle challenging interactions with contextual stakeholders to ensure they did not damage any existing rapport and trust that they had developed. In one such example, Alice recalled how they were required to pick their battles in their interactions with the stakeholders, ensuring that they were not challenging others' opinions all the time. Similarly, Tom reflected how they refrained from challenging a head coach's way of working to protect the relationship.

While an adaptation of a theoretical lens provided a greater conceptualised understanding of lived experiences, such an approach also holds significant implications in enhancing an understanding of professional development within sport psychology (Tod & Lavalle, 2011; Tod et al., 2011; Tod et al., 2017). More specifically, the current analysis revealed the importance of meaningful interactions between the practitioners and the professional context in which they worked. Indeed, it became clear that as a result of such interactions the practitioners learned to weigh up the outcomes by engaging in professional judgment and assessing the risk of damaging their 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) in the eyes of contextual stakeholders. Therefore, the workings of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) helped to further conceptualised the career-long process of learning, illustrating that practitioners developed an ability to perform micropolitical actions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) to gain the social recognition and establish the desirable workplace conditions.

However, it also needs to be highlighted that while the majority of stories shared within the present thesis demonstrated that a range of 'proactive' and 'reactive strategies' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) often led to desired changes in working conditions, and practitioners realising their desired 'self-image' (Kelchtermans 2005, 2009a, 2009b), some practitioners failed to gain the sought-after recognition from key contextual stakeholders. This was particularly evident in reflective accounts produced by Beth and Jake, who recalled that despite their efforts to integrate sport psychology into the existing routines of their respective settings, other stakeholders did not share the same perceptions regarding the importance of sport psychology services. As a result, a lack of social recognition regarding the significance of practitioners' role challenged their 'subjective educational theory' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) and negatively influenced their 'job motivation' and 'future perspectives' (Kelchtermans 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Such situational and contextual factors, in turn, decreased practitioners' willingness to continue within their position, influencing how they saw themselves in the job in the years to come (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b).

Overall, it was evident that practitioners engaged in micropolitical actions to 'navigate' the inherent ambiguity of their applied role. More specifically, both 'proactive' and 'reactive strategies' allowed the practitioners to develop a personal construction (meaning) of how they understood themselves in a given moment in time. Here, the 'instrumental or operational aspects' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) served as means of developing a positive sense of 'self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). More specifically, the practitioners looked to obtain favourable recognition from contextual stakeholders to develop a positive 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). This in turn, led to an enhanced 'self-esteem' (i.e., practitioners' appreciation of their performances in the role) (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Also, the practitioners were able to meet their normative beliefs regarding 'task perception' (i.e., establishing themselves within the organisation to work with athletes) (Kelchtermans, 2005,

2009a, 2009b). Failure to develop and maintain a positive sense of 'self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b), however, was seen to occasionally result in practitioners resigning from their respective positions.

5.3.3. Pursuing professional interests

Upon investigating beginning teachers' career stories, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) reported that teachers' actions as members of an organisation were guided by their 'professional interests'. The idea of different interests, therefore, forms the foundation of Kelchtermans and colleagues' analyses aimed at exploring the micropolitical elements of organisational behaviours. From such a perspective, micropolitical actions were conceptualised in terms of establishing desirable working conditions (i.e., 'professional interests'), along with corresponding sub-interests (i.e., 'material', 'organisational', 'social-professional', 'cultural-ideological' and 'self-interests') (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). This conceptualisation of desirable working conditions in terms of different professional interests, therefore, provided another effective analytical tool to describe, disentangle and understand practitioners career stories shared within the present thesis.

Indeed, interpretation of reflective accounts from a perspective of 'professional interests' revealed that practitioners' strategic attempts to secure social recognition were underlined by a desire to fulfil 'self-interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, scholars in education acknowledged that when the professional context threatens one's 'professional self-understanding' as a teacher (e.g., 'self-esteem' and 'task perception'), 'self-interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) emerge. Within the present thesis, the superordinate themes of *reality shock* demonstrated that upon facing resistance from key contextual stakeholders, practitioners strived to demonstrate high levels of commitment to come across as a knowledgeable individual, who may add value to the sporting organisation, and contribute towards achievements of performance objectives. Indeed, it was apparent that practitioners strived for self-affirmation and tried to go the extra mile to meet the demands placed on them by key contextual stakeholders. As discussed in the preceding subsection, such actions were underlined by a desire of enhancing social recognition in the eyes of key contextual stakeholders. However, such efforts of impressing key decision makers were also underlined by the intention to fulfil 'organisational interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, analysis of beginning teachers' experiences demonstrated that getting and keeping a job (formally being a member of a school) was a central 'organisational interest' upon entering the profession (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Similarly, within the present thesis, it was apparent how practitioners strived for social recognition as a means of increasing their chances of securing and/or maintaining an applied contract.

A quest for social recognition was also associated with practitioners' desires to pursue their 'material interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Indeed, within their studies with beginning primary school teachers, scholars in education referred to 'material interests' as the availability of teachers' access to teaching materials, funds, and specific infrastructure (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Although immaterial, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) also included the structural facility of time (e.g., time for preparing lessons plans) within this category. Whilst the practitioners sampled within the present thesis gave some attention to the constraints of their role associated with the time required to plan and reflect on consultancies with

athletes, all practitioners unanimously highlighted the limited time available to them to actually consult with athletes in the first instance. This was particularly apparent amongst practitioners who worked on a part-time or consultancy basis. For example, Amy and Steve outlined the challenges associated with delivering sport psychology within a camp-based programme. Therefore, the theoretical lens proposed by Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) played a vital role in identifying time available to work with athletes as a significant 'material interest'. Such a sense-making of practitioners' time in context also enhance an understanding of their actions within sporting organisations. More specifically, it became that the quest for social recognition was associated with practitioners' objectives of increasing their time within the sporting organisations, with several practitioners expressing a desire to be embedded with their respective settings full-time.

Also, it became apparent that practitioners' actions of weighing up the outcomes was underlined by a desire to fulfil a 'cultural-ideological interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). According to Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) the 'cultural-ideological interests' are an object of negotiation and cultural definition between an organisation's members and relate to the more or less explicit norms, values and ideals that get acknowledged within an organisation. The analysis of beginning teachers career stories revealed that their 'cultural-ideological interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) came into play due to discrepancies between teachers' 'task perception' and 'job motivation' and the dominant culture (values, norms) within the schools that they worked. Interestingly, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) reported that early career teachers often avoided taking a stance within ongoing conflicts or discussions and complied with dominant values despite often holding opposing beliefs. Similarly, and as was highlighted earlier within this chapter, practitioners here were seen to engage in 'reactive strategies' of avoiding challenging conversations to develop a perception of someone who aligned with existing norms and values at the sporting organisation.

Analysis of lived experience from such a perfective, therefore, demonstrated that practitioners employed a range of 'reactive strategies' as a means of fulfilling 'cultural-ideological interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). More specifically, practitioners' reluctance to provide recommendations and feedback to enhance service provision was underpinned by a fear of expressing alternative opinions. Indeed, practitioners recognised that their suggestions may often be perceived to question the existing values and norms within their respective organisations. As such, when reflecting upon their career stories, the practitioners acknowledge that they were often inclined to comply with the dominant culture of their respective settings. The reluctance to speak out was particularly apparent in the early stages of practitioners' careers. During this stage of their applied journeys, practitioners' sense-making was influenced by the highly competitive nature of securing applied positions and challenges of finding work. Also, it was apparent that the practitioners often perceived themselves lower down the hierarchy within the sporting organisations, believing that they were more expendable compared to more senior members of the multidisciplinary team. Therefore, even upon disagreeing with stakeholders' ways of working, practitioners refrained from any actions that could perceivably lead to the potential termination of their contract. Such sense-making was particularly evident in the stories of practice shared by Jake, who recalled how they often felt that challenging opinions of the key contextual stakeholders hold the potential of losing an employment contract.

In a similar vein, practitioners' actions can be understood from a perspective of 'social-professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Scholars in education suggested that the quality of interpersonal

relationships within a school were the most important working conditions for beginning teachers, with 'social-professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) often found to take priority over other 'professional interests'. For instance, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) reported that teachers often turned down employment contracts and preferred to be unemployed as opposed to working in schools with an apparent climate of mistrust, conflict, suspicion, and gossip. Within the present thesis, it was similarly apparent that the practitioners identified coaches as being particularly significant stakeholders, who spent the most time with the athletes and were, therefore, figures who may contribute to the effective provision and integration of sport psychology provision. As such, the practitioners looked to engaged in actions that would develop, maintain, and enhance their 'social-professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Such sense-making provides a greater understanding of the rationale behind the 'reactive strategies' employed by practitioners. More specifically, efforts to avoid challenging stakeholders' ways of working were aimed at protecting the relationships with the key decision makers. This in turn, enhanced practitioners' chances of fulfilling their own 'professional interests' accordingly (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Such a process of evaluating applied situations and deciding on how to act was best described by Alice, who reiterated the importance of gaining support from the academy manager to integrate sport psychology into a football academy's coaching programme.

Overall, the micropolitical actions of gaining social recognition were understood further from a perspective of achieving 'professional interest' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Such sense-making provides a powerful conceptual tool to enhance an understanding of the ambiguity of an applied role. More specifically, it became apparent that due to their developing 'knowledge aspect of micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), practitioners recognised the importance of positive working relationships in their efforts of 'navigating' the 'structural vulnerability' of their role. Micropolitical actions targeted towards being acknowledged and valued by contextual stakeholders, were aimed at achieving 'organisational' (i.e., securing and maintaining and applied contract), 'material' (i.e., securing a full-time contract), and 'cultural-ideological interests' (i.e., being perceived as someone with values and beliefs aligned to the existing norms at the sporting organisation). It was clear, therefore, that their efforts of pursuing 'professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) were underlined by a need to address the 'structural vulnerability' within practitioners' respective roles. Also, it was apparent that actions aimed at developing positive working relationships with key contextual stakeholders were aimed at fulfilling 'social-professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) and therefore, attempting to achieve professional goals. While Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) suggested that same events and experiences may often be understood simultaneously from a perspective of different categories of 'professional interests', the present thesis' findings also highlighted the relationship between practitioners' ability to gain social recognition and the fulfilment of professional interests.

5.3.4. Summary

The analysis presented here demonstrated that throughout their careers, the practitioners engaged in an ongoing learning process that included aspects of political learning. Such processes encompassed conscious awareness of different types of power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965; Raven, 2008) and an enhanced 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005). These *experiential learning* and professional development processes, in turn, were understood from a perspective of 'micropolitical

literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Indeed, it was apparent that practitioners developed the 'knowledge aspect of micropolitical' literacy that allowed them to better acknowledge (see), interpret and understand (read) the micropolitical character of a particular situation (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Also, the practitioners possessed a sound understanding of the 'instrumental and operational aspects' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) that allowed them to 'navigate' the inherent ambiguity of their applied roles. More specifically, the practitioners engaged in a range of 'proactive' and 'reactive strategies' in pursuit of their own 'professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

It needs to be highlighted, however, that in one event or situation several categories of interest can play a part at the same time. As such, readers of the present thesis are encouraged to consider the interwoven nature of professional interests. Only such a conceptualisation of 'professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), interpretated in terms of desired working conditions, holds the potential for enhancing an understanding of micropolitical actions. More specifically, while micropolitical actions were presented as a means of maintaining and/or advancing one's position within a sporting organisation (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones 2009a, 2009b, Thompson et al., 2015), the present thesis highlights the significance of practitioners' normative beliefs, value-laden choices, and moral considerations (i.e., 'task perception'). Indeed, while striving for social recognition can be seen as a means of obtaining 'material' and 'organisational interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), it was clear that practitioners' actions were underlined by their professional sense of self. In particular, practitioners' 'job motivation' (i.e., desire to work with people) and 'task perception' (i.e., helping people achieve their full potential) (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b).

It is here, therefore, where the present thesis adds greater conceptual understanding of the micropolitical actions within sporting organisations (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones 2009a, 2009b, Thompson et al., 2015). More specifically, by illuminating the significance of 'self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) and practitioners' commitment to one's practice, the present thesis presents micropolitics as efforts targeted towards living up to one's own professional beliefs. Therefore, micropolitics can be seen as efforts to establish and maintain a socially valued understanding of one-self that is enacted in one's practice. In turn, the efforts of enhancing the social-professional relationships with contextual stakeholders can be seen as a condition for attaining sense of professional self as an applied sport psychologist, and meaningful professional practice. As such, the present thesis adds to the current knowledge and understanding of how practitioners look at their job, give meaning to it and act in it (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones 2009a, 2009b, Thompson et al., 2015).

5.4. Negotiating

The preceding section demonstrated the significance of *experiential learning* in practitioners' ability to 'navigate' encountered working conditions and live up to deeply held normative beliefs. However, while micropolitical actions of gaining socially recognised 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) allowed practitioners to 'navigate' the inherent ambiguity of their role, it was clear that social recognition was a gift and something that one receives from others. Therefore, it was apparent that despite their efforts through engaging in micropolitical actions, practitioners were always at risk of either not achieving their desired social recognition, or losing the recognition that they have already achieved, at any

point. Several practitioners echoed such experiences exemplifying the challenges of obtaining a desired social recognition from the contextual stakeholders embedded within sporting organisations (i.e., coaches, performance directors).

It is here where the development of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) warrants greater attention. In particular, it was clear that due to an ongoing evaluation of the interactions within the applied context, practitioners experienced different degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding the impact of their own micropolitical actions (i.e., 'experiential aspect of micropolitical literacy') (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). For example, it was evident that while engaging in micropolitical actions, practitioners experienced high levels of uncertainty, powerlessness or even anger in their efforts of gaining social recognition. This was particularly apparent in reflective accounts produced by Tom, who expressed their frustrations of working with a head coach, who was seen to pay them 'lip-service' within their interactions. As a result, Tom was unsure what the head coach truly thought about the sport psychology and them as a practitioner.

From such a perspective, it became clear that practitioners were required to 'negotiate' their encountered working conditions in order to achieve a sense of professional self and meaningful professional practice. Within the contexts of school, Kelchtermans (2018) defined 'negotiating' as representing the micropolitical agency of teachers, and their attempts of changing their working conditions in keeping with their developing self-understanding. Within the present thesis, it was clear that practitioners looked to use the 'information power' (i.e., possessing information about other people) (Reven, 1965; Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001) to establish, safeguard or restore the desirable working conditions in line with the normative elements of their 'professional self-understanding' (i.e., 'task perception') (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). To better conceptualise such micropolitical actions on the part of practitioners, the present section utilises Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory as a second analytical framework. The objective of the present subsection, therefore, is to build on the interpretations presented earlier in the present thesis and further enhance an understanding of practitioners micropolitical actions to strategically manipulate social situations and others' impressions of themselves (Goffman, 1959).

However, the objective of the present subsection is also to move past the current understanding as to how practitioners strategically produce recognisable performance for others (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones 2009a, 2009b, Thompson et al., 2015). The present section, therefore, provides a more comprehensive description of the mode of presentation that the practitioners employ within the broader social context of sporting organisations. In particular, the interpretations presented here outline different aspects of the impressions given off by the practitioners. As such, it is anticipated that the present section provides a more in depth understanding of how practitioners consider and construct the impressions of their choice. Finally, the interpretations outlined here aim to bring greater attention, compared to that achieved to date, to the intellectual and emotional aspects of micropolitics. Therefore, it is expected that this subsection will initiate a debate regarding the importance of self-control in practitioners' efforts of 'negotiating' encountered workplace conditions.

5.4.1. Developing positive working relationships

The stories of practice shared within the present thesis demonstrated how positive working relationships with key contextual stakeholders allowed practitioners to react, deal with, and adapt to their encountered working conditions. However, through a process of *experiential learning*, practitioners realised that due to positive working relationships with key decision makers they were able to have a greater influence on the functioning of their respective settings. It was clear, therefore, that as the practitioners progressed through their careers, they recognised how working relationships could allow them to put their 'own stamp' on applied practice and implement their ideas into the daily functioning of the organisation as a whole. Several practitioners highlighted the *significance of positive working relationships,* with Alice acknowledging that support from the academy manager allowed them to work more effectively with the part-time coaches and incorporate sport psychology into the design, planning and delivery of training sessions. As such, it was apparent that positive working relationships significantly influenced practitioners' ability to increase the buy-in into their services and overcome some of the barriers encountered within applied practice. This was particularly evident in an interview with Steve, who acknowledged that positive working relationships with other professionals increased the importance of their voice within the environment, ensuring that their input was more valued.

Positive working relationships, therefore, were seen to help enhance practitioner's 'agency' and their role's 'intentionality' (Kelchtermans, 2018). It was apparent that the adaptation of a 'top-down' approach and strong relationships with the key decision-makers increased practitioners' ability to choose between alternative courses of action and overcome some of the structural limitations of their respective sporting contexts. Positive working relationships allowed practitioners to implement their personal goals and fulfil role aspirations. As such, practitioners could have greater control over training methods and approaches and ultimately establish, safeguard or restore desirable working conditions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Therefore, it was apparent that to enhance their ability to 'negotiate' (Kelchtermans, 2018) their encountered working conditions, practitioners engaged in 'micropolitical actions', through an ongoing process of *forging positive relationships* with key decision-makers. Indeed, it was clear that as the practitioners progressed through their careers, they demonstrated the 'instrumental or operational aspects of micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), engaging in a range of proactive micropolitical strategies and actions, *manufacturing opportunities to engage with the stakeholders.*

Several stories of practice demonstrated that practitioners made a conscious effort to spend additional time within their respective settings to help maximise their opportunities to interact with key contextual stakeholders, with Jake highlighting the importance of being the first person to arrive and last to leave. It was also apparent that the practitioners often placed themselves strategically within their respective settings to facilitate encounters with the stakeholders. Indeed, several stories of practice illuminated that the practitioners often intentionally spent time in public spaces (e.g., canteen, coaches' office, gym), and ensured that they were having breakfast and lunch at the same time as the stakeholders, they were walking to the training sessions with the coaches, and they were observing training sessions stood next to the stakeholder they wish to have a conversation with. Also, it was evident that the practitioners strived to create opportunities to interact with stakeholders outside the work context, with Amy reflecting how they facilitated going for a run with a coach to enhance their ability to engage with this particular stakeholder. This strategic

approach of facilitating opportunities to interact with the stakeholders was echoed by Jake, who recalled how due to their struggle to engage in conversations with the performance director, they asked this stakeholder for a lift to a train station as a mean of creating an opportunity to interact.

Furthermore, practitioners strived to attend social events arranged by the organisation (e.g., Christmas meals, nights out), identifying such settings as fruitful opportunities to engage in informal conversations and to get to know their colleagues better. Also, several practitioners reiterated the importance of focusing on 'normal' discussions not related to sport psychology, with Steve highlighting the value of speaking to stakeholders as a human being, and asking about areas of life outside of sport. More specifically, the practitioners looked to engage in non-threatening conversations asking stakeholders about their hobbies, family life, or past sporting experiences. From such a perspective, it became apparent that practitioner's 'micropolitical actions' aimed to enhance stakeholders' buy-in into them as a person rather than sport psychology as a discipline.

Indeed, upon realisation that social recognition depends upon the perceptions of others, and as such is very vulnerable to contestation and can be easily withdrawn, practitioners strived to develop positive rapport and sense of trust within their interactions with contextual stakeholders. Consequently, trust and trustful relationships with contextual stakeholders started to emerge as a key aspect of practitioners' 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Therefore, due to *experiential learning,* being trusted to be a supportive individual developed as an important element of their 'task perception' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). More specifically, giving trust and being trusted in the relationship with contextual stakeholders started to guide practitioners' professional behaviours and decisions.

It is here, therefore, the present thesis houses the potential to enhance existing knowledge regarding micropolitics within sporting organisation. More specifically, while acknowledging the often problematic and contested nature of sporting contexts, the interpretations outlined here present micropolitics as means of collaboration and coalition building (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Therefore, while some of the progress achieved to data can be perceived as unrealistic and overly negative (Potrac et al., 2013), the present thesis provides a more comprehensive understanding of micropolitics within sporting organisations. It is anticipated, in turn, that such representation of organisational life will encourage practitioners and educators to better recognise the ambiguity and dynamic complexity of applied practice.

5.4.2. Micropolitics as strategies to establish trust

The interpretations of reflective accounts demonstrated that upon facing resilience in establishing collaborative work, practitioners sampled here recognised the importance of building trust in the relationship. However, to enhance the conceptual understanding of practitioners' actions, the present thesis continued to draw on research in education as a means of enhancing the theoretical analysis and sense-making of lived experiences. Within educational literature, trust has been defined as:

> "A particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both before he can monitor such action (or independently of his capacity ever to be able lo monitor it) and in a context in which it affects his own action." (Gambetta, 1988 as cited in Hudson et al., 1999, p. 249).

Within educational literature Webster (2018) suggested that educators are required to accord trust in order to educate. Also, it was identified that trust held the potential to enhance positive interpersonal relationships (Coleman, 2012), and to promote mutual respect and credibility between professionals (Muijs & Harris, 2007). Trust has also been recognised as a means of managing uncertainty, risk and vulnerability within professional relationships (Doney et al., 1998; Hudson et al., 1999; Humphrey, 1998; Powell, 1996; Rus & Iglic, 2005). Interestingly, scholars in education highlighted that the establishment of trust requires a commitment period in which each partner has an opportunity to demonstrate to the other their willingness to accept the personal risk, associated with trusting another, and not to exploit the vulnerability of the other for a personal gain (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Also, it was suggested that people have a natural tendency to protect themselves from the possible harm that may arise from trusting someone prematurely, and therefore, often look to minimise their vulnerability (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Therefore, while highlighting the benefits of trust, scholars in education also emphasised the challenges to forming trusting relationships.

In a similar vein, investigating the significance of trust in school-based collaborative leadership, Coleman (2012) highlighted that a process of forming working relationships and collaborative opportunities was not unproblematic. More specifically, Coleman (2012) recognised that collaboration was a complex and multi-faceted construct and a highly resource-consuming activity. According to Coleman (2012), some of the main challenges to developing positive collaboration include: promoting common vision and inspiring others to follow; encouraging ownership and participation in collaborative process; resolving disputes, promoting genuine buy-in amongst partners. Trust, was identified as an important aspect in overcoming barriers to collaboration, including conflict avoidance and destructive competitiveness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). As such, levels of collaborations within school setting were related to the level of trust amongst the key stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Adapting educational research as a theoretical lens within the present thesis had a significant impact at enhancing the sense-making of applied sport psychologists' experiences. Educational literature (e.g., Coleman, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) serves to better conceptualise understandings of the challenges faced by the practitioners in their efforts of forming collaborative working opportunities. Indeed, considering the contested nature of professional sporting organisations (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b, Rowley et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2015), it became clear that some of the contextual stakeholders looked to avoid working in collaboration as a means of protecting themselves and minimising the sense of vulnerability that stems from being a member of a sporting organisation (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Also, it became evident that trust was not a gift that people easily established with each other (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Therefore, the theoretical lens adopted here allowed to reveal why the practitioners sampled within the present thesis were not able to develop trust in the workplace relationship in the initial stages since entering a new environment.

Furthermore, the significance of the present thesis lies in the acknowledgement that upon recognising the significance of trust within their respective settings, practitioners sampled here engaged in a range of micropolitical activities as a means of developing trust and forming further collaborative opportunities. Therefore, the findings presented here move past the existing literature-base regarding micropolitics within sporting organisations (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b, Rowley et

al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2015). More specifically, while previous publications focused on presenting micropolitics as a means of overcoming the contested nature of sporting settings, the present thesis aspires to present micropolitics as a tool to develop trust and help form collaborative relationships. To achieve such objectives, the working of Snyder (1984, 1992) and Goffman (1959) are utilised as a theoretical lens aimed at enhancing conceptualise understanding of micropolitical actions as shared by the practitioners sampled here.

Firstly, as discussed earlier within the present chapter, practitioners' sense-making of their encountered professional situations were determined by their perceived power position (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996). To further enhance an understanding of the richness of power differences inherent in interpersonal interactions, the present thesis drew on the workings of Snyder and Kiviniemi (2001). Similarly to the present thesis, Snyder and Kiviniemi (2001) utilised the different types of power proposed by French and Raven (1959) and Raven (2008). In particular, Snyder and Kiviniemi (2001) explored the idea of motivations that a high-power individual and low power individual bring to a given interaction. More specifically, Snyder and Kiviniemi (2001) suggested that a higher power individual is motivated to get to know the other person, whereas the lower power individual is guided by a motivation to get on with the other person. Therefore, the workings of Snyder and Kiviniemi (2001) are of a particular significance within the present thesis. More precisely, the interpretations of lived experiences shared here demonstrated that sport psychologists perceived themselves to be in a lower power position compared to key contextual stakeholders across the five types of power proposed by French and Raven (1959) (i.e., reward, coercion, legitimate, expertise, and referent). As such, in line with the suggestions proposed by Snyder and Kiviniemi (2001), it was recognised that the practitioners sampled within the present thesis were motivated to ensure smooth interactions with the stakeholders, trying to fit in, be responsive, and be generally accommodating.

Using Snyder and Kiviniemi's (2001) ideas as a theoretical framework within the present thesis, therefore, added greater conceptual understanding to practitioners' sense-making of their encountered situations. Indeed, it became apparent that in their interactions with higher power individuals, the practitioners aspired to say the right thing, make the other person feel comfortable, and allowed the other person to be themselves. From such a perspective, it also became obvious that practitioners entered the interactions seemingly dependent on the higher power person in terms of corresponding outcomes (i.e., rewards, punishment, information) (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). However, the findings of the present thesis also demonstrated that practitioners were in a higher power position in terms of 'information power' (Raven, 1959). Therefore, it became clear that practitioners strived to utilise the 'information power' to get on with the other person. To achieve this, practitioners engaged in 'behavioural confirmation' (cf., Snyder, 1984, 1992) and paid careful attention to their behaviours when being observed by key contextual stakeholders.

The 'behaviour confirmation' was defined as "a phenomenon of social interaction in which one person (the "target") comes to confirm, through their actions, the expectations that another person (the "perceiver") holds for them because of the treatment that they receive from that person (Skutas & Snyder, 2016, p. 92). From such a perspective, therefore, it became clear due to the information collected about the stakeholders, the practitioners strived to be flexible and adjust to the individual to confirm stakeholders' expectations about them (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). Indeed, several practitioners recalled how they were required to demonstrate high levels of flexibility in their working practices and their communication skills.

All practitioners collectively highlighted the importance of recognising individual differences and adapting their interactions accordingly. Such sense-making was particularly evident in career stories presented by Jake, who recalled adapting their interventions to the stakeholders' attention span, and trying to adjust their behaviours to meet the stakeholder's needs. In one such example, Jake explained how, despite being an introvert, they were required to demonstrate extrovert characteristics to enhance their ability to communicate effectively with the stakeholders. As such, several practitioners metaphorically compared themselves to a chameleon, reiterating the significance of adapting to the person they were working with and adopting the interaction style. Indeed, all practitioners sampled in the present thesis looked to utilise their tacit understanding of individuals in an attempt to mirror the stakeholders' communication style, with Amy reflecting on how they looked to be direct and to the point in their interactions with the performance director. Similar, sense-making was evident in reflections produced by Tom, who recalled adapting their conversations with a football coach to address their perceptions of sport psychology, discussing resilience and mental toughness rather than self-care and self-awareness. From such a perspective, it was apparent that the practitioners engaged in 'behavioural confirmation' (cf., Snyder, 1984, 1992) to adapt and adjust their communication in relation to the key stakeholders' preferences.

In addition, the utilisation of 'behavioural confirmation' (cf., Snyder, 1984, 1992) as a sense-making tool allowed for a better conceptualisation of practitioners' actions. Indeed, from such a viewpoint, it was clear that practitioners' behaviours in interactions with contextual stakeholders were motivated by their desire to show their willingness to work with the stakeholders and demonstrate a level of agreement. This 'behavioural confirmation' (Snyder, 1984, 1992) was underlined by practitioners' desire to demonstrate to stakeholders that they were on board with their methods and things that they wanted to achieve in their role. Thus, the practitioners were striving to facilitate pleasant and smooth interactions with stakeholders, demonstrating buy-in into their working ways (Copeland, 1994). Such sense-making was particularly evident in the interviews with Steve, who acknowledged that in their interactions with stakeholders they were trying to demonstrate supportive behaviour and that they were 'singing from the same hymn sheet'.

Putting together the range of analytical frameworks employed within the present thesis, it was apparent that 'behavioural confirmation' (cf., Snyder, 1984, 1992) was an effective 'proactive strategy' (Kelchetrmans & Ballet, 2002b) aimed at gaining social recognition and developing positive working relationships with contextual stakeholders. In addition, it was clear that practitioners engaged in 'behavioural confirmation' (cf., Snyder, 1984, 1992) as a means of developing trust (Coleman, 2012) within their workplace relationships. To understand such actions further, the present thesis further utilised the working of Coleman (2012) and their ideas regarding three different elements of trust. Here, practitioners' actions were seen to be underpinned by a desire to develop 'ideological trust' (Coleman, 2012). More precisely, it became apparent that practitioners strived to demonstrated that they hold similar beliefs and values as the contextual stakeholders they worked alongside. Therefore, it was clear that micropolitical actions were aimed at developing a degree of consistency in the values held by the practitioners and stakeholders embedded within their respective settings. However, it was also evident that such an articulation of values required displays of corresponding congruent behaviour. As such, to ensure consistency between one's espoused principles and one's actions, practitioners looked to establish 'behavioural trust' (i.e., the day-to-day manifestations of values) (Coleman, 2012). It became obvious, therefore, that the practitioners

sampled here paid a significant attention to their day-to-day practices, ensuring that their all behaviours were consistent with dominant values of their respective settings. Consequently, one of main concerns in practice was to ensure that the stakeholders interpreted and constructed meaning in accordance with how practitioners wanted to be seen. As such, practitioners' actions were underlined by a desire to develop 'perceptual trust' (i.e., one's perceived authenticity and integrity) (Coleman, 2012). From such a perspective, therefore, it became clear that practitioners' actions were aimed at being seen by contextual stakeholders as authentic.

Making further associations between the educational literature on trust (e.g., Coleman, 2012) and 'behavioural confirmation' (e.g., Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001) also illuminated how practitioners were seen to be strongly influence by impression management concerns (Goffman, 1959). While operating from a lower power position across five types of power (French & Raven, 1959), practitioners sough to make a good impression with the higher power individuals (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). First, it was clear that the practitioners were not able to afford leaving negative impressions in their interactions with contextual stakeholders due to a negative outcome dependency (i.e., contract termination). Secondly, it was clear that getting along with the key decision makers and leaving a positive impression was motivated by a desire of obtaining a positive outcome (i.e., contract extension) (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). Such interpersonal interactions, in turn, were further understood by drawing on Goffman's classical text which addressed "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (Goffman, 1959). While providing detailed descriptions and analysis about the rules of social interactions and various modes of self-presentation, Goffman (1959) argued that individuals could seek to strategically manipulate social situations and others' impression of themselves. Indeed, through a metaphor of theatre, Goffman (1959) provided a fascinating description of what people do when there are in the company of others. In adopting this dramaturgical approach, Goffman (1959) viewed interactions as performance that the actor presents to the audience in the form of impressions aimed at achieving the desired goal. More specifically, Goffman (1959) looked to demonstrate how individuals present themselves and their actions to others, in a way that guides and controls the impression they form of them. From such a perspective, Goffman (1959) viewed the individual as the combined entity of the self as a performed character.

As such, adopting ideas presented by Goffman (1959) within the present thesis enhance understanding of applied sport psychologists' actions in their interactions with key stakeholders. Such a perspective provides a greater conceptualised understanding of 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) of developing trusting relationships with contextual stakeholders. Indeed, according to Goffman (1959), individuals engage in a performance to display a particular front and define the observers' situation. More specifically, Goffman (1959) defined 'front' as the "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (p. 32). Therefore, the 'front' acts as the vehicle for standardisation and consistency, allowing the actor to project a character in keeping with the social role in question (Goffman, 1959). Making sense of reflective accounts presented within the present thesis from a perspective of Goffman's (1959) ideas demonstrated that practitioners' 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) were underlined by an engagement in dramatic expressions of trustworthiness. The practitioners, therefore, engaged in 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959) by presenting a front that would allow them to gain trust of key decision makers and ultimately develop positive working relationships.

Such sense-making may be further enhanced by drawing on Goffman's (1959) ideas regarding setting, appearance and manner. More specifically, Goffman (1959) identified these concepts as standard parts of the 'front' that an individual portrays. Setting was associated with furniture, physical layout and other background items which define the scenery and stage props. According to Goffman (1959), actors "who would like to use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it" (p. 33). Within the present thesis, it was apparent that the practitioners paid significant attention to the setting of their interactions, putting on an appropriate act accordingly. This was particularly evident in the reflections produced by Tom, who highlighted how they looked to refrain from expressing their opinions in group spaces and public meetings to protect the relationship with the key stakeholders, maintain an appropriate impression (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, it was apparent that Tom was much more comfortable in challenging the stakeholders in private settings where they could be perceived as someone who is looking to raise awareness rather than criticise. Similar sense-making was reported by Alice, who described how they avoided engaging in confrontational conversations at the first-team training ground to ensure that they were not perceived as unprofessional in front of the main stakeholders at the football club (i.e., the CEO).

Similarly, it was evident that the practitioners looked to demonstrate a particular appearance to present to the stakeholders a specific social status (Goffman, 1959). This was particularly apparent in stories produced by Jake, who recalled how they looked to asked inquisitive, not instructive, questions in their interaction with coaches to demonstrate a 'front' of someone who was not a specialist in the sport. More specifically, Jake reflected on how they looked to acknowledge the expertise of those whom they were working with. As such, employing Goffman's (1959) ideas to make sense of practitioners' career stories demonstrated that they often engaged in actions aimed at developing an appearance of a normal person, with Steve, in particular, highlighting the importance of connecting with the stakeholders as human beings and engaging in conversations from the standpoint of a normal bloke. As such, Steve recalled how they often refrained from bringing up sport psychology in their conversations with the stakeholders to maintain the desirable appearance.

Finally, Goffman's (1959) ideas regarding manner demonstrated the importance of the communication style that practitioners look to adopt in their interactions with the key stakeholders. More specifically, it was apparent that practitioners paid significant attention to how they were putting messages across, asking questions, and presenting an argument to ensure that they were displaying supportive mannerisms. Several practitioners reiterated the importance of adopting a questioning style to help ensure that they were not coming across as critical and judgemental, with Steve highlighting the significance of framing the discussions in a certain way to display a manner of someone who is trying to maximise athletic development. It was evident that practitioners paid significant attention to the way they expressed themselves with a view to ensuring that their communications with key stakeholders evoked the impression that they were striving to obtain (Goffman, 1959). In one such example, Beth described how they looked to display a manner of care and interest in a coach opinion as a mean of giving a well-designs impression of someone who valued their input.

According to Goffman (1959), all these standard parts of the 'front' often need to be expressed in consistency within a desired interaction role and/or impression. Such coherence of 'front' was particularly

evident in the reflective stories produced by Alice, who described how they refrained from challenging the coach's full-time team talk within the public setting of the dressing room. More specifically, rather than challenging the coach in front of the players, Alice looked to address the issue a few days later in a private one to one setting by a strategic manipulation of inquisitive appearance and nonconfrontational manner. Several practitioners echoed similar sentiments within the present thesis, who collectively reiterated the significance of placing themselves in settings that would allow them to give off an appearance of someone open and willing to engage in conversations. For instance, Tom reflected how they often come in early before the training sessions to spend time in the office with the manager, or they ensured that they placed themselves next to the manager during the training session making themselves available for conversations.

Overall, interpretations of practitioners' career stories from a perspective of trust (Coleman, 2012), provided a greater conceptual understanding of 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) within sporting organisations. Indeed, it became apparent that practitioners engaged in 'behavioural confirmation' (Snyder, 1984, 1992) and presented a particular 'front' (Goffman's, 1959) to develop 'ideological', 'behavioural' and 'perceptual trust' (Coleman, 2012). Therefore, it was clear that during their interactions with the contextual stakeholders, practitioners strived to provide the observers with an idealised impression of themselves within the context of their professional role (Goffman, 1959). Such sense-making of practitioners' actions illuminated that practitioners often strived to present themselves before others according to officially accredited values within their respective settings. This was particularly evident in reflections regarding the process of forming new relationships. Several practitioners recalled how they looked to mobilise their activity and engage in dramatic realisation (Goffman, 1959) to express what they wished to convey within their interactions. In one such example, Steve described how they strived to be perceived as someone who was listening and hearing the coach, demonstrating a willingness to support the coach in achieving their role-related objectives. As such, Steve looked to dramatize their work and mobilise their behaviour to help show their desire to work with the coach. For instance, Steve described how despite trusting the doctor's assessment, they engaged in a conversation with an athlete who potentially suffered from clinical psychology issues to show the coach that they were prepared to meet their requests. The similar, dramatization was demonstrated by Beth, who upon arriving at the training centre in the mornings would go to see the coach before putting their bags away to exemplify the importance of such conversation, demonstrating to the coach that this was the first thing that they were doing when entering the environment.

5.4.3. Significance of emotional self-control

The stories of practice shared within the present thesis presented working in collaboration as an important working condition within applied sport psychology practice. It is here where it needs to be highlighted that in many instances the analysis of micro-level political interactions illuminated the cohesive and coherent aspects of social relationships. Indeed, several stories of practiced shared by practitioners exemplified trust, collaboration, rationality, and openness as an apparent aspect of social interactions within sporting organisations. As such, it became clear why some professionals operating within sporting context seen their experiences as convergent, unifying, and functional (Potrac et al., 2013). Indeed, it needs to be highlighted that some sporting organisations might be characterised by a collaborative culture. Within such settings the collaborative working relationships between practitioners and their colleagues can be spontaneous (i.e., they emerge from the team members themselves), voluntary (i.e., perceived by the team

members as both enjoyable and productive), development oriented (i.e., focused on establishing the task and purpose of working together), pervasive across time and space (i.e., often unnoticed, brief yet frequent, informal encounters), and unpredictable (i.e., often uncertain and not easy to predict) (cf. Hargreaves, 1991).

However, while acknowledging that in some instances two individuals working within the same sporting setting may hold aligned values and beliefs, the practitioners operating within sporting organisations should not dismiss issues regarding individual differences, goal diversity and conflict. Indeed, within the present thesis, it was apparent that practitioners' efforts of forming collaborative relationships included issues regarding personal beliefs and values, on which members of the organisations based their professional actions. Moreover, it was clear that practitioners faced significant resistance in developing professional collaborations, particularly if stakeholders felt that such interactions threatened their deeply held professional beliefs. Such challenges to establishing collaborative relationships was particularly apparent in the reflections outlining experiences of working alongside stakeholders who had a lack of knowledge and/or misunderstood applied sport psychology practice. As such, it was apparent that practitioners were required to deal with situations in which conflict and differences in opinion may appear.

It is here, therefore, where the present thesis adds to the existing knowledge regarding micropolitical actions within sporting organisations. More specifically, the analysis of reflective accounts demonstrated that practitioners' objectives of developing collaborative working relationships could not be achieved without a fundamental degree of trust and safety. From such a perspective, it became apparent that micropolitical actions within sporting contexts aimed at developing a safe environment of trust and mutual respect. In particular, whilst striving to develop trust and collaborative relationships, practitioners were often required to 'negotiate' differences in opinions between themselves and other key stakeholders. It was clear, therefore, that within such interactions, practitioners often engaged in 'concealed actions' inconsistent with the idealised standards (Goffman, 1959). This was particularly evident in the reflective accounts produced by Dan, who recalled how they often concealed the topic of the psychology workshop from the coach, framing it around something that the coach wanted to do and believed in, whilst actually delivering something opposite. Such, discrepancy between appearance and actual activity was reiterated by several practitioners, who collectively acknowledged that they often presented idealised impressions in their direct interactions with the key stakeholders. Indeed, it was evident that the practitioners were striving to regulate the information acquired by the audience projecting the situations to maintain the desired impression (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman (1959), such restrictions placed on the performer's interactions can serve as a means of keeping the audience in a state of 'mystification' in regards to the given performance, accenting certain matters and concealing others. Indeed, within the present thesis, it was apparent that such a mystical character provided the practitioners with some "elbow-room" (Goffman, 1959, p. 46) in building up an impression of their choice and allowing them to achieve the desirable goal of developing and maintaining a sense of trust and positive relationships with key stakeholders.

Interestingly, when reflecting on their interactions with significant others, practitioners often described their behaviours as being indicative of them 'playing the game'. For example, Dan expressed how they tried to be clever and work around the relationship with the coach to achieve their role's objectives. Similarly, Beth acknowledged that their actions were often underlined by playing to coach ego to fulfil role responsibilities more effectively. Here, practitioners' actions can be further understood from a perspective of

Goffman's (1969) ideas regarding social interactions presented in their third book titled 'Strategic Interaction'. More specifically, the first essay presented in this publication addressed occasions when the informing individual is in the party's immediate presence collecting information. As such, Goffman (1969) provided a description, analysis, and classification of how the information conveyed through speech and/or expressive behaviour may be manipulated, distorted and/or concealed. More specifically, by building on the ideas of manner and appearance, Goffman (1969) focused on using language and language-like signs that can be used by an individual to transmit information. Goffman (1969) identified two protagonists, observer and the subject within the analysis of transmitted communications. More specifically, Goffman (1969) suggested that as the observer strives to acquire information from a subject, it may be assumed that the subject interest lies at controlling or managing the information that the observer obtains.

Drawing on Goffman's (1969) ideas within the present thesis, it was evident that a practitioner's ability to control and manage information developed as their careers progressed. Indeed, several practitioners reflected upon significant conversations with key stakeholders at the beginning of their career, where they had said the wrong thing. For example, Dan recalled instances where they said things they should not have and were part of the conversations they should not have. Similarly, Steve recalled examples where they failed to secure buy-in in the conversations with a coach early in their career. The practitioners sampled in the present thesis recalled that often during the early stages of their career, the information given to the stakeholders was perceived as a personal attack. In one such example, Dan recalled how the feedback they provided was perceived as a way to outcast the coach from sport psychology sessions and resulted in Dan's being excluded from the video analysis sessions.

However, it was apparent that the practitioners enhanced their ability to communicate with the key stakeholders without damaging the rapport and the relationship with experience. The reflective accounts produced by Dan can serve here as the best example of such sense-making. Indeed, Dan reflected that as they continued to develop their understanding of the context and individuals within their applied settings, they learned to communicate information that they believed the stakeholders wanted to hear. Such an ability to control and manage information can be understood further from a perspective of providing cover for the performances (Goffman, 1969). Indeed, Goffman (1969) suggested that subjects would often engage in 'control moves' to produce an expression that in their opinion would improve their situation if gleaned by the observer. This self-conscious and calculated process to use one's behaviour to provide information to the observer was, therefore identified as a form of 'impression management' (Goffman, 1969). While Goffman (1969) identified three 'control moves', practitioners' actions can be best understood from the 'cover move's' perspective. Such a move was associated with an open act of secrecy and privacy, where the subject keeps the observer from perceiving something purposefully keeping them in the dark (Goffman, 1969).

The utilisation of 'cover moves' (Goffman, 1969) as a theoretical lens to interpret reflective accounts provided a further developed understanding of actions whereby practitioners purposefully avoided expressing their true opinions and beliefs. Such 'cover moves' were particularly apparent in practitioners' reflections regarding their experiences of dealing with challenging stakeholders and were associated with practitioners gaining greater experience. Indeed, in one such example, Alice recalled how as they progressed in their career, they maintained an impression of a supportive individual, despite fundamentally disagreeing with the messages projected by the coach. Several practitioners also highlighted how in their interactions

with the key stakeholders, they used their ability to frame conversations to ensure cover for the frustrations and dissatisfactions with coaches' actions. In one such example, Tom recalled how, despite disagreeing with a coach view of sport psychology, they looked to frame the conversations around the coach beliefs to maintain the relationship. Interestingly, Amy compared such actions to maintaining a 'professional guard' without revealing true thoughts about the situation.

Also, when dealing with challenging stakeholders, the practitioners reiterated the significance of managing their emotions. For example, Alice reflected how they learned to 'take a step back' from emotionally charged situations, to think rationally while presenting an argument without directly addressing the situation. Similar conclusions were presented by Tom, who highlighted the significance of 'biting their tongue' when disagreeing with key stakeholders and presenting an argument in a polite, rather than abrupt, manner. It was apparent that the practitioners within the present thesis recognised the importance of ensuring that their emotions were not getting better of them, and they were maintaining a professional face in emotionally charged encounters. Here some of Goffman's (1969) ideas regarding subject 'emotional self-control' may enhance understanding of practitioners' actions in their interactions with key stakeholders. Indeed, Goffman (1969) suggested that when stakes are high, the subject must possess sufficient 'emotional self-control' and 'intellectual control' to ensure that 'strategic information' is not given away inadvertently.

It is here, therefore, Goffman's ideas may have significant role in enhancing conceptual knowledge regarding interpersonal interactions within sporting settings, and micropolitics more broadly. Indeed, while it was clear that the practitioners interviewed as part of present thesis strived to create an image of supportive and like-minded individuals in the eyes of contextual stakeholders, they often encountered a range of challenges that tested their deeply held beliefs and values. Therefore, by drawing on the concept of 'emotional self-control' (Goffman, 1969) the interpretations presented here provide a comprehensive understanding of a range of processes aimed at establishing trust and developing collaborative relationships. More precisely, the present thesis illustrates the significance of an ability to manage emotions and acting rationally in the interpersonal interactions. Indeed, the present thesis exemplifies practitioners' interactions with contextual stakeholders where they were required to manage their emotions, suppress immediate heartfelt feelings, and convey a view of the interaction at least temporarily acceptable by the contextual stakeholders (Goffman, 1959). Such sense-making of interactions was particularly evident during multidisciplinary team meetings where the practitioners maintained a surface agreement paying 'lip service' to statements valued by contextual stakeholders (Goffman, 1959).

Therefore, by drawing from a range of disciplines and utilising different theorising of interpersonal interactions, the presented thesis offers a novel contribution to knowledge. More specifically, this is achieved by conceptualising applied sport psychologists sense making of encountered situations and theorising their actions of leaving a desirable impression (Goffman, 1959; 1969) to get on with the higher power person (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001), develop trust in the relationship (Coleman, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and ultimately secure the desired working conditions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b). Therefore, the findings presented here provide a greater conceptualisation of the significance of trust within applied sport psychology (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Gould et al., 1991), whilst also outlining a range of concepts that could contribute towards the further development of trust and effective service delivery accordingly. It is anticipated, therefore, that the theoretical interpretations of practitioners' career stories and

knowledge development that stemmed from such analysis, will contribute towards enhancing applied sport psychologist abilities to survive and thrive within their respective roles (McDougall et al., 2015).

5.4.4. Summary

The analysis outlined here presents micropolitics as a means of collaboration and coalition building (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). While acknowledging the often contested nature of sporting organisations, the present subsection illustrates the importance of developing positive and trusting relationships with contextual stakeholders. More specifically, the findings presented here identify trust and trusting relationships as a key aspect of practitioners' 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, due to an *experiential learning*, being trusted to be a supportive individual developed as an important element of practitioners' 'task perception' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b), guiding their professional behaviours and decisions.

The sense-making of practitioners' career stories outlined here provides a greater conceptual understanding of 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) within sporting organisations. In particular, the presented analysis portrays 'proactive strategies' of 'behavioural confirmation' (cf., Snyder, 1984, 1992) and 'impression management' (Goffman's, 1959) as a means of developing 'ideological', 'behavioural' and 'perceptual trust' (Coleman, 2012). The micropolitical agency of practitioners, therefore, was understood as attempts of developing and maintaining desired working conditions in line with developing 'professional self-understanding' (i.e., 'task perception') (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). This in turn, increases the current understanding as to how practitioners strategically produce recognisable performance for others (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones 2009a, 2009b, Thompson et al., 2015). Therefore, the present subsection provides a more in depth understanding of how practitioners consider and construct the impressions of their choice.

However, the present subsection also highlights that the process of establishing trust and developing collaborative relationships was often associated with practitioners' ability to manage their emotions and act rationally. The analysis outlined within this section, therefore, may stimulate future investigations into the 'experiential aspects of micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Future research should consider how the confrontation with the micropolitical realities of organisation life impact upon the emotions experienced by the practitioners. Such line of inquiry may further exemplify the challenges to practitioners' well-being and therefore pose further questions for the governing bodies and professional institutions within applied sport psychology, to consider and enhance the available support for the practitioners striving to meet the demands of their role.

5.5. Conclusion

The objective of the present chapter was to theoretically analyse and interpret participants lived experiences as accounted for within Chapter 4. To achieve this, Kelchtermans' inter-related writings (e.g., Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2018) and Goffmans' (1959, 1969) dramaturgical theory were utilised as the main analytical frameworks. While striving to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of practitioners' subjective understanding of situational and contextual factors encountered within the everyday practice, the present chapter also looked to enhance an understanding of micropolitics within the sporting organisations. It is anticipated, therefore,

that such objectives were met by illuminating the importance of practitioners' 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) in practitioners' choices, motives, and preferences. More specifically, the present chapter demonstrated how practitioners' sense-making, choices and decisions in practice reflected their 'self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) and 'subjective educational theory' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b).

From such a perspective, it became clear how descriptive and evaluative components of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) continued to influence practitioners' perceptions of encountered situations. However, it is here where deep, detailed, and prolonged interpretations of practitioners' career stories from a perspective of 'professional self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) adds to the social analysis of sport work achieved to date (e.g., Gale et al., 2019; Gibson & Groom, 2018; Huggan et al., 2015; Ives et al., 2016; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Potrac et al., 2016; Potrac et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2015). More specifically, focusing on practitioners' early-life experiences, educational experiences and professional experiences throughout the whole career demonstrated that as practitioners progressed in their careers, the conative and normative components increasingly formed the basis of their applied work. The practitioners started to meaningfully acknowledge one's understanding of oneself, developing a sense of internal coherence, consistency, and continuity (Kelchtermans, 2018). Therefore, the present thesis adds to the previous findings within performance and sport coaching literature (e.g., Gale et al., 2019; Gibson & Groom, 2018; Huggan et al., 2015; Ives et al., 2016; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Potrac et al., 2016; Potrac et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2015) highlighting the changing significance of stakeholders interactions on practitioners 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). More specifically, the present thesis illustrates that while in the early stages of practitioners' careers contextual stakeholders had a significant impact on practitioners' sense-making of themselves and encountered situations, this impact decreased as practitioners progressed in their careers.

More specifically, by drawing on the idea of 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005) and different types of power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008) it became apparent that practitioners strived to establish, safeguard or restore the desirable working conditions in line with the normative elements of their 'professional self-understanding' (i.e., 'task perception') (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). As a result, a greater understanding of how sport workers conceive of and represent themselves in their professional practice was achieved. This, in turn, allowed for a better appreciation of how these conceptions relate to professional practice. In particular, the interpretations of practitioners' career stories from a perspective of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) within the present thesis demonstrated how the person (practitioner) engages in a committed and responsible relationship with others to support them on their journey. Therefore, by illustrating the importance for sport workers to meaningfully construct and reconstruct one's self-understanding with a sense of internal coherence, the findings presented here demonstrate how as a result of enhanced experiences, practitioners developed their ability to cope with the ambiguity that stemmed from 'self-understanding' being both a 'process' and a 'product' (Kelchtermans, 2018).

While previous analysis of sport work (e.g., Gibson & Groom, 2018; Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Potrac et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2015) focused on understanding the significance of 'professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a), the present thesis shifts the attention towards the

significance of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, by recognising practitioners' 'personal interpretative framework' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) as a central part of their personal judgements, deliberate choices and intentional actions, it became apparent that as practitioners' sense of self-developed, the value-laden choices and moral considerations were at the heart of their 'proactive' and 'reactive strategies' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Therefore, the conative and normative aspects of self-understanding played a key role in practitioners micropolitical actions. From such a perspective, practitioners' actions were understood to influence the institutional structures to ensure that athletes' psychological development and well-being were integrated into the policies, approaches, and practices within the organisation.

It became clear that the developing 'instrumental or operational aspects' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) allowed practitioners to bring their normative beliefs to the forefront and have a greater influence on their respective settings' daily routines. Micropolitical actions, therefore, were mainly motivated by a 'negotiating' the aims, purposes, and structures of the programmes within applied contexts. It is here, the present thesis enhances the knowledge and understanding of the importance of positive working relationships within applied sport psychology (e.g., McDougall et al., 2015). Indeed, the findings presented here illustrate how micropolitical actions of *forging positive relationships* served to enhance practitioner's 'agency' and 'intentionality', while decreasing the 'structural vulnerability' of their applied practice. Indeed, it became clear that positive working relationships allowed the practitioners to 'negotiate' the training programmes goals and purposeful interventions of all professionals embedded within an organisation. Also, it was evident that positive working relationships with key decision makers served to solidify practitioners' position within an organisation, and therefore, enhanced their jobs security. The findings of the present thesis, therefore, serve to present micropolitics as actions aimed at establishing and developing a socially valued understanding of one-self, as well as, enhancing social-professional relationships with contextual stakeholders. From such a perspective, micropolitics can be seen as a condition for attaining sense of professional self and meaningful practice. The presentation of micropolitics in such light, in turn, might have significant implications for applied practice within sporting organisations as it might encourage a greater number of professionals to considered it as an essential aspect of daily routines.

Also, while previous research demonstrated the significance of trust in sport work (Gale et al., 2019, 2021), the present thesis adds to such a finding. First, while Gale et al. (2021) recognised the significance of utilising Goffman's (1969) workings as a means of judging the trustworthiness of others, the interpretations of career stories from a perspective of 'Strategic Interactions' (Goffman, 1969) presented micropolitics as means of cultivating, maintaining, and, where needed, repair their trust in the eyes of others. Therefore, the findings outlined here do not only add to an understanding of interpersonal trust within the sporting context but also address the paucity of research regarding how practitioners develop trust and use it to achieve desired ends (Gale et al., 2021; Purdy et al., 2013). While such sense-making of career stories moves the analysis of sport work forward, it is also anticipated that the present thesis moves past the negative and unrealistic perceptions of micropolitics within the sporting world (e.g., Potrac et al., 2013). Indeed, it is anticipated that 'proactive strategies' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a) will start to be perceived as a means of developing collaborative opportunities aimed at enhancing the support of the athletes.

It is anticipated, therefore, that readers of the present thesis, who might operate within cohesive and collaborative environments, will consider micropolitics as means of developing, enhancing, and maintaining positive working relationships. However, it is also expected that the findings outlined here will serve to support professionals in 'navigating' and 'negotiating' the workplace conditions when issues regarding values, beliefs and conflict might arouse. This thesis, therefore, enhances the current understanding of micropolitics within sporting organisations (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Rowley et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2015) by presenting it not only as a means of overcoming the contested aspects of professional practice but also as a way of developing trust and collaborative relationships. Such an enhanced understanding, in turn, is achieved by illuminating the significance of 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005) and 'informational power' (Raven, 1965) within the 'knowledge aspect' of practitioners 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Also, the present thesis adds to the current knowledge by illustrating the significance of 'behavioural confirmation' (Snyder, 1984, 1992), 'conceal actions' (Goffman, 1969), and 'cover moves' (Goffman, 1969) within the 'instrumental or operational aspects' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

Finally, the significance of the present thesis also lies in answering calls for a greater critical appreciation and application of Goffman's (1959) analysis of face-to-face interactions (Potrac, 2019). In particular, scholars in sport coaching utilised some of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical ideas to understand the micropolitical dynamics that comprise coaching (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015), the present thesis builds on such scholarship by utilising Goffman's (1959) ideas regarding 'manner', 'front' and 'back region', 'mystification' to enhance an understating of when, how and why practitioners may attempt to maintain their face (Potrac, 2019). Therefore, the present thesis questions, problematises, and builds on Goffman's (1959) ideas to create a greater and more detailed understanding of how their ideas are connected to the nuances of contemporary social life (Potrac, 2019). As such, it can be suggested that the interpretations outlined here enhance the quality of micropolitical research within the sporting context. For instance, by drawing on Goffman's (1969) text (i.e., 'Strategic Interactions') and the idea of 'emotional self-control', the present thesis serves to further enhance the knowledge of micropolitics within sporting context by demonstrating the significance of managing one's emotions and acting rationally. Such understanding, in turn, may open new lines of inquiry how the need of suppressing immediate heartfelt feelings might impact upon practitioners' wellbeing. The present thesis, therefore, might encourage professional bodies to consider the issues regarding support available to practitioners operating within sporting organisations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the major findings and to outline some of the main empirical and theoretical contributions of the present thesis. Also, the implications of the findings are presented here, illuminating the potential contributions towards the professional development of applied sport psychologists. Finally, the chapter identifies potential future avenues for further critical investigation into the socio-political realities of day-to-day applied sport psychology practice. Here, particular attention is given to demonstrating how Goffman's (1969) research regarding 'expression games' and workings on 'emotional intelligence' (cf., Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) might be applied to further explore the realities of everyday sport psychology practice.

6.2. Summary of major findings

The present thesis inquiry was aimed at addressing the paucity of research regarding how applied sport psychologists experience and respond to working with a range of contextual stakeholders. Through exploring practitioners' everyday experiences and shared endeavours with others, this thesis has sought to enhance the conceptualised understanding of how sport psychologists seek to demonstrate the impact of their applied work, in order to 'survive and thrive' within their respective professional settings (McDougall et al., 2015). Also, the objective of the present thesis was to shine some much-needed light on how practitioners develop and maintain relationships with key contextual stakeholders (McDougall et al., 2015), and therefore, understand how they act as part of their interactions with significant others (Chandler et al., 2015; Gilmore et al., 2018). It is anticipated that the multi-theoretical approach utilised here to help conceptualise practitioners' sense-making around their workplace interactions and relationships will add to the ongoing debate and discussion regarding the changing nature of the expertise and professional competencies required to practice effectively as a contemporary sport psychologist (Sly et al., 2020). Accordingly, implications are provided for professional training bodies and academic institutions who seek to train and prepare neophyte practitioners for the everyday demands and requirements of successful applied sport psychology practice. As such, an overarching objective of the present thesis was to help neophyte sport psychologists avoid a *reality shock* when entering the working environments (Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Rowley et al., 2012), developing their ability to better manage their encounters with a vast array of different contextual stakeholders.

To achieve the objectives outlined here, the present thesis adopted a longitudinal approach and an in-depth analysis of practitioners' current and retrospective sense-making throughout their respective careers-to-date. Therefore, whilst previous investigations have focused on a single practitioner's experiences (e.g. Cropley et al., 2007; Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsey, Breckon, Rowley et al., 2012; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock et al., 2008), the present thesis explored the subjective understanding of applied practice complexities from a range of different perspectives. Also, this thesis has sought to capture rich and in-depth accounts of applied experiences from the perspectives of trainee, neophyte, and experienced practitioners, thereby making a significant contribution towards conceptualising the socio-political nuances of applied practice in relation to different career stages. Finally, the findings presented here highlighted how Kelchtermans' (2002a, 2002b, 2005, 2009a) workings addressing 'professional self-understanding' and 'micropolitical literacy', and Goffman's (1959, 1969) work on 'impression management' can be utilised to

help advance an understanding of the socio-political nature of stakeholder interactions within sporting organisations.

While the frameworks introduced by Kelchtermans (2002a, 2002b, 2009a) were utilised in both performance and community coaching (e.g., Gale et al., 2019; Gibson & Groom, 2018; Huggan et al., 2015; Ives et al., 2016; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Potrac et al., 2016; Potrac et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2015) one of the main contributions of the present thesis is recognising the significance of practitioners' early life experiences on developing 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) and normative beliefs regarding the importance of sport psychology support. Such sense-making was understood from a perspective of Kelchtermans and Deketelaere (2016) and Kelchtermans (2018) work regarding teachers' prior experiences as pupils. While acknowledging the significant differences between attending school and participating in sport, the present thesis looked to illuminate the potential influence of practitioners' experiences as a young athlete on shaping their understanding of sport psychology practice and themselves as future practitioners. In particular, the reflective accounts shared within the present thesis demonstrated that a lack of sport psychology support during practitioners' time as a youth athlete paid a significant role in their desire to pursue a career in sport psychology and serve to underline their 'job motivation' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, it was evident that such experiences played a key role in practitioners' desire to pursue a career in sport psychology, choosing such a career over several other roles that would allow them to fulfil their desire of working within a sporting environment (i.e., coach, performance analyst, strength and conditioning coach).

This is not to suggest that a sporting career as a youth or professional athlete is a prerequisite for becoming an applied practitioner. However, the present thesis holds the potential for illuminating the significance of early life experiences on developing the normative component of 'professional self-understanding'. Indeed, adopting such an approach within the present thesis demonstrated that the practitioners entered the accreditation process and ultimately, their respective organisations with a personally constructed system of knowledge and beliefs. This, in turn, allowed to develop an understanding of how practitioners perceived encountered situations within sporting organisations and how the interactions with key contextual stakeholders served to challenge, modify, strengthen, or even change their views of themselves and their practice. In particular, it was apparent that the 'structural vulnerability' (Kelchtermans, 1996, 2007, 2011) played a key role in influencing practitioners' 'self-esteem' and 'self-image' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). While several practitioners reflected that they were not prepared to work alongside a diverse range of stakeholders, which resulted in self-doubt, it was also apparent that the practitioners often refrained from challenging contextual stakeholders due to a perceived lack of job security. In a similar vein, the limited job opportunities available underlined practitioners' efforts to develop a positive image in the key contextual stakeholders' eyes.

It is here, therefore, the present thesis adds to the current understanding of sport psychologists' interactions within the sporting context (e.g., Eubank et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015; Reid et al., 2004). More specifically, the findings demonstrated how practitioners engaged in 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) as a means of dealing with 'structural vulnerability' (Kelchtermans, 1996, 2007, 2011) and with a view to advancing their own positioning within the organisation. This was particularly evident during the early stages of practitioners' career where they

looked to influence stakeholders' perceptions of them by willingly working outside of their contracted and/or paid working hours. Indeed, several practitioners expressed the significance of going above and beyond in an attempt to show their commitment and to mirror the apparent dedication shown by their colleagues. This was particularly apparent in those cases where the practitioners were found to be working on a voluntary or part-time basis. Such 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) could be seen as an indication of their 'future perspectives' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b), with several practitioners highlighting how they immersed themselves into their roles in the hope of securing additional opportunities for further employment as their career progressed.

Interpretations of reflective accounts from such a perspective, therefore, demonstrated the significance of social recognition as a means of increasing job security and enhancing career opportunities. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners engaged in intentional actions to gain a sense of professional self, recognised by significant others (i.e., athletes, coaches, performance directors). In particular, neophyte practitioners strived to demonstrate their competence and leave good impression about their knowledge and understanding of sport psychology. Also, the practitioners took on extra duties to develop an image of being a hardworking and dedicated individual. Therefore, the present thesis echoed the previous findings regarding micropolitics within sporting context (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Thompson et al., 2015). Indeed, scholars in sport coaching demonstrated that professionals operating in the sporting context strived to present an appropriate 'front' (Goffman, 1959) to ensure that the stakeholders perceived their skills and services in a positive manner (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015). Micropolitics, therefore, were depicted as strategies of presenting a compelling 'front' (Goffman, 1959) in the efforts of securing buy-in from contextual stakeholders, and to fulfil the duties of their particular role and ultimately meet the expectations that the key decision makers may have of them (e.g., Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015).

It is here where the present thesis can be seen to enhance the knowledge and understanding of micropolitics within the sporting context (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015). More specifically, despite the welcomed contributions of the sport coaching literature, it needs to be highlighted that previous publications have almost exclusively focused on the "dark side of organisational life" (Hoyle, 1982, p. 87), presenting micropolitics as a means to outmanoeuvre (Potrac & Jones, 2009b) and manipulate those around to reach desirable goals (Potrac et al., 2013). Significant attention was given to having an eye over your shoulder (Potrac & Jones, 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015) and impressing stakeholders to maintain and improve personal standings (Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac et al., 2013). However, such a representation of micropolitics within sporting contexts was perceived by professionals operating within sporting settings as unrealistic and overly negative, with the influence and reach of such findings being questionable (Potrac et al., 2013). Whilst recognising the contested nature of sporting settings (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b), the present thesis adds to the current state of knowledge by presenting micropolitics in a less negative light. More specifically, the present thesis findings demonstrated that micropolitics encompass elements of collaboration and coalition building, in an attempt to achieve certain valued goals (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Such an understanding of 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) was particularly evident from a perspective of normative aspects of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009, 2009b). Upon recognition that practitioners' 'task perception' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) was underlined by moral responsibility and duty of care

towards the athletes (cf., Andersen, 2009; Chandler et al., 2014; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Sharpe & Hodge, 2011), it was evident that the practitioners engaged in micropolitical action as a means of forming collaborative opportunities with significant others to enhance an athlete's psychological development. More specifically, it was evident that the practitioners recognised that by forming alliances with other professionals, other key stakeholders might in turn seek to better incorporate sport psychology within the sporting organisation's day-to-day functioning more successfully, and ultimately enhance athletes' psychological capabilities.

The findings of the present thesis, therefore, illuminate that while micropolitics may serve as a means of achieving 'professional interests' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b), which often includes securing and keeping one's position, it does not take precedence over the primary objective of supporting athletes in their efforts of achieving high performances levels (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Indeed, the present thesis illustrated that applied sport psychologists might be in a unique position compared to other members of the multidisciplinary team and engage in 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) as a means of adhering to the professional and personal ethics (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Therefore, the present thesis highlights the significance of developing an understanding of individuals' values, interests, motives, and individual career stories to develop a greater understanding of the micropolitical workings of sporting organisations, further demonstrating the significance of the specific context in which one's operates. As a result, the present thesis enhances sport professionals understanding of micropolitics, illustrating that it can take the form of very different actions, depending on the meaningful interactions between the individual practitioner and the professional context and stakeholders embedded within sporting settings. Therefore, the findings outlined here serve to encourage the sport professionals to pay greater attention to micropolitics within their respective roles and everyday situations encountered in sporting organisations.

While the present thesis is not suggesting that practitioner's sense-making of their workplace situations was solely underlined by micropolitical actions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b), the findings presented here serve to support professionals to better understand and conceptualise the flexible adaptations required when working within sporting settings. Indeed, the findings presented here demonstrate that the practitioners engaged in micropolitical actions to deal with the ambiguity inherent within sporting organisations (cf., Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac & Jones, 2009b). Within the present thesis, such ambiguity was associated with practitioner's 'self-understanding' as both a 'process' and 'product', as being situated between 'agency' and 'structure', and as being caught between 'intentionality' and 'vulnerability' (Kelchtermans, 2018). While social recognition was identified as something that one receives from others, and therefore, might be lost at any given time, it was apparent that practitioners engaged in 'micropolitical actions' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) of *forging positive relationships* with key contextual stakeholders. Indeed, it was apparent that the practitioners sampled here were striving to develop positive working relationships to enhance their influence of the functioning of the sporting environment. The practitioners, therefore, adopted a 'top-down' approach and forming positive relationships with the key decision-makers within the sporting organisation (e.g., sporting director, academy manager, head coach).

Interpretations of such actions demonstrated that as the practitioners progressed in their career, they develop an ability to recognise 'different types of power' (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008) and the

formal and informal political structures (Brown et al., 2005). It is here where the present thesis holds a significant contribution to knowledge regarding micropolitics within the sporting context, documenting how practitioners develop their 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b). In particular, by drawing on the concept of 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005), the present thesis provided a greater insight into the processes by which practitioners acquired the knowledge necessary to acknowledge ("see") and understand ("read") the micropolitical character of a particular situation (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). The present thesis, therefore, provided a greater insight into the more tacit development of practitioners embedded within sporting context, illustrating how they change throughout their careers (Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Tod, 2007). The development of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), therefore, was associated with a lifelong experiential learning process during which the practitioners develop their knowledge regarding issues of power and struggles of interest within a given context (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

However, the present thesis also adds to the current knowledge and understanding of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) by illustrating the significance of understanding values and attitudes of the individuals at all levels of the organisation (Brown et al., 2005). More specifically, the findings outlined here presented knowing a person as a vital component of the 'knowledge aspect' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Indeed, knowledge and understanding of stakeholders' views, approaches, philosophies, and preferred methods of work, played a key role in supporting a practitioner's ability to achieving their own desirable working conditions. More specifically, it was apparent that practitioners' efforts of collecting situation-specific information and unique aspect of each stakeholders serve to guide their 'micropolitical actions'. Indeed, the present thesis demonstrated that practitioners engaged in 'behavioural confirmation' (Snyder, 1984, 1992) and 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959, 1969) to establish and safeguard the desirable working conditions.

The present thesis, therefore, provided a greater insight into the 'instrumental or organisational aspects' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) within sporting contexts. Indeed, while the previous research utilised some of Goffman's (1959) ideas (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015), the findings presented here moved pass the current understanding of micropolitical actions within sporting organisations. More specifically, the present thesis provided a novel understanding of how practitioners seek to develop an impression of their choosing. Such an understanding was achieved by illuminating how practitioners created a state of 'mystification' (Goffman, 1959) in regards to given performance, accenting certain matters and concealing others. It was apparent, therefore, that practitioners engaged in 'concealed actions' (Goffman, 1959) to achieve desirable goals of developing and maintaining positive working relationships with contextual stakeholders. Such actions were further understood from a perspective of 'transmitted communications' (Goffman, 1969). More specifically, the practitioners used their 'information power' (Raven, 1965) to communicate the information that stakeholders wanted to hear, while concealing information that could damage the relationship.

The findings of the present thesis, therefore, hold significant implications for enhancing an understanding of micropolitics within sporting context by illuminating practitioners' ability to engage in 'control moves' (Goffman, 1969) as a means of producing a desired impression of themselves within their professional roles. In particular, the analysis here outlined highlighted how practitioners engage in 'cover

moves' (Goffman, 1969) to prevent contextual stakeholders from obtaining undesirable information. This in turn, enhanced an understanding of how practitioners refrain from expressing their true opinions and beliefs, maintaining an image of a supportive individual. It was clear, therefore, that 'cover moves' (Goffman, 1969) allowed the practitioners to maintain a professional face in their interactions with contextual stakeholders. The significance of 'cover moves' (Goffman, 1969) was particularly apparent in interactions with stakeholders who were reluctant to collaborative work enhancing an understanding of how practitioners managed their frustrations in such encounters. In similar vein, the analysis of 'cover moves' (Goffman, 1969) highlighted the importance of 'emotional self-control' (Goffman, 1969) in an ability of maintaining a desirable impression.

Overall, the micropolitical inquiry of the present thesis and utilisation of Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) inter-related writings and Goffman's (1959, 1969) ideas regarding 'impression management' strengthened the calls for the further development of training programmes within applied sport psychology (e.g., Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Sly et al., 2020; Winter & Colins, 2016). Also, it is anticipated that the findings presented here will reiterate the need for a debate regarding competency profiles required by applied practitioners operating within sporting organisations. More specifically, the present thesis aspires to present micropolitics as a fundamental or core competence (Jooste et al., 2016; Tenenbaum et al., 2003). required as part of successful applied sport psychology practice. It is anticipated that such an acceptance of micropolitics as a vital part of everyday practice will have a positive impact on enhancing practitioners' ability to survive and thrive within their respective applied settings (McDougall et al., 2015). Also, by presenting micropolitics as a means of developing trust (Coleman, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and forming collaborative relationships, it is expected for the present thesis to hold significant implications within applied sport psychology by enhancing practitioners' ability to develop, maintain and enhance positive working relationships with contextual stakeholders (McDougall et al., 2015) and to receive greater buy-in from those in the wider allied professions (Eubank et al., 2014; McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). This in turn, is anticipated to help enhance practitioners' ability of having a more positive and far-reaching impact on athletes' lives, well-being, and performances.

6.3. Implications

The findings outlined within the present thesis hold the potential for building towards a 'new grammar' (Kelchtermans, 2018) of applied sport psychology providing the aspiring practitioners' resources to construct better and understand applied situations. More specifically, the findings presented here go some way towards enhancing aspiring practitioners' 'knowledge-in-action', which has been recognised as "the most substantive form of knowledge and should properly constitute the body of knowledge of a practice discipline" (Johns, 1995 as cited in Anderson et al., 2004, p. 191). Indeed, it was recognised that the practitioners striving to develop their 'knowledge-in-action' should assimilate different sources of knowledge (i.e., empirical, aesthetic, personal, and ethical) that, consequently, become evident in their actions (Anderson et al., 2004). The present thesis, therefore, plays a significant role in enhancing aspiring practitioners' personal knowledge concerned with knowing and understanding oneself and how one's personal characteristics can influence the sense-making of interpersonal relationships and interactions within applied context, as well as aesthetic knowledge related to the art of practice and ability to use knowledge to grasp, understand, and respond to situations (Anderson et al., 2004). Such knowledge, in turn, may serve to

increase aspiring sport psychologists' ability to work alongside those in the wider allied professions (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016) and avoid the *reality shock* and a feeling of being "thrown to wolves" (Tonn & Harmison, 2004, p. 325) upon entering sporting organisations for the first time.

This is not to suggest that the findings outlined in the present thesis can help the neophyte sport psychologist completely avoid the 'praxis shock' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Indeed, it needs to be acknowledged that each context is different and that the experiences of practitioners interviewed within the present thesis may not be replicated in other settings. Also, sport is a very dynamic social phenomenon that is developing rapidly (Koprivica, 2018). Therefore, it is very difficult to predict how sporting organisations will look and function in the future and what challenges await the next generation of practitioners. As such, it may be anticipated that the first confrontation with the realities of applied practice will often put the practitioners to the test. However, it is anticipated that the readers of the present thesis can enhance their professional learning by developing knowledge that would allow them for more meaningful interactions with their organisational context. More specifically, neophyte sport psychologists can be better prepared to see, read and understand the issues of power, influence, and control within sporting settings. As such, readers of the present thesis may better understand and appreciate that professional development not only encompasses a technical dimension (knowledge and understanding of theory) but also a moral, emotional, and political dimension.

Therefore, while it might be too ambitious to anticipate that the present thesis could remove such experiences altogether, the findings presented here hold potential for enhancing neophyte sport psychologists' ability to better recognise, understand and overcome some of the challenges associated with the 'praxis shock' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). For instance, the findings outlined here may play a key role in influencing the 'experiential aspect' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) by preparing the aspiring practitioners to meet the micropolitical realities of applied practice. Such an appreciation of the dilemmas of initial experiences, in turn, may serve to decrease aspiring practitioners' intense emotions of discomfort and uncertainty, powerless and sometimes anger, frustration, and vulnerability, which often may stem from a lack of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). This, therefore, may further contribute towards enhancing practitioner's ability to remain in their role by enhancing positive emotions of joy and satisfaction as a result of their increased ability to deal with encountered situations and experiencing success (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

The findings outlined within the present thesis also serve as a response to calls from within sport psychology literature for more in-depth knowledge about learning, professional development, and excellence in sport psychology (Hutter et al., 2015). Indeed, acknowledging the significance of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) within sport psychology practice holds significant implications within the development of expertise and excellence in sport psychology education. More specifically, by recognising what the practitioners need to learn to survive and thrive within the applied practice (McDougall et al., 2015), the present thesis contributes towards improvement and development of educational programmes with a view to better preparing sport psychologists for the everyday interpersonal demands of successful applied practice.

One area that may see significant developments as a result of the findings present here is the supervision experience required to obtain the chartered status within sport psychology. More specifically, supervisors looking to develop their trainees micropolitical abilities could draw on Goffman's (1959) work regarding 'region behaviour'. Indeed, while acknowledging the part of the front called 'setting', which was discussed earlier within the present thesis, Goffman (1959) used the term 'front region' to refer to the place where the performance is given. Goffman (1959) suggested that some aspects of the performance may be played not to the audience but to the 'front region', where the actor looks to give the appearance that embodies certain standards. These standards may be defined in terms of the way that the performer treats the audience while engaging in a talk with them and the way the performer comports themselves while in the visual range of the audience, without engaging in talk with them (Goffman, 1959). In addition, Goffman (1959) acknowledged the existence of other regions where the suppressed facts make an appearance. First, the 'back region' or a 'backstage' were identified as a place where the performer can relax, drop their front, and step out of character (Goffman, 1959). Secondly, the 'outside region' was identified as a place where neither the front nor back aspects of the performance take place, with individuals on the outside of the social establishment referred as outsiders.

Trainees and their supervisors, therefore, may utilise the 'outside region' (Goffman, 1959) as a mean of enhancing trainees' awareness of micropolitical realities of applied practice within the sporting context and supporting them in preparing the performance (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, Goffman (1959) suggested that, when out of the 'front region', the performers may adjust certain aspects of the 'front', scrutinise for flaws, and check for potentially inappropriate expressions. As such, the trainees can be schooled when no contextual stakeholders are presented to them (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, it can be suggested that throughout the supervision process, trainees should be exposed to direct experiences tied to real world problems that would allow them to develop their knowledge and understanding of micropolitical realities. As such, supervisors should adopt a role of experiential educators to provide trainees with an opportunity to engage in problem-solving exercises aimed at enhancing 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

The present thesis, therefore, holds the potential for adding to the debate regarding the competency of supervisors (e.g., Sly et al., 2020). More specifically, by illuminating the significance of experience within applied sport psychology practice, it might be suggested that supervisors should look to incorporate aspects of 'experiential learning' (cf. Kolb, 2015) into the supervision process. Indeed, in recent years higher education providers have sought to respond to the changing demands of modern-day world by modifying the core of educational processes (Vilarroel et al., 2020). As such, greater attention started to be given to providing students with more autonomy and responsibility for their learning, involving them personally with their learning process (Vilarroel et al., 2020). 'Experiential learning' (Kolb, 2015), therefore, was identified as a powerful tool for making the required change within higher education (Miettinen, 2000). As a result, experiential education received significant attention in the higher education sector in the twenty-first century with universities striving to prepare students for real-world problems (Vilarroel et al., 2020).

While 'experiential learning' is commonly used to define learning from life experiences, it needs to be highlighted that it is often contrasted with classroom learning (Kolb, 2015). Therefore, there is a danger that the association between 'experiential learning' with direct experience and exemplifying in-context action

as the primary source of learning downplays the significance of thinking, analysing and academic knowledge (Kolb, 2015). Therefore, it is anticipated that the present thesis will serve to encourage supervisors to incorporate some of the 'experiential learning' exercises (e.g., case studies, critical incidents, role play) into the supervision meetings that would allow the trainees to establish connections between theory and experience. As such, it is expected that such experiences in the 'outside region' (Goffman, 1959) would allow trainees to build a bridge between undergraduate education and the world of applied practice. More specifically, by engaging in role play experiences in supervision, trainees could explore issues and situations from a micropolitical perspective. Within such exercises the trainees would be provided with an opportunity to gain a greater personal insight and greater awareness to one's personally held beliefs. This in turn, could allowed trainees to express their feelings, explore their ideas of reality and be confronted with the consequences of their actions within the safe environment of supervision.

It is anticipated, therefore, that such experiences in the 'outside region' (Goffman, 1959) would better prepare the practitioners to guide their behaviours and actions in the 'back region' (Goffman, 1959). More specifically, the supervisors may encourage trainees to develop their 'contextual intelligence' (Brown et al., 2005) while outside of direct interactions with contextual stakeholders. Therefore, in line with the findings of the present thesis, supervisors may reinforce the significance of developing a bespoke understanding of the applied contexts that one operates in. This may involve learning about formal and informal structures of an organisation, understanding how the system works, recognising the dominant values and beliefs with the environment, increasing an awareness of different means of influence, and paying attention to individual differences. Therefore, it is anticipated that supervisors may prepare trainees to better utilise their time in the 'back region' (Goffman, 1959) to develop 'informational power' (Raven, 1965) and as such enhance the 'knowledge aspects' of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

The utilisation of 'outside' and 'back regions' (Goffman, 1959) in supervision, therefore, holds a potential for enhancing 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), which in turn may play a key role in guiding trainees' actions in the 'front region' (Goffman, 1959). It is expected, therefore, that Goffman's (1959) ideas regarding 'region behaviour', may enhance supervisory provision and prospective practitioners' abilities to 'navigate' and 'negotiate' wide range of interactions with contextual stakeholders. This is not to suggest that the present thesis may only hold positive implications for trainee and neophyte sport psychologists. While acknowledging that professional development in applied sport psychology is a lifelong process (Fletcher & Maher, 2013), the present thesis may have a positive impact on all practitioners regarding of qualifications and level of experience. Indeed, it is anticipated that more experienced practitioners, who are not required to engage in supervision (Sly et al., 2020) might benefit from developing their understanding regarding 'region behaviour' (Goffman, 1959). More specifically, experienced practitioners may engage in conversations with their peers or colleagues regarding micropolitics while in the 'outside region' (Goffman, 1959), looking to utilise their time in the 'back region' (1959) to prepare their performance.

Overall, the present thesis holds significant implications for the discipline by identifying 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) as a fundamental competence within applied sport psychology. Also, by documenting how different aspects of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) develop, the findings outlined here, serve to add to a debate regarding professional development of

applied sport psychologists (Sly et al., 2020). More specifically, the multi-theoretical lens adopted within the present thesis provides a heuristic basis to help scaffold developmental activities aimed at enhancing practitioners' professional self-understanding, contextual understanding and micropolitical activity. It is anticipated, therefore, that the present thesis will contribute towards enhancing practitioners' 'experiential learning' (Kolb, 2015) in an absence of actual lived experiences. This in turn, will serve to better prepare practitioners for the realities of everyday practice and contribute towards decreasing negative experiences that may often arise as a consequence of interpersonal interactions within sporting organisations.

6.4. Limitations

While the present thesis holds significant implications in sport psychology literature and enhances understanding of micropolitics within a sporting context, it needs to be acknowledged that there is much work to be done before a full understanding of the social complexity of applied sport psychology delivery could be achieved. Indeed, while the present thesis provided valuable insight into the rules of social interactions and modes of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) within the applied practice, such descriptions and analysis were provided only from sport psychologists' perspective. As such, while some attempts have been made to present the social networks that comprise everyday organisational life (Potrac, 2019), the examination of how, and to who, the stakeholders are connected could indeed strengthen an understanding of micropolitical thoughts, feelings, and actions of sport psychologists. For instance, the reflective accounts produced by Amy demonstrated how the relationship between the performance lifestyle advisor and performance director impacted upon their sense-making of applied situations. Therefore, by mapping the organisational network, the present thesis could further enhance an understanding of the nuances of sport work.

However, it needs to be acknowledged that such a process would require gathering the viewpoints of various other agents that comprise an organisational network. Indeed, one group of stakeholders might not have the required understanding of social networks and/or might view it only from their unique perspective. Considering that the objective of the present thesis was to enhance an understanding of sport psychologists' sense-making of interpersonal interactions, the sampling process focused on recruiting participants from a single population sample. As such, effective and accurate social mapping of the organisational network went beyond the scope of the present thesis. Therefore, while the present thesis provided significant contributions to knowledge by exploring specific relationships or sets of relationships (e.g., practitioner-coach and practitioner-sporting director), there is certainly an opportunity for enhancing this scope of inquiry.

Secondly, the present thesis illuminated the significance of emotional self-control in interactions with a range of stakeholders. Indeed, the findings presented here outlined the importance of practitioners' ability to conceal their emotions and act rationally. However, it also needs to be highlighted that emotions in practice may play a significant role in impacting practitioners' *self-image* (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) and therefore influence various reactive and proactive strategies (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). As such, a more detailed exploration into the emotional affairs of social life may hold significant implications in the exploration of micropolitical actions. However, such a detailed exploration of emotions (e.g., hope, fear, embarrassment, pride, anger, joy) experienced in practice went beyond the scope of the present thesis. Indeed, by focusing on understanding the day-to-day realities of

applied practice, the present thesis was not able to focus on a detail exploration of the emotions experienced by the practitioners. The emotions described by the practitioners of the present thesis, therefore, formed a part of their daily practice, and the findings regarding the significance of emotional self-control were a result of injury to practitioners' sense-making of interpersonal interactions. As such, much more can be done in future work to better explore practitioners' emotional experiences. In particular, research can focus on investigating emotional cultures, display rules, and feeling rules that are a feature of the sporting setting (Potrac, 2019).

6.5. Suggestions for future research

While the exploration of specific relationships or sets of relationships (e.g., practitioner-coach and practitioner-sporting director) conducted within the present thesis helped to enhance an understanding of everyday realities of applied sport psychology and sport work more broadly, there remains much more than can be done to understand the complexities and nuances of social interactions. For instance, in Goffman's (1969) terms, the sport psychologists within the present thesis were presented as 'subjects', whereas the contextual stakeholders were presented as 'observers'. However, while such differentiation was adopted for the purpose of the analysis, it needs to be acknowledged that in real life, pairs of 'players' are involved in 'expression games' against each other adopting reversed roles (Goffman, 1969). More specifically, if the 'observer' wants to inform themselves effectively, they need to act as if they accept the 'subject' on the face value and ensure that they are not discrediting their own act (Goffman, 1969). At the same time, the 'subject' tries to 'uncover' if the 'observer' is suspicious of their act. Within the social interaction, the 'observer' is a 'concealer' or 'subject', while the 'subject' is a 'searcher' too, with both 'players', therefore, being in the same 'box' (Goffman, 1969).

In addition, Goffman's (1969) analysis of social interactions, from a perspective of 'expression games', highlighted the significance of a 'player's' knowledge of the other's knowledge of what is occurring in the 'game'. According to Goffman (1969), the information that the 'observer' is trying to acquire is very often already possessed by the 'subject', who is being concerned to restrict access to it. The 'subject' is also concerned with guarding the information and keeping the 'observer' from knowing that they have this information (Goffman, 1969). Simultaneously, suppose the 'observer' gains access to the information. In that case, they will almost always find it in their interest to 'conceal' that they have done so, ensuring that they do not destroy the possibility of acquiring more information (Goffman, 1969). Describing such interactions, Goffman (1969) used a metaphor of intelligence agent, who looks to memorise or photocopy restricted documents ensuring that it would not be seen that they have been discovered. Therefore, such actions ensure that the 'observer' position is not jeopardised, keeping the 'subject' in the dark and making sure that they do not see what the 'observer' is preparing (Goffman, 1969).

Also, within such 'strategic interactions' (Goffman, 1969), both parties may find themselves in a well-structured situation of mutual impingement where each player must make a 'move'. More specifically, each player is required to make a series of decisions, knowing that the other 'player' is likely to work out their decisions in advance (Goffman, 1969). According to Goffman (1969) therefore, within social interaction, each 'player' will take a particular course of action or make a move in the light of one's thoughts about the other's thoughts about oneself. As such, both the 'subject' and the 'observer', engage in a 'strategic

interaction' by exchanging a series of 'moves' made based on orientation to self and others (Goffman, 1969). The present thesis provides some insight into 'cover moves' adopted by the 'subject' (Goffman, 1969), the future research should build on such findings and investigate the 'strategic interactions' and 'expressions games' within the sporting context in greater depth (Goffman, 1969). In particular, significant attention should be given to the concept of unwitting, uncovering moves, and counter-uncovering moves (Goffman, 1969). More specifically, Goffman (1969) defined an unwitting move as "a subject's observable behaviour that is unoriented to the assessment of the observer" (p. 11), 'uncovering move' has been described as an examination of some kind. Whereas the 'counter-uncovering move' has been defined as the 'subject's' awareness that their actions and words can be anticipated by the 'observer' and, therefore, counter the 'observers'' action who may seek out means of piercing the veil means.

As such, considering the symmetry of the role obtained in the social interaction (Goffman, 1969) when one individual engages in assessing another, it is in their interest to control the information about this fact. Therefore, both the 'subject' and the 'observer' might engage in an 'uncovering move' by performing an examination of some kind (Goffman, 1969). For instance, the 'observer' may engage in 'covert interviews' to delicately gather information without the 'subject' (the observer hopes) being aware that such a process is going on, being trapped in an 'unwitting move'. At the same time, however, the 'subject' may anticipate that the 'observer' is suspecting the controls they employed. Within such a situation, the 'subject' may engage in 'counter-uncovering moves' and give the 'observer' a false sense of having an advantage (Goffman, 1969). However, while engaging in such action, the 'subject' needs to acknowledge that they might be checked out by the 'observer' against their physiological and emotional expressions (Goffman, 1969).

Indeed, while the present thesis highlighted the significance of *managing the self* within the social interaction, future research should focus on investigating how practitioners develop 'emotional self-control' and 'intellectual control' to ensure that strategic information is not given away inadvertently (Goffman, 1969). Indeed, such line of inquiry holds potential for making a significant contribution to knowledge by enhancing an understanding of how applied practitioners suppress effectively many physiological and emotional signs through which they can give themselves away in the 'game of expression' and 'strategic interaction' (Goffman, 1969). In particular, future research should investigate how practitioners manage to act coolly and unsuspiciously even when the 'observer' is getting warm and close to the discovery of their act (Goffman, 1969). One concept that could enhance understanding of an individual's self-control in social interaction may include 'emotional intelligence' (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Indeed, it was suggested that individuals who have high levels of 'emotional intelligence' possess a self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self and sense the emotions of others to guide one's thinking and actions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). More specifically, future investigations of social interactions (Goffman, 1969) may explore adopting a range of theoretical and measurement perspectives on 'emotional intelligence' to understand better how practitioners *manage the self* in applied practice (cf., Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Indeed, the mixed model of 'emotional intelligence' that encompasses both mental abilities (i.e., emotional self-awareness, problem-solving, impulse control) and self-reported personality characteristics (i.e., mood, genuineness, warmth), as well as, the ability model of 'emotional intelligence' that involves the ability to use the information in the emotion to direct cognition and motivate behaviour could be utilised to advance research and practice in sport psychology (c.f., Mayer &

Salovey, 1997) While both of these models should be given thorough consideration, the significance of *experiential learning* highlighted within the present thesis, may serve to illustrate to potential benefits of adopting the ability model of 'emotional intelligence' (cf., Mayer, 2001) within sport psychology literature. Indeed, such a line of inquiry could further illuminate the importance of experience within the applied practice and ultimately have significant implications within the training of applied practitioners by enhancing the understanding of learning and development over time.

Finally, Goffman (1959) highlighted that a definition of a particular situation is often fostered and sustained by the intimate co-operation of more than one participant. More specifically, using a rather dated and patriarchal metaphor of marriage, Goffman (1959) suggested that when a wife and a husband appear before new friends, the wife may present a more respectful subordination to the husband's opinions compared to when alone with them when in the presence of old friends. To better understand several participants' ability to sustain a particular impression as a unit in front of an audience, Goffman (1959) utilised a 'team's concept'. Indeed, Goffman (1959) defined a 'team' as "a set of performers who cooperate in presenting a single performance" (p. 50). In a similar vein, a 'teammate' was defined as "someone whose dramaturgical co-operation is dependent upon fostering a given definition of the situation" (p. 51). While the stories of practice demonstrated that, despite holding opposite beliefs, the practitioners often adopted an impression of support towards the key stakeholders in front of the audience, future research should explore in greater detail how the practitioners show a united 'front' and refrain from showing hostility or disrespect towards key stakeholders. Such inquiry may provide greater insight into social interactions within the sporting context, illuminating in particular how the practitioners decide to interact with other professionals while in front of the athletes. This may also enhance an understanding of micropolitical actions of solidarity of subordination briefly described within the present thesis.

This line of inquiry may hold significant implications in enhancing the knowledge regarding micropolitical strategies for developing trust. To achieve this future research can build on the work on the 'five facets of trust' (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Interpretation of everyday realities of applied practice from a perspective of this framework can explore how sport workers seek to promote trust by demonstrating 'benevolence', or the attitude of goodwill, to acknowledge the needs and interests of others, while refraining from exposing their vulnerabilities for personal gain. Next, future exploration can focus on enhancing an understanding of 'openness' and 'transparency' in interpersonal interactions. For instance, how stakeholders embedded within the same setting share relevant information and materials to help others succeed. Finally, interpretations of practitioners' actions to be perceived as 'honest' and 'reliable' may also hold significant implications in enhancing an understanding of micropolitical action.

Considering the nuances of working with a range of stakeholders (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b), future research should also consider investigating specific emotions that feature in the process of developing and maintaining trust within a relationship (Gale et al., 2021). In particular, new research inquiries should build on the finding of the present thesis regarding 'emotional self-control' (Goffman, 1969) and utilise Hochschild's (1983) ideas regarding 'emotion management'. Indeed, Hochschild (1983) builds on the ideas presented by Goffman (1959) demonstrating how impression management has an inherently emotional dimension. Therefore, future research should investigate how practitioners manage their emotional

experiences when trying to conform to emotional norms, gain social approval and other rewards, and avoid sanctions (Hochschild, 1983). As such, following the lead from Hochschild (1983), an inquiry into 'emotion management' within sport work should focus on enhancing an understanding of surface acting, deep acting, and interpersonal emotion management strategies. More specifically, future research can explore how practitioners manage their outward expression of emotion (i.e. surface acting) to control what others perceive about their feelings. Next, how practitioners attempt to manipulate the level of bodily arousal while trying to change the way they feel in their interactions with others (i.e. deep acting). Finally, interpretations of practitioners' actions to influence, control, and modify the emotions of others (i.e., interpersonal emotional management) may provide a more sophisticated understanding of micropolitical strategies within the sporting context. Therefore, an investigation into 'emotional management' (Hochschild, 1983) may further enhance an understanding of tools used by practitioners to better navigate and negotiate interpersonal interactions.

Overall, the recommendations of future research just outlined may hold a potential to provide greater insight into the dealings individuals have with one another and as such further enhance the understanding of micropolitics within sporting context. To achieve this, future research should move past investigations from a perspective of one group of practitioners (i.e., sport psychologists, coaches, performance analysts) and look to simultaneously incorporate the sense-making of all practitioners embedded within the sporting environment. An examination of sporting organisations' micropolitical reality from such a perspective may provide a greater understanding of social interactions than has been achieved to date. One methodological approach that may hold the potential for understanding such individual meaning-making process is ethnography (cf., Sparkes & Smith, 2016). Indeed, an adaptation of multiple methods such as participant-observation and interviewing may provide a fascinating insight into individual meanings attached to everyday activities (Krane & Baird, 2005). Ethnography may be particularly suited within studies focused on the organisation of social life (Lofland, 1995) capturing rich cognitive data due to close and prolonged interaction with participants and their everyday lives (Tedlock, 2000). An adaptation of ethnography within the studies investigating micropolitical realities of the sporting organisation may provide a greater understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours grounded in the experiences and the beliefs of the social group members compared to using any other approaches (Tedlock, 2000). This in turn, may further enhance an understanding of the theorising adopted within the present thesis further facilitating the development of applied sport psychologists and enhancing their ability to survive and thrive within sporting organisations (McDougall et al., 2015).

6.6. Conclusion

As accounted for within Chapter 1 (Introduction), my own experiences in professional sport initially led to me seeking to explore personal interactions and relationships within sporting organisations as part of this PhD thesis. Through engaging with practitioners' stories presented here and conducting this longitudinal process, I have come to appreciate the significance of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) on practitioners' sense-making of encountered applied situations. Such a realisation, in turn, had a significant impact on my own applied practice. Indeed, the theorising and frameworks proposed by Kelchtermans (2005, 2009a, 2009b) allowed me to better explore and understand my experiences and decisions in practice. Also, I became better prepared to manage myself and my practice while working in a

range of contexts and alongside a wide group of stakeholders. Therefore, by adapting the theoretical lens (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1969; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a) within the present research I achieved my objectives of enhancing my personal development as a researcher and a practitioner. Indeed, while utilising different frameworks as a tool to interpret practitioners lived experiences I was required to engage in reflexivity (Wilkinson, 1988) and make sense of my own experience. This, in turn, allowed me to better appreciate the significance of stakeholders interactions with my actions and helped me to better understand issues of power and trust within the sporting context. Therefore, the process of working on the present thesis allowed me to achieve my personal goals of enhancing my practice and operating within sporting organisations more effectively.

However, while the present research allowed me to achieve some of my developmental objectives, my engagement with micropolitical theory and related framework also produced a greater critical appreciation of Kelchtermans workings. More specifically, by recognising 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) as a core of practice I develop a more sophisticated understanding of how applied practitioners decide to navigate organisational contexts. Therefore, my utilisation of Kelchterman's workings within the present thesis allowed me to enhance my academic aspirations of producing a more critical understanding of where, when, and how practitioners overcome organisational demands. For instance, whilst I recognised that 'organisational interests' (i.e., getting and keeping a job) (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) are of vital importance, I acknowledged the previous investigations of micropolitics within sporting contexts (e.g., Huggan et al., 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Thompson et al., 2015) seemingly overemphasised the "dark side of organisational life" (Hoyle, 1982, p. 87). Instead, I started to perceive micropolitics more positively as means of enabling practitioners to stay immersed within their respective applied environments, as well as with their profession more generally.

More specifically, I came to realise that micropolitical action allowed the practitioners to bring the normative aspects of their 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009, 2009b) to the forefront of their applied roles. This, in turn, allowed practitioners to better align their time in context with deeply held moral responsibilities and their duty of care towards the athletes whom they worked with (cf., Andersen, 2009; Chandler et al., 2014; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Sharpe & Hodge, 2011). Also, it was apparent that a range of micropolitical strategies enhanced practitioners' abilities to build positive working relationships with key contextual stakeholders. As a result, practitioners were able to enhance the collaborative opportunities, which further strengthened their perceptions of having an impact and contributing towards the development of people they supported.

Micropolitics, therefore, are depicted here as a key tool in enhancing practitioners' perceptions of 'psychological empowerment' (cf., Spreitzer, 1995). Thomas and Velhouse (1990) defined empowerment as an increased intrinsic task motivation manifested across a set of four cognitions, namely; 'meaning', 'competence', 'self-determination', and 'impact'. From such a perspective, it was apparent here that 'micropolitical action' allowed the practitioners to enhance the 'meaning' of their work within applied setting. That is by 'navigating' and 'negotiating' the encountered workplace conditions, practitioners were able to fulfil their deeply held beliefs and values regarding sport psychology provision. Also, due to the development of positive working relationships and collaborative opportunities, practitioners enhanced their 'competence', or self-efficacy, manifested in an increased perceived capability of meeting the role objectives.

Therefore, while in the early stages of their careers, practitioners struggled to justify their impact, micropolitics played a vital role in enhancing their 'self-determination'. More specifically, as a result of their 'micropolitical action', practitioners were able to enhance their perceived sense of having choices in initiating and regulating actions. Therefore, it can be suggested that micropolitics increased practitioners' sense of autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behaviours and processes (Spreitzer, 1995). Similarly, an ability to from and maintain positive working relationships with the key contextual stakeholders enhanced practitioners' perceived 'impact' in terms of influencing the strategic, administrative, or operating aspects of the organisation (e.g., incorporating sport psychology into the training programmes).

This conceptualisation of micropolitics and related frameworks holds significant implications for the discipline. As suggested, the recognition of micropolitics as an important competence within applied practice and its implementation into the training programmes, may play a vital role in enhancing practitioners' ability to take initiative, embrace risk, stimulate innovation, and cope with uncertainty. Also, practitioners' ability to engage in micropolitical action as a means of developing positive working relationships may also have an important role in enhancing their well-being (cf., Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 1995; Di Fabio, 2019, Kenny et al., 2003). Indeed, it can be suggested that micropolitics can play an important role in enhancing trust, respect, care and connections between practitioners and contextual stakeholders. This, in turn, can lead to a greater sense of belonging, which can prove vital during practitioners' early career stages or upon entering the new organisation for the first time. As such, the utilisation of micropolitical theory and frameworks within the present thesis may play a significant role in enhancing practitioners' ability to embed themselves within the contexts of their practice, enjoy the transition process, remain within an organisation, and ultimately perform better within their respective roles.

This is not to suggest that practitioners with a high level of 'micropolitical literacy' (Kelchetrmans & Ballet, 2002b) will not be subjected to the challenges of everyday applied sport psychology provision. Indeed, practitioners with sound knowledge and understanding of micropolitics may still struggle to fit their normative beliefs and values into their respective roles. Also, the achievement and maintenance of desired workplace conditions might challenge practitioners due to an ever changing and unpredictable nature of sporting settings. However, it is anticipated that the present thesis will stimulate a debate amongst academic and professional accreditation bodies regarding the significance of micropolitics within an applied practice. Also, the findings documented here will, hopefully, open the door for the new lines of enquiry that would further enhance an understanding of everyday organisational life and micropolitics. As suggested within the present thesis, scholars should consider conducting ethnographic research (cf., Sparkes & Smith, 2016) should focus on investigating 'expression games' (Goffman, 1969) from a perspective of all groups of practitioners embedded within a single setting (i.e., sport psychologists, coaches, performance analysts). Finally, future research should consider an utilisation of other frameworks (Hochschild, 1983; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). to further enhance an understanding of the daily realities of sport work.

Indeed, while the utilisation of theoretical frameworks (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1969; Kelchtermans 2005, 2009a, 2009b; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a) within the present thesis served as a means of identifying the problem statement, the rationale of the research, purpose, research questions, and structure. Therefore, an approach adapted here provided an articulated signpost to guide the pursuit of new knowledge.

Also, the theoretical frameworks allowed for a better understanding of the relationship between the existing findings, which further provided a conceptual and systematic organisation for data regarding everyday organisational life. Therefore, the utilisation of the theoretical frameworks allowed us to better explain the meaning, nature, and challenges associated with interpersonal interactions with a range of contextual stakeholders. Also, such an approach allowed us to understand the realities of applied practice from an interdisciplinary perspective. Indeed, by drawing on the framework developed in other disciplines, the present thesis was able to enhance knowledge creation within sport psychology literature.

Despite the apparent benefits of using the theoretical framework in research, such an approach may also restrict the research process. For instance, theoretical frameworks may limit the scope of the relevant data and define the data analysis process. Therefore, such an approach may lead to the development of a particular viewpoint. Indeed, this was something that was taken under the consideration throughout the research process and I paid significant attention to ensuring that the project was not aimed at replicating findings documented in other disciplines or just simply confirming the validity of the theoretical frameworks. However, the approach adopted here possessed some restrictions on the sense-making of practitioners' lived experiences, viewing and understanding them from a restricted perspective. As a result, the future research recommendations outline within the present thesis call for further exploration of the dilemmas and nuances of applied sport psychology and the utilisation of other theoretical frameworks as a means of developing a broader perspective.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Approval Letter

Leeds Trinity University

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PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

Dr Alison Torn

Chair of SSHS Ethics Committee

Tel: 0113 283 7110

E-mail: a.torn@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Date: 13/07/17

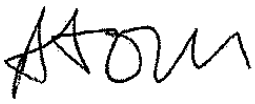
Dear Piotr

Re: SSHS/2017/048 An Ethnographic Study of the Micro-Politics of Sport Psychology Practice

Thank you for your recent application for block ethical approval for the above named module.

After reviewing the application it has been resolved that the module is granted ethical approval until five years after the date of this approval letter.

Yours sincerely



Dr Alison Torn
Chair of School of Social and Health Sciences Ethics Committee

Cc: Dr. Helen Morris

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE | Gold

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Name of Researcher:	**Piotr Haluch**	**Contact Details:**	**p.haluch@leedstrinity.ac.uk**
Research Supervisor:	**Dr Chris Rowley**	**Contact Details:**	**c.rowley@leedstrinity.ac.uk**
Research Supervisor:	**Dr Jon Radcliffe**	**Contact Details:**	**j.radcliffe@leedstrinity.ac.uk**
Title of study:	**The day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice: Towards a micropolitical understanding of service delivery**.		

Dear Participant,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide if you would to take part please take some time to read the following information carefully. Do not hesitate to ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like to receive more information. You can ask questions at a later date by contacting the researcher at p.haluch@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Overview

You have been invited to take part in a PhD research study investigating day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice. You are eligible to take part in this study if you completed Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) Stage 1 (this involves completing a BPS-accredited Master's degree in sport and exercise psychology) and you have completed/or you are in the process of completing BPS/BASES accreditation and supervision. The day-to-day realities of applied practice have received limited attention in the academic literature and have not been studied directly. McDougall et al. (2015) documented that psychologist may often face a range of challenges and that to thrive and survive they are required to know when to challenge, be flexible and develop self-awareness. However, our knowledge regarding the realities of applied practice remains limited and further studies are needed in this area. Therefore, the objective of the present research is to attempt to provide a greater contextual depth regarding day-to-day realities of applied practice and trying to answer the following questions: Which aspects are most important? Which aspects are difficult to deal with and why? How psychologist deal with the day-to-day realities of their practice? What are the personal impacts?

Your participation will contribute towards developing our knowledge and understanding of day-to-day realities of applied practice. The input you may provide by sharing your experiences may help us understand more about the daily activities, actions, and behaviours practitioners engage in to navigate themselves through often challenging working conditions (Eubank et al., 2014). Consequently, the findings of the present research may contribute towards developing practitioner's effectiveness by increasing the awareness of challenges that may lie ahead and provide insight into how they may be met.

What does the study involve?

If you will decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in 7 semi-structured interviews regarding your professional experience, education and accreditation process, and the challenges you have faced within your applied sport psychology delivery. The data collection process may take up to 12 months, therefore you may be asked to take part in one hour interview approximately once every two months. The data will be collected via one-to-one, Skype, or phone call interviews depending on your availability. One-to-one interviews will take place at a mutually agreed location.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise that this study will help you directly, however, the information gathered will help to improve understanding of day-to-day realities of applied practice and increase the effectiveness of sport psychology provision.

What if there is a problem?

If at any point you will have any concerns about this study, you should speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. If you will remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint you will be able to do so by contacting Dr Chris Rowley, Programme Leader for BSc Sport Psychology, Leeds Trinity University at c.rowley@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you will be able to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Participants can also withdraw after the study and you have up to 14 days after the completion of the research to do so, after this point it is not possible to withdraw from the study. You can decide not to take part after reading the information sheet, during the study and after you have completed the study.

1) *Withdrawing during the study itself* - Participants have the right to withdraw and not continue with the study at any time. The reasons about why you would like to withdrawn will not be required; you can simply just ask to withdraw.

2) *Withdrawal of data after completion of the research* – If participants want to withdraw after completion of the research, they only have 14 days after the completion of the research to do so.

How will my data be dealt with and who will see my results?

Your participation in this study is confidential and no information about your participation will be shared beyond the researcher and the research supervisor. All data will be stored securely for five years and then destroyed, and no data will reveal any participants identity.

The results will be included in the researcher's PhD thesis and disseminated in academic and sporting forums through conferences, publications, and media. All results will be confidential and no information about participant's identity will be shared in any of the publications.

Are there any benefits or risks associated with participating in the study?

There are no risks in participating in this study. Furthermore, any data that is acquired throughout the study will be anonymised and all participants in this study will not be identified.

What if I require further information about the study or my involvement in it?

When you read this information sheet, Piotr Haluch will be happy to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage or if, having participated, you wish to withdraw from the study, please feel free to contact:

Name: Piotr Haluch
Position: PhD student
Email: p.haluch@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Name: Dr Chris Rowley
Position: Researcher Supervisor
Email: c.rowley@leedstrinity.ac.uk

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study should contact the Chair of School Ethics committee, Dr Mark Russell, School of Social and Health Science, Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD. Email: m.russell@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Appendix C: Research Consent Form

Name of Researcher:	**Piotr Haluch**	**Contact Details:**	**p.haluch@leedstrinity.ac.uk**
Research Supervisor:	**Dr Chris Rowley**	**Contact Details:**	**c.rowley@leedstrinity.ac.uk**
Research Supervisor:	**Dr Jon Radcliffe**	**Contact Details:**	**j.radcliffe@leedstrinity.ac.uk**
Title of study:	**The day-to-day realities of applied sport psychology practice: Towards a micropolitical understanding of service delivery**.		

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and that the research has been explained to me in enough detail.	**YES**	**NO**
I understand that the research may include taking part in six semi-structured interviews and that the time involved will be approximately 60 minutes for each interview.	**YES**	**NO**
I understand that my participation in voluntary and that I can withdraw from this study at any time without any consequences.	**YES**	**NO**
I understand that all the information will be treated in strict confidence and I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.	**YES**	**NO**
I understand that the information collected will be held on a safe and secure database.	**YES**	**NO**
I freely give my consent to participate in this research study.	**YES**	**NO**

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Participant Number (To be completed by the researcher): _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions Example

- How would you outline your role?
- What are your main responsibilities and what do you do?

Having established the main roles and responsibilities I would like to determine how he/she perceives the duties of a Sport Psychologist and what has contributed towards developing these perceptions. The following questions will be asked to gain rich insights.

- What is the main objective of your role?

What are the objective of your role mainly focused on?

How does the involvement of other stakeholders at the organisation shape/determine the objectives of sport psychology provision?

How do you perceive the objectives of your role?

- What tasks makes you feel that you doing your job well?

Why do you think that these tasks are important in doing your job effectively?

- What duties you consider as essential and what you would prefer to avoid?

What task are most enjoyable and what you consider as most challenging?

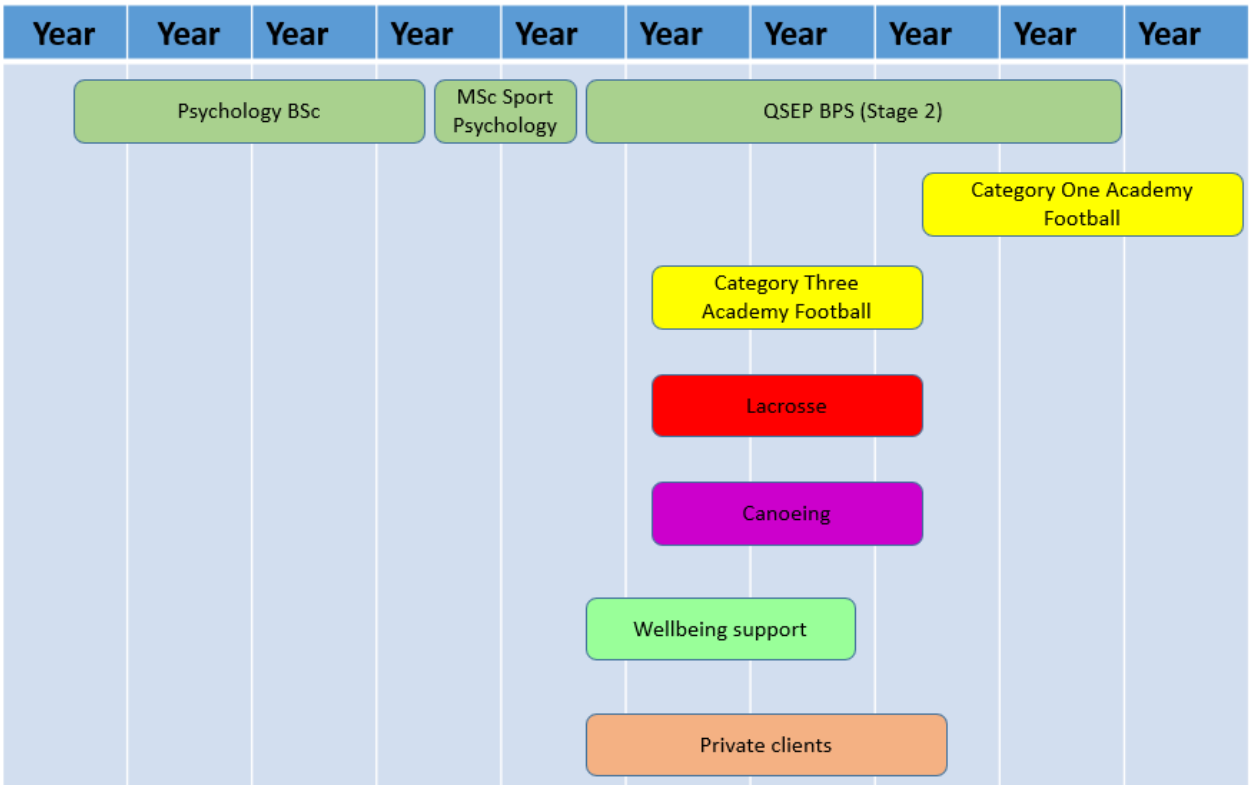
- Do you feel that you have any responsibilities while working with players?

Did you ever felt that your integrity has been questioned?

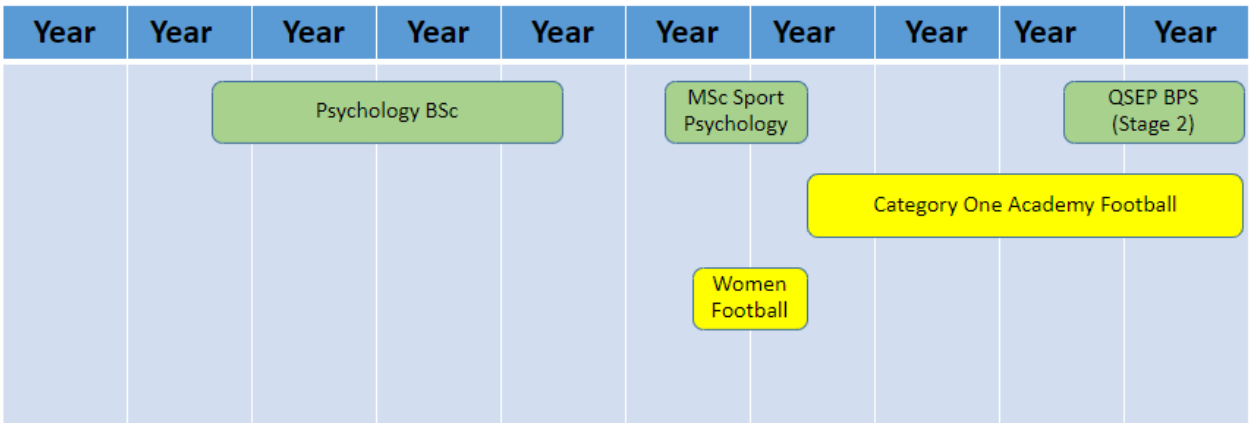
- What are yours believes regarding effective sport psychology practice?

Did you ever felt that yours believes have been questioned?

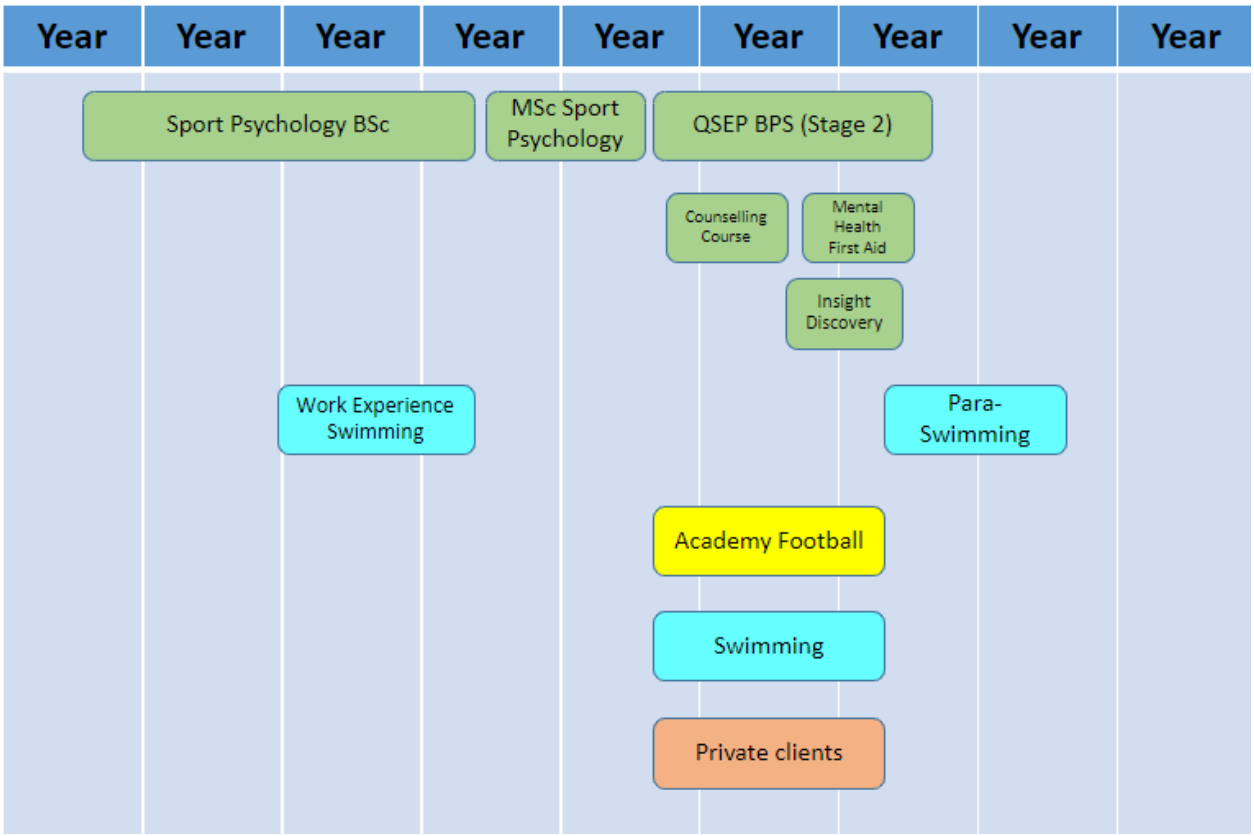
Appendix E: Alice Career Timeline



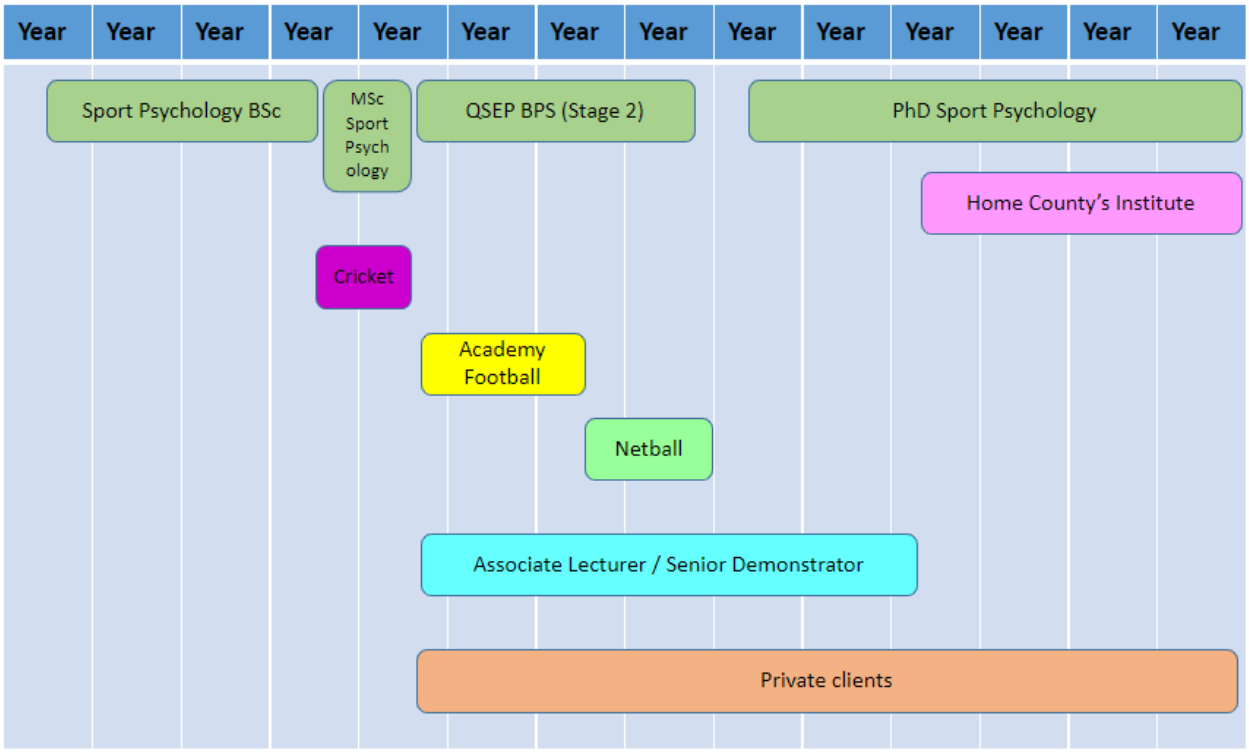
Appendix F: Dan Career Timeline



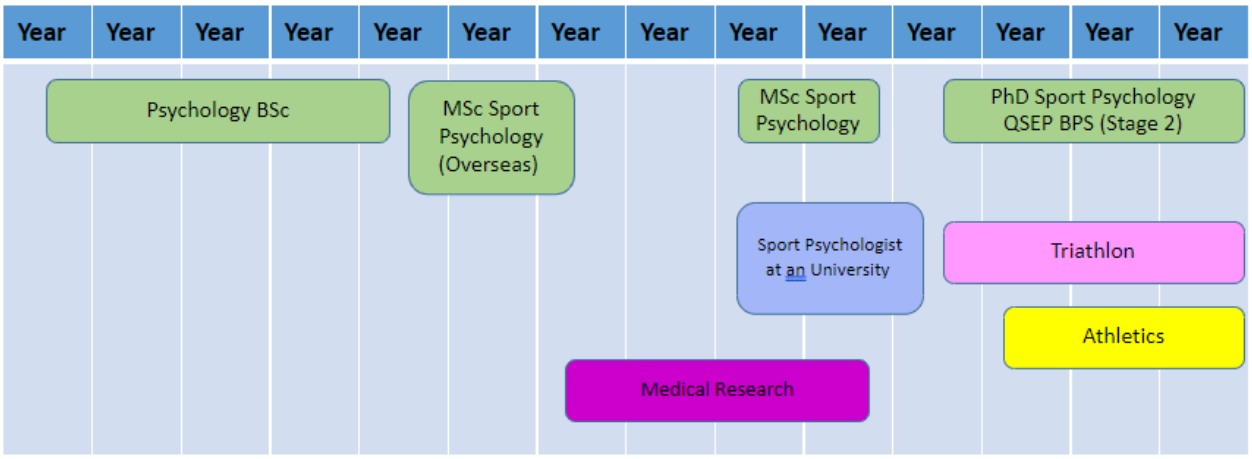
Appendix G: Beth Career Timeline



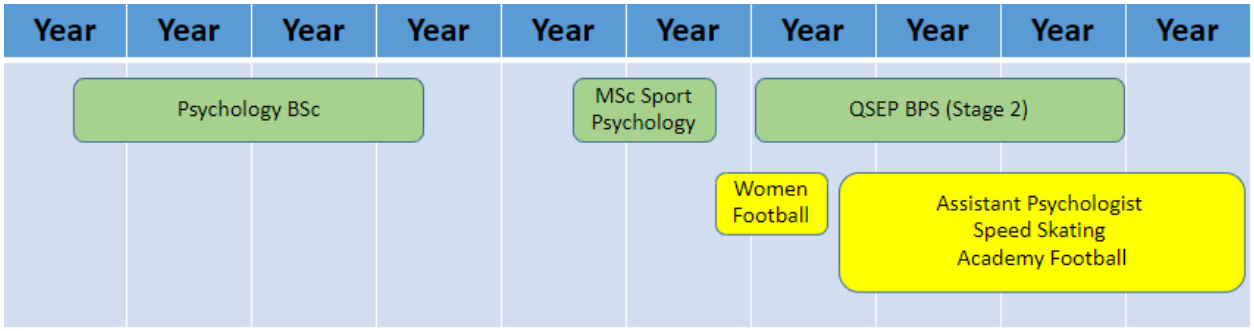
Appendix H: Steve Career Timeline



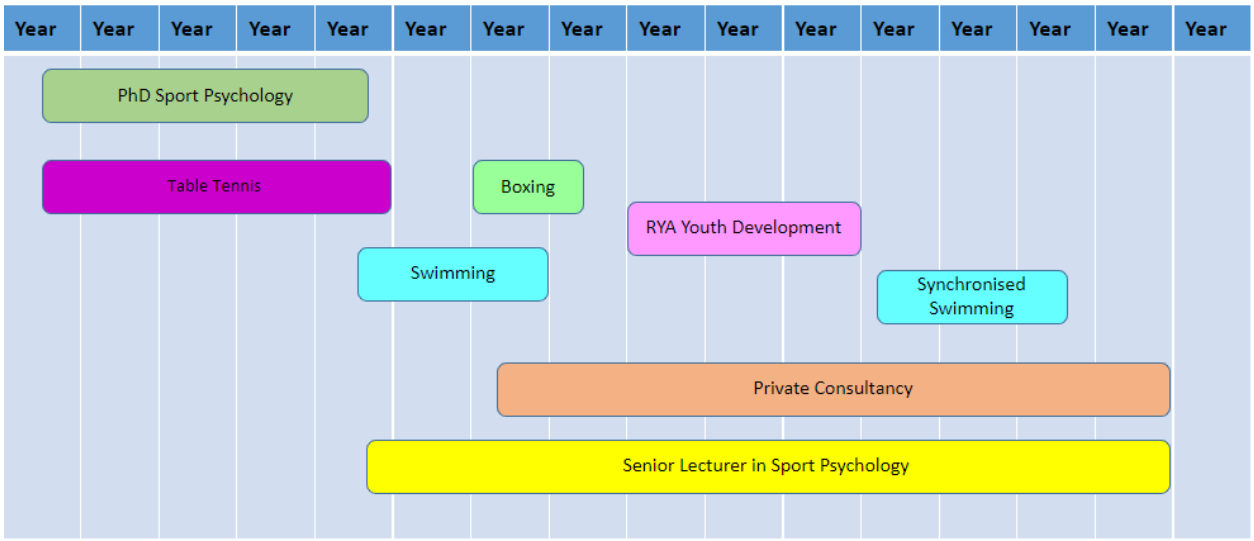
Appendix I: Amy Career Timeline



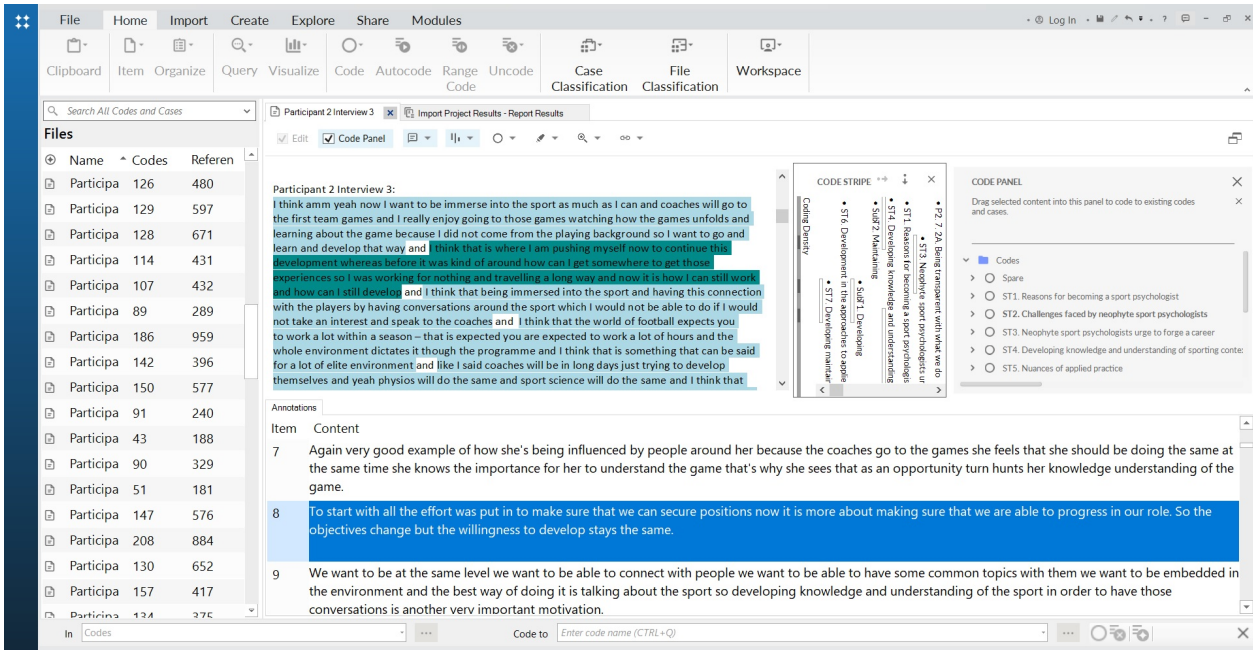
Appendix J: Tom Career Timeline



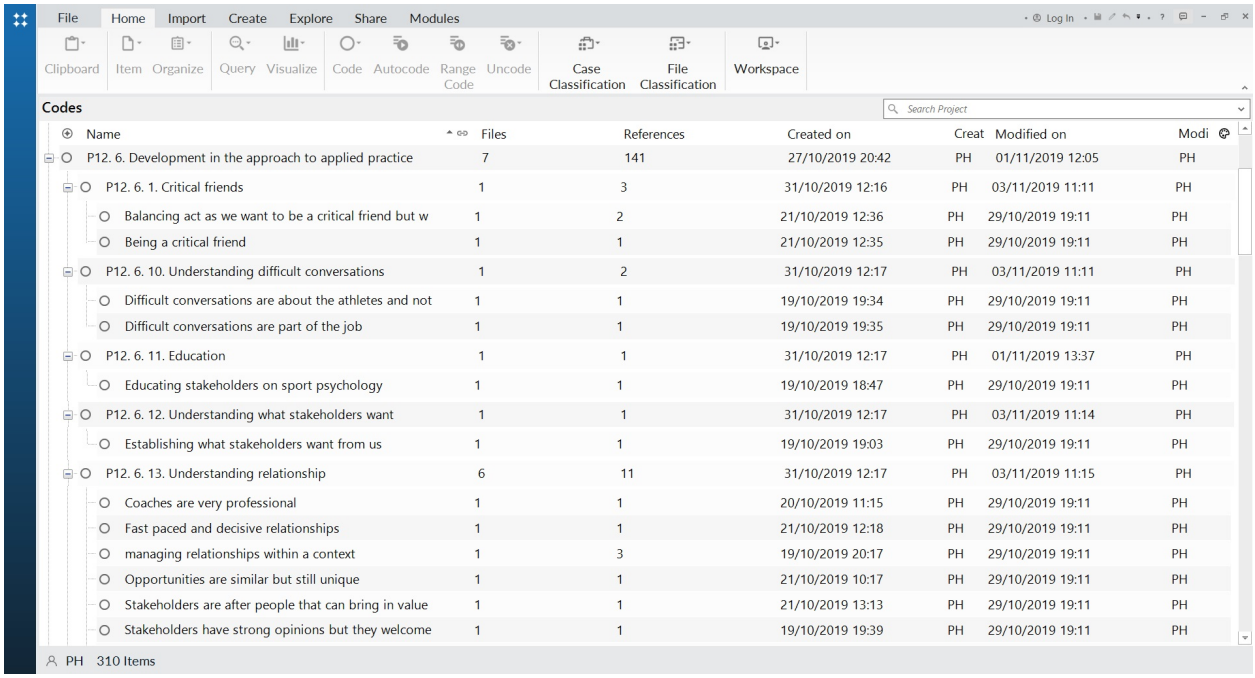
Appendix K: Jake Career Timeline



Appendix L: NVivo 12 Annotations

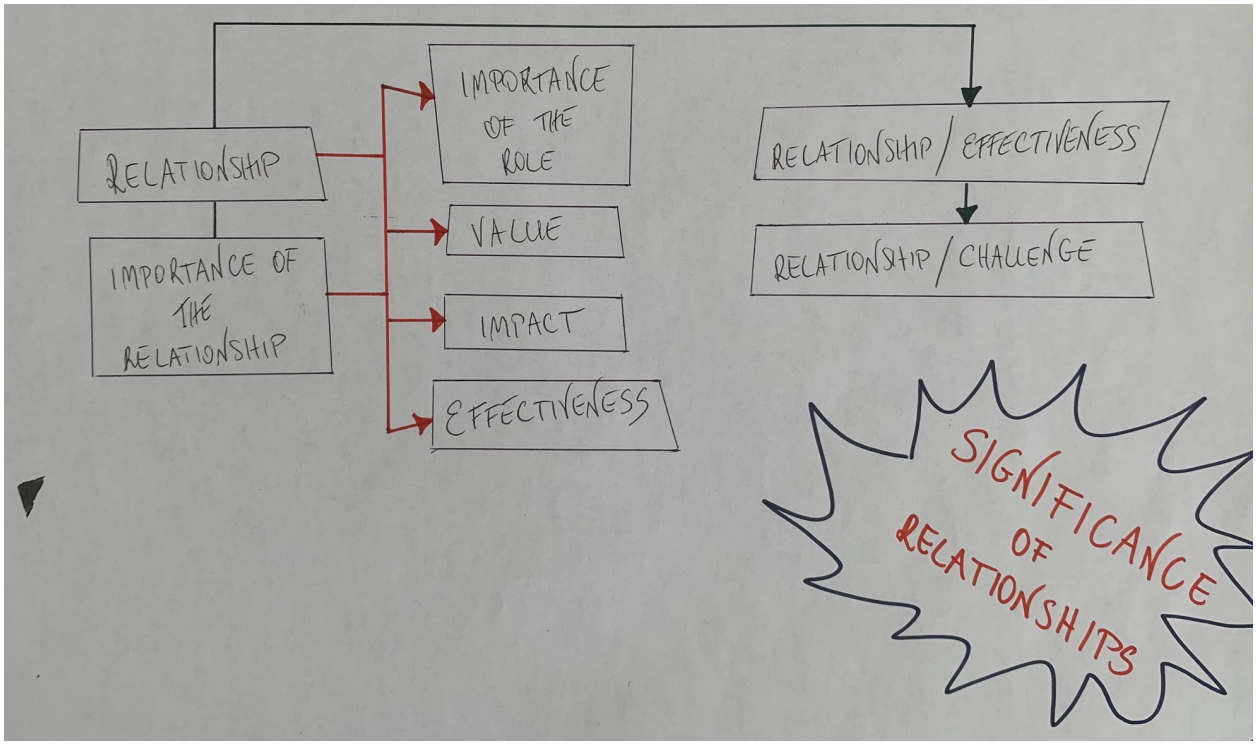


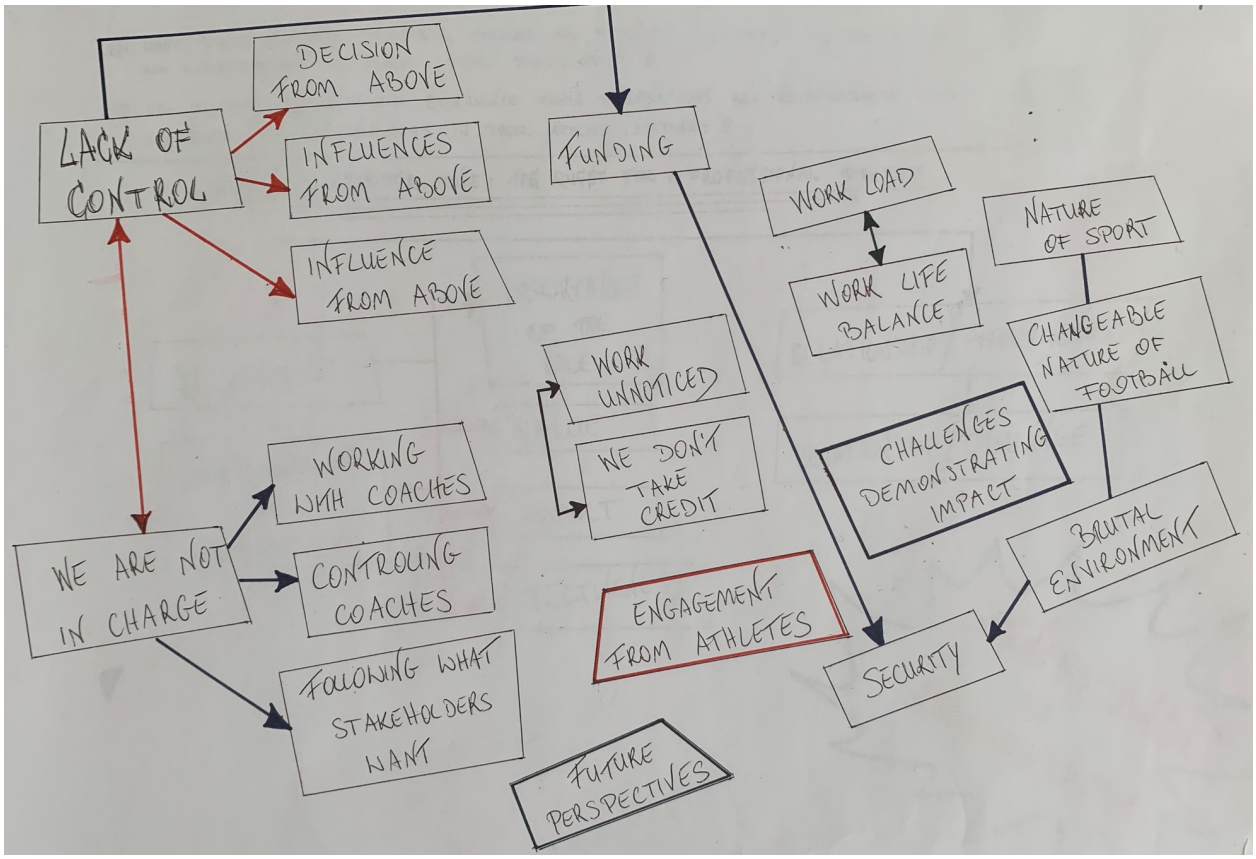
Appendix N: Participants Codding



Name	Files	References	Created on	Creat	Modified on	Modi
P12. 6. Development in the approach to applied practice	7	141	27/10/2019 20:42	PH	01/11/2019 12:05	PH
P12. 6. 1. Critical friends	1	3	31/10/2019 12:16	PH	03/11/2019 11:11	PH
Balancing act as we want to be a critical friend but w	1	2	21/10/2019 12:36	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
Being a critical friend	1	1	21/10/2019 12:35	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
P12. 6. 10. Understanding difficult conversations	1	2	31/10/2019 12:17	PH	03/11/2019 11:11	PH
Difficult conversations are about the athletes and not	1	1	19/10/2019 19:34	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
Difficult conversations are part of the job	1	1	19/10/2019 19:35	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
P12. 6. 11. Education	1	1	31/10/2019 12:17	PH	01/11/2019 13:37	PH
Educating stakeholders on sport psychology	1	1	19/10/2019 18:47	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
P12. 6. 12. Understanding what stakeholders want	1	1	31/10/2019 12:17	PH	03/11/2019 11:14	PH
Establishing what stakeholders want from us	1	1	19/10/2019 19:03	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
P12. 6. 13. Understanding relationship	6	11	31/10/2019 12:17	PH	03/11/2019 11:15	PH
Coaches are very professional	1	1	20/10/2019 11:15	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
Fast paced and decisive relationships	1	1	21/10/2019 12:18	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
managing relationships within a context	1	3	19/10/2019 20:17	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
Opportunities are similar but still unique	1	1	21/10/2019 10:17	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
Stakeholders are after people that can bring in value	1	1	21/10/2019 13:13	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH
Stakeholders have strong opinions but they welcome	1	1	19/10/2019 19:39	PH	29/10/2019 19:11	PH

Appendix M: Codding Map





Appendix O: NVivo 12 Analysis