

A commentary and reflections on the field of organizational sport psychology: epilogue to the special issue

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Abstract

The articles published in this special issue all significantly extend the knowledge within their respective lines of inquiry. Taken together, they offer a key reference point for future research and application knowledge. In this epilogue, I provide a brief commentary on each article and some reflections on the field of organisational sport psychology. Specifically, I offer three pressing observations of the field relating to: the need for intervention work; the need for greater duty of care; and, the need for practitioner action.

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8 It has been a decade since David Fletcher and I concluded our review of the then nascent
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10 research on organizational psychology in elite sport by stating:

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12 Those governing and managing elite sport have a duty of care to protect and support the
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14 mental wellbeing of its employees and members. In addition to these statutory
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16 requirements, National Sport Organizations also have an ethical obligation to create
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18 performance environments which facilitate individual and group flourishing... It appears
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20 that the ‘global sporting arms race’ has had both positive and negative consequences for
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22 those operating in elite sport. A convergence of evidence points to the organisational
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24 environment as having the potential to significantly impact on individuals’ wellbeing and
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26 performance. It also indicates that the climate and culture in elite sport requires careful and
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28 informed management in order to optimise individuals’ experiences and organisational
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30 flourishing. However, the body of knowledge is still in its early stages and restricted.
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33 (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009, pp. 432–433)
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38 In the intervening years since these sentiments were expressed, there have been considerable
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40 developments. Indeed, the knowledge in this domain has matured markedly from its early
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42 foundations in organizational stress to incorporate the study of a diverse range of phenomena
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44 from a variety of epistemological, ontological, and methodological perspectives (cf. Wagstaff,
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46 2017). But what impact has this work had? Despite the research developments, a cursory glance
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48 at global sport media over just the last two years will provide a newsreel of bad press for sport
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50 organizations and a “rogue’s gallery” of those leading them. To draw on just a few of the more
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52 high-profile, there has been the fallout of the Larry Nasser sexual abuse of female gymnasts,
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3 numerous allegations of bullying, racial, gender, and sexual abuse in Olympic sport, the state-
4 sponsored doping program in Russia, the ball-tampering fiasco in Australian cricket, and many
5 reports of sport organizations having a “toxic culture”.
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10 In reflecting, 10-years hence on the conclusions of Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009), these
11 scenarios collectively point to a failure of sport organizations in their: 1) *duty of care to protect*
12 *and support the mental wellbeing of its employees and members*, and 2) *ethical obligation to*
13 *create performance environments which facilitate individual and group flourishing*. Moreover,
14 there has been plenty of anecdotal evidence of *the organisational environment as having the*
15 *potential to significantly impact on individuals’ wellbeing and performance and that the climate*
16 *and culture in elite sport requires careful and informed management in order to optimise*
17 *individuals’ experiences and organisational flourishing*. But, in returning to the final
18 observation from the quotation from Fletcher and Wagstaff, is *the body of knowledge ... still in*
19 *its early stages and restricted?* I would argue that it is not. Much has been done to extend
20 knowledge on the demands that athletes, coaches, support staff face in their day-to-day work in
21 elite sport environments. We have even seen work emerge that has examined and attempted to
22 improve organizational functioning in such environments. Yet, clearly not enough of this work
23 has been translated into changes at the coalface in elite sport. This might be because of the
24 nature of elite sport organizations, which are complex, turbulent, and volatile social systems
25 (see Wagstaff, 2017) in which individuals have an often chaotic and precarious existence
26 (Gilmore, Wagstaff, & Smith, 2018). The failure to prevent organizational dereliction of duty of
27 care may also reflect poor regulation of organizations and their leaders who ruthlessly pursue
28 “winning at all costs”. The failure might be a consequence of either low impact or poorly
29 translated research being conducted in the domain of organizational sport psychology over the
30 past decade. Alternatively,
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3 the issue might be due to a void of competence and service support expertise to facilitate
4 flourishing sport environments that enable thriving, and the development of organizational
5 resilience in sport. My suspicion is that the answer lies, in part, with all these explanations; the
6 cause is both systematic, cultural, and a reflection of the state of research and practice. The
7 success and survival of sport organizations is predicated on performance outcomes. Often, this
8 performance is prioritized over duty of care, culture, tradition, legacy planning, ethics, and
9 welfare. It is abundantly clear that sport organizations must better protect their charges and
10 undertake regular systematic monitoring of cultural and climatic environments within sport. Yet,
11 researchers must do more to translate their knowledge, undertaking more ambitious intervention
12 research, using cohort and longitudinal research designs, process evaluation, the sampling of
13 multiple social groups (e.g., athletes, coaches, support staff) concurrently, and developing more
14 effective knowledge transfer partnerships with sport organizations. Finally, practitioners must
15 develop competencies in organizational service delivery and move out of their comfort zone. I
16 continue to believe, as I did in 2009, that our profession will flounder if we remain pigeonholed
17 as mental skills coaches, regardless of the positive move to better incorporate counselling skills
18 within our service repertoire (Sly, Mellalieu, & Wagstaff, in press). We have so much more to
19 offer, but to fulfil this potential we must diversify and enhance competencies to work with new
20 people, in new ways, within sport organizations. I recommend sport psychologists to break free
21 of the shackles of the science and medicine team, and after developing the requisite expertise,
22 offer their services across the organizational hierarchy. For instance, the development of – to
23 name a few – leadership and coaching behavior expertise, value-driven norm identification and
24 promotion, wise emotion regulation strategy selection, prosocial deviance and citizenship
25 behavior, stress management and self-care, socialization processes refinement and provision,
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3 cultural and climatic awareness and monitoring, are all areas of service provision sport
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5 psychologists might develop, and importantly, offer to *all* individuals in the organization. If
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7 sustained success and wellbeing are dependent on the functioning of a complex network of
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9 relationships, utilization of expertise, and optimization of cultural and climatic factors, and not
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11 individual or collective talent, we must look beyond interventions with athletes. We must dispel
12
13 the myth of individualism (see Wagstaff, 2017).
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17 The articles published in this special issue all significantly extend the knowledge within
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19 their respective lines of inquiry. Taken together, they offer a key reference point for future
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21 research and application knowledge. In the next section, I provide a brief commentary on each
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23 article and some reflections on the field.
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27 Given the growing scientization and medicalization of elite sport environments and the
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29 recent observation of the largely deleterious impact of managerial turnover-related
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31 organizational change on support staff (see Wagstaff, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2015; 2016), it is
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33 surprising that more studies have not been dedicated to the working experiences of science and
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35 medicine support and management staff. Arnold et al.'s (this issue) examination of the "team
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37 behind the team's" stressors therefore offers a valuable contribution to knowledge regarding the
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39 experiences and needs of this social group. Surely it is time to educate undergraduate students
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41 and neophyte practitioners of the realities of the profession they seek to join? Why do
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43 professional societies and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in sport science and medicine not
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45 systematically provide education and support regarding professional burnout and turnover,
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47 lifestyle advice, professional development, and precarious employment and unemployment
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49 advice. Thankfully, work is emerging to support sport science and medicine educators and
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51 trainers in this endeavor. For instance, Hings and colleagues recently observed professional
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53 development challenges for
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3 practitioners (Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2018a; Hings, Wagstaff,
4 Thelwell, Gilmore, & Anderson, 2018b), and examined the emotional education-training-
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practitioners (Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2018a; Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell, Gilmore, & Anderson, 2018b), and examined the emotional education-training-practice gap in the professional formation of sport psychologists, and provided guidance for individuals at each career stage (Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson, Gilmore, & Thelwell, in press).

In Arnold et al.'s study, I particularly liked the reporting of example outcomes within the results, which also extended previous qualitative organizational stressor studies and better reflect the transactional conceptual foundation of this work. The very large sample in Arnold et al.'s study, including both science and medicine and performance management staff from a diverse range of sports, was also a real strength of their study. That so many of these participants reported relationship and interpersonal issues with colleagues and coaches highlights the importance of sport psychologists working with these social groups. I felt other notable stressor themes for reflection in this sample were contractual issues, organizational processes, organizational culture, and travel and accommodation. While the last of these is common among other social groups in sport organizations (e.g., athletes, coaches), the others are reported less frequently and indicate that "supporting support staff", as well as management staff, might require some differentiation from the support of athletes. Regardless of the nuanced stressors for each social group in sport organizations, I believe cultural and climatic interventions are likely to be of benefit to all social groups.

Arnold et al.'s data contribute to the growing evidence that working as a member of support staff in elite sport is precarious (see Gilmore et al., 2018). Indeed, these individuals are typically poorly remunerated in comparison to managerial or playing staff, work undesirable hours, spending substantial time away from home, and are often at the mercy of questionable employment practices (see Waddington, Rodderick, & Naik, 2001; Wagstaff et al., 2015). In

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3 view of such precarity and demands, sport organizations often rely on the appeal of working in
4 elite sport to recruit and retain support staff. I have also noted – with very different implications
5 – that both sport organizations and support staff are typically acutely aware that there is exists a
6 conveyor belt of qualified professionals eager to work in elite sport environments.
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12 Consequently, while Arnold et al.'s study provides further valuable evidence of the importance
13 of supporting “the team behind the team”, these professionals currently have limited job
14 security and formal professional support. Such factors do little to support an individual's
15 professional quality of work life and employers and PSRBs must do more to prepare and
16 support these individuals. Arnold et al.'s study points to sport psychologists as being one
17 conduit for such support and education, yet to do so, sport psychologists must reconsider their
18 service provision and clientele. Clearly, support and management staff would benefit from
19 organizational stressor support from sport psychologists, but I would question the extent to
20 which they are prepared or able to provide this support in their traditional roles within support
21 teams, where they are typically charged with providing mental skills training and mental health
22 first aid. Arnold et al. provide some recommendations for sport psychologists to better assist
23 medicine and science and management staff in elite sport with the job insecurity demands they
24 encounter (e.g., proactive coping strategies, enhancing perceptions of control and self-efficacy,
25 reducing role conflict, and strengthening organizational communication).
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44 Tamminen, Sabiston and Crocker (this issue) commendably integrated theoretical
45 perspectives of support, appraisals, and performance satisfaction in their study. In doing so,
46 they go some way to answering repeated calls for the examination of the stress process
47 components together, rather than in isolation (see Arnold, Wagstaff, Steadman, & Pratt, 2016).
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49 I also really enjoyed the inclusion of appraisal as a variable in this study. Appraisal is a
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3 variable to capture meaningfully, and sport stress researchers have been able to bypass this
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5 given the opportunities for mining other aspects of the stress process (e.g., stressors). That
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7 appraisal research has such a low presence in sport stress research both saddens and disappoints
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9 me given the pivotal role of appraisal in the transactional theory. Tamminen and colleagues also
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11 have noteworthy elements of novelty in their study regarding the use of organizational stressors
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13 as
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15 “background variable”. That is, the results of this study advance organizational stress theory by
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17 modelling stressors as something other than an independent variable. Moreover, by testing
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19 organizational stressors as a moderator variable, Tamminen et al.’s work speaks nicely to one of
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21 the central tenets of the transactional theory regarding the ongoing, iterative, process nature of
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23 stress. The authors’ inclusion of performance satisfaction as an outcome variable was also
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25 commendable, given performance outcomes have generally been elided within the extant
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27 organizational stressor research. It was interesting that Tamminen et al.’s data did not support an
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29 indirect effect of esteem support on athletes’ perceptions of performance via secondary
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31 appraisal when organizational stressors were included as a moderator. Yet, such findings do
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33 support the “background” role of organizational stressors and I would be excited to see future
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35 examination of other performance indicators. Nevertheless, in a warning to the reader, due to
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37 their greater frequency than competitive and personal stressors (cf. Hanton, Fletcher, &
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39 Coughlan, 2005), we should not confuse the conceptually-sound positioning of organizational
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41 stressors as
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43 “background variables” with a secondary status regarding their relational meaning for
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45 individuals. While some organizational stressors might appear to tick along in the background,
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47 athletes typically appraise these demands as threatening or harmful with few resources to
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49 resolve or address them (e.g., Hanton, Wagstaff, & Fletcher, 2012).
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3 Given the complexity of the stress process, with the many possible mediator and
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5 moderator variables, one might expect only a weak-moderate direct effect of organizational
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7 stressor frequency on performance outcomes. Therefore, while the use of performance
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9 satisfaction offered a useful proxy for the cross-sectional data in Tamminen et al.'s study, it
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11 would be interesting to examine a similar model using objective performance over time. That
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13 is, researchers should examine the stressor-performance(-wellbeing) relationship using
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15 longitudinal designs to build on this positive step forward in including performance
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17 satisfaction. Another finding of interest and for further exploration relates to Tamminen et al.'s
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19 observation that more frequent team and culture stressors strengthened the relationship between
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21 athletes' perceived support and their appraisals of resources to cope with competitive demands.
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23 Consequently, researchers might consider examining the relationships between team and
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25 culture stressors and other team-level variables and processes (e.g., cliques, conflict resolution,
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27 cohesion, collaboration, decision-making).
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34 Within organizational sport psychology, the area of stress and well-being has received
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36 more research attention than any other dimension and researchers have been slow to diversify.
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38 Yet, as the domain of organizational stress has matured, there has been substantial conceptual
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40 and methodological refinement, with taxonomic stressor identification and wider demographic
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42 examination (e.g., Arnold et al., this issue; see also, Arnold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2016) leading
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44 to measurement development, and more diverse methodological designs and advanced
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46 modelling of moderator and mediator variables (e.g., Tamminen et al., this issue; see also
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48 Larnar, Wagstaff, Corbett, & Thelwell, 2018). In a report to the UK Health and Safety
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50 Executive, Cox (1993) argued that the priority in workplace stress research can no longer be
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52 more studies on risk groups and risk factors: rather, researchers should address the design,
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54 implementation, and evaluation of
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3 interventions. I am unsure that we have reached that same stage of saturation that Cox noted
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5 regarding the risk groups and risk factors in sport organizations, but we certainly need to
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7 dedicate research attention to interventions. Indeed, I believe the most pressing issue in
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9 organizational stress and wellbeing research in sport is the dearth of knowledge on what
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11 effective and efficacious organizational interventions “look like”. While this need might move
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13 researchers to instinctively focus on “what works” in stress intervention research, the *why* and
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15 *how* of these interventions also requires attention. Too little intervention work is published in
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17 the sport psychology domain as a whole, and too little of that work provides tacit information
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19 for applied practitioners or academics. Hence, and as clearly communicated Randall, Nielsen
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21 and Houdmont (this issue), a focus on intervention outcomes alone elides much valuable
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23 information and arguably limits the opportunity for transferability of a given intervention.
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25 Hence, in order to optimize intervention effects, promote knowledge transference and learning
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27 for adaptation to other contexts, there is a need to know how organizational interventions work
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29 (i.e., what are the working mechanisms of a particular intervention) as well as why it worked
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31 (i.e., what were the drivers of change; cf. Nielsen, Taris, & Cox, 2010). In light of these
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33 observations, I was very encouraged to receive two submissions relating to the use of process
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35 evaluation for stress interventions. Given the similarity of these submissions only one was
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37 accepted for publication in the special issue, an outcome that gave me cause for empathy with
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39 the author whose work did not make it into this issue.
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47 Randall, Nielsen and Houdmont’s article contains several key messages for stress and
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49 wellbeing researchers as well as those seeking to provide organizational-level interventions in
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51 general. Indeed, I see no reason why the important messages from Randall et al.’s article could
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53 not be relevant for those providing non-stress related organizational intervention in sport.
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3 the messages that resonated with me from Randall et al.'s article were the challenges of
4 intervention delivery in organizational settings and the influence of these practicalities for the
5 completion of primary stress management interventions (i.e., those that target the reduction of
6 stressors in the environment) and use of randomized control trials involving large numbers of
7 participants. Additionally, readers should heed Randall et al.'s advice not to assume all
8 participants are equally likely to experience an average intervention effect. As such, those
9 undertaking organizational interventions might compare outcomes for those indicating that they
10 felt equipped and motivated to get the best out of the intervention and whether those who
11 reported experiencing challenges prior to the intervention report the greatest improvements after
12 its delivery. Randall et al. also provide valuable resources in the form of example interview
13 questions and questionnaire items that might be used as part of a primary stress intervention
14 process evaluation and will undoubtedly help researchers to identify implementation failures
15 (problems with intervention design and delivery) and contextual events that influence
16 intervention outcomes.
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35 To offer a word on the state of stress-based interventions in sport organizations. Randall
36 et al. observe that the majority of extant intervention research reflects secondary stress
37 management interventions, focused on the development of psychological resources (see
38 Didymus & Fletcher, 2017; Rumbold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2012). As research indicates that
39 organizational stressors are prevalent and pervasive (Arnold, Wagstaff, Steadman, & Pratt,
40 2017), and commonly appraised as threatening or harmful and largely uncontrollable (see
41 Hanton et al., 2012), it might be that some organizational stressors in sport are not readily
42 amenable to primary intervention; that some organizational stressors might be unavoidable (cf.
43 Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006). Nevertheless, researchers must be bolder in developing
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3 primary interventions that reduce the frequency, duration, and intensity of amenable
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5 organizational stressors through cultural and climatic change. Given the complexity of
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7 organizational culture change in sport (see Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018), sport psychologists
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9 might reflect on the opportunities to provide “nudge” organizational interventions (see Thaler &
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11 Sunstein, 2008). Such interventions should be considered part of a sport organization’s duty of
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13 care to those operating within its sphere of influence, and reflect the needs of managers, coaches,
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15 support staff and athletes.
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19 We move from Randall et al.’s call for the use of process evaluation to Slater and Barker’s
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21 development of an efficacy evaluation of a longitudinal leadership intervention to develop social
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23 identity. Slater and Barker’s combination of longitudinal intervention work, timely application of
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25 social identity leadership, and sampling of an under-studied and under-supported sample of
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27 disabled athletes, offers several novel and valuable contributions to the field. I have observed
28
29 with interest the fast emergence of social identity and social identity leadership research in sport
30
31 over recent years. By intertwining strands of social support, group dynamics, organizational
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33 psychology and leadership theory, this line of research has much to contribute to organizational
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35 sport psychology. Moreover, it is encouraging that there are several prominent research groups
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37 around the world working in this space, which I am sure will accelerate conceptual and applied
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39 knowledge development; indeed, given the speed at which research on social identity in sport has
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41 blossomed, I expect this work to continue to be a growth area in the coming years.
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47 Slater and Barker’s operationalization of social identity leadership development translated
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49 the phases of Haslam, Egghins, and Reynolds’ (2003) actualizing social and personal identity
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51 resources (ASPIRe) model into three workshops. The rationale for this approach was
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3 based on promising findings from non-sport organizational psychology research examining the
4 use of the ASPIRe model with hospital staff (O'Brien et al., 2004) and teachers (Reynolds,
5 Subašić, Lee, & Tindall, 2014). While the use of models developed outside of sport have much
6 potential value for knowledge transference into organizational sport psychology, practitioners
7 might be best served by context-sensitive conceptualization, instrumentation, and application.
8 Researchers seeking to build on Slater and Barker's promising work might seek to provide
9 intervention content directly to participants, collect social validation from all end-users of
10 intervention content, and include within intervention work additional social groups within the
11 sport organization. In doing so, researchers might obtain evidence of the efficacy of the
12 ASPIRe-based intervention work not just from leaders but also from other members of their
13 organization. This more inclusive approach is particularly important given the main delineation
14 of social identity leadership from other leadership theories (e.g., transformational leadership)
15 being the inclusion of the cognitions and actions of both leaders and followers, and not only
16 those of the leader in isolation.
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35 In their systematic review of performance management literature across elite sport and
36 other performance domains (e.g., business, performing arts, military, medical, and emergency
37 services), Molan, Kelly, Arnold and Matthews provide a landmark reference for scholars
38 examining this concept. Moreover, their observation of the similarities and differences between
39 elite sport and other performance domains have several important implications. First, the
40 different strategic and individual-level performance management processes and commonalities
41 in operational level stimulated me to reflect on *why* these commonalities are present and
42 whether better knowledge transference between these performance domains would benefit.
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54 Clearly, the authors highlight signaling theory as potentially useful for understanding how sport
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3 directors' vision can be translated into meaningful practices and communicated to promote
4 positive staff and organizational outcomes. Indeed, I can see how observable strategic actions
5 within elite sport (e.g., explicit communication of values and organizational objectives,
6 development of strategic plans, publication of aligned policies) are likely to be interpreted as
7 signals which, in turn, might influence the perceptions and behaviors of stakeholders (e.g., staff,
8 clubs, funding agencies).
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17 Molan et al. interpreted the extant literature to indicate that the professional development
18 of coaches, support staff, and management in elite sport organizations is predominantly informal
19 or on-the-job learning. Such findings mirror organizational stressor themes reported by Arnold et
20 al. in their "team behind the team" article also in this issue. Taken together, both studies provide a
21 strong message that professional development and support for those in coaching, management
22 and support staff roles needs greater attention within sport. I would agree with Molan et al. that
23 there are potential benefits of a multilevel approach to performance management by considering
24 the components of performance management at individual, operational, and strategic levels and
25 their interaction with contextual variables (e.g., leadership, organizational culture). I look forward
26 to more performance management work in elite sport, and I believe much of this will continue to
27 offer valuable "crossover" knowledge for non-sport organizations. For instance, other
28 performance domains might be interested to understand elite sport approaches to: at the
29 individual level, the management of star performers and global celebrities, or those who have
30 high value and lengthy non-performance-based contracts; at the strategic level, the use of
31 negotiation, authenticity, and dark triad behaviors, and; at the operational level, the use of regular
32 performance debriefs, feedback, and planning.
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3 From performance management, we turn to Gledhill and Harwood's research note on
4 female football talent development environments in the United Kingdom. It was pleasing to note
5 that Gledhill and Harwood's findings provided indirect support for organizational stressor
6 taxonomies. That is, the most positive perceptions players reported were of long-term
7 development focus and support networks, but the least positive perceptions were of
8 communication and understanding the athlete. It follows that athletes' (and other social agent's)
9 perceptions of their environment will likely be a source of strain or support. Thus, this work
10 offers another important illustration of the central role of one's environment for long-term athlete
11 development, while highlighting those factors rated with the most and least positive perceptions
12 for female footballers.
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26 Gledhill and Harwood's study provides support for the opportunities allied with talent
27 development environment study and design from a holistic ecological approach (HEA; cf.
28 Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen, & Christensen, 2013). Such approaches reject the traditional
29 focus on individual athletes (i.e., a myth of individualism) and shift the focus from talent
30 detection to talent development, with specific attention devoted to the environments in which
31 expertise develops. A central component of the holistic ecological approach is the role and
32 function of organizational culture (see Henriksen, 2015), on which research and applied attention
33 has recently grown (see Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Nevertheless, some notable exceptions
34 aside (see Henricksen, 2015), I remain surprised by the predominance of cross-sectional research
35 on talent development environments and I would encourage researchers within this domain to
36 undertake cohort studies, or where this is epistemologically incompatible, longitudinal case
37 studies and ethnographic work. Moreover, researchers must undertake more talent development
38 environment intervention work which retains the central role of
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3 organizational culture, while being cognizant of broader organizational sport psychology trends
4 relevant to environments (e.g., organizational change and climate).
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8 The focus of Martin and Eys's case study on selection for an elite performance team
9 offers a novel opportunity for knowledge sharing for those interested in organizational sport
10 psychology. While direct transference of the case study to sport selection should be cautioned, the
11 common goal of getting the right people into one's organization – in the right roles – is pivotal
12 for any high performance organization. As Martin and Eys note in their article, member selection
13 is an opportunity to acquire human capital, whereby organizations seek candidates with
14 characteristics that best suit their needs (e.g., knowledge, skills, abilities). Nevertheless, selection
15 process clarity, timing and length are consistently observed in athlete organizational stressor
16 taxonomies and regularly provide the fuel for explosive social media and punditry debate. In my
17 applied practice I have witnessed elite sport organizations rely too heavily on a myth of
18 individualism (see Wagstaff, 2017) by prioritising athletic prowess (but not performance *per se*),
19 status, brand, and market value over work ethic, leadership, and organizational citizenship.
20 Recruitment, selection, and socialization processes in elite sport are never objective and are often
21 problematic and contentious. All-too-often these processes are secretive, poorly communicated
22 and elide valuable psychosocial information. Moreover, in order to protect power, ego, and their
23 job, leaders rarely publicly admit mistakes or errors in their processes and there is clearly much
24 scope to improve such processes. As such, Martin and Eys' case study provides a timely and
25 novel insight into the selection process in a highly-specialized military performance team. Of
26 particular interest to me was the importance of an individual's "fit" within the performance team,
27 and the power of peers to veto prospective recruits when collective agreement on that individual's
28 non-selection was achieved. Whether elements of this approach to recruitment could
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3 translate to sport remain to be seen. Other findings that I found particularly resonant from the
4 military squadron were the selection process transparency, collegiality to prospective recruits
5 and early integration and socialization, mentoring for new recruits, and the thread of cultural
6 importance throughout the selection and socialization processes. Taking the last of these, one
7 key opportunity for sport organization learning was the stylization of selection and socialization
8 processes to retain cultural traditions, engage symbolism, and promote sensemaking. That is, the
9 “Snowbirds” used the selection process to: (a) facilitate the identification of ideal members; (b)
10 provide those potential candidates with a clear understanding of the normative expectations and
11 culture, and; (c) immediately begin candidate integration, all with a specific orientation toward
12 their organization. Many sport organizations would benefit by incorporating similar values into
13 their recruitment. This incorporation might facilitate alignment of intentions and expectations
14 between the various subgroups within an organization (e.g., administrators, coaches, and
15 athletes; cf. Martin, Eys, & Spink, 2017), and enable greater transparency and collaboration in
16 the recruitment, selection, and socialization of future team members. Nevertheless, such
17 involvement should not place additional demands on senior athletes and should not infringe on
18 their substantive role as an athlete.

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40 In taking these findings and reflecting on the broader organizational sport psychology
41 literature that has referred to selection (e.g., Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Martin, Evans, &
42 Spink, 2016), I would argue that sport organizations must: (a) recruit athletes who fit within
43 their organizational culture and will positively contribute to the team climate; (b) be transparent
44 during recruitment and establish congruency with incoming member role expectations; (c)
45 undertake and adequately communicate to all parties unambiguous and timely selection
46 decisions; (d) provide deselected individuals with authentic, achievable and constructive
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3 feedback; and (e) revisit performance feedback through individual performance management
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5 discussions or promote closure via exit interviews on departure from a program.
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8 In drawing together my reflections on this special issue and the field of organizational
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10 sport psychology, I offer three pressing observations of the field relating to the need for:
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12 intervention work; greater duty of care; and, practitioner action.
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15 **The need for intervention work.** Researchers are urged to undertake intervention research
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17 within organizational sport psychology. This is pivotal to fully communicate the role of
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19 psychosocial and environmental factors in the promotion of individual, team and organizational
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21 performance and wellbeing. There remains a dearth of intervention research in organizational
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23 sport psychology. This scarcity is perhaps an artefact of the domain's relative youthful status in
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25 comparison to more established lines of inquiry within sport psychology; yet, now the conceptual
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27 foundations have been laid, researchers must construct impactful intervention knowledge across
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29 all silos of organizational sport psychology.
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33 When conducting intervention studies, researchers should not only evaluate what works,
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35 but how and why. Process evaluation offers a framework for such evaluations and can offer a
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37 valuable foil for measures of intervention effectiveness. Additionally, much of the work on
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39 organizational sport psychology is published on the assumption that organizational environments
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41 can be easily-controlled and suitable control groups easily found for intervention comparison. Yet,
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43 given the volatile and precarious nature of elite sport, organizational change and personnel
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45 turnover are common (see Wagstaff et al., 2015). Additionally, in Olympic sport countries often
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47 share centralized resources, such as facilities and employees, thus blurring organizational
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49 boundaries and isolating intervention effects problematic. Moreover, it is difficult to find, and for
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51 some researchers epistemologically counterintuitive to seek, organizational controls for
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3 interventions. Therefore, given these challenges, researchers might find it more appropriate to
4 use comparison or reference groups rather than control groups for organizational interventions in
5 sport.
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10 **The need for greater duty of care.** Sport organizations, professional societies and
11 regulatory bodies, and education and training providers are currently failing in their duty of care
12 to individuals in sport. Sport organizations must be both supported and expected to engage in
13 appropriate and fair employment practices, and to monitor and manage the cultural and climatic
14 health of their environments. Until only recently there has remained a tendency to overlook the
15 climatic and cultural factors associated with the optimal development of athletes (see, for a
16 recent review of organizational culture, Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Yet, sport
17 organizations must also be guided to likely relationships between organizational culture and
18 climate and burnout, turnover, identity, commitment, engagement, wellbeing and performance.
19 To optimize this guidance, both researchers and practitioners must do more; yet, the body of
20 work presented in this special issue will provide a key resource.
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35 It is unfortunate that despite repeated observations that mental skills training to enhance
36 athletes' performance is unlikely to be sufficient in addressing the expanding needs of those
37 operating in contemporary elite sport (see Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), the education and training
38 of sport psychologists continues to be dominated by the psychological skills. As the guardians of
39 practitioner qualification pathways and legal registration for practitioners, PSRBs must promote
40 the importance of organizational sport psychology within service provision guidelines,
41 competency frameworks, and standards of proficiency. There are some examples where
42 organizational factors are represented within curricula guidelines and qualifications (e.g., British
43 Psychological Society; British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences; Association for
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3 Applied Sport Psychology), but organizational service delivery competence is not yet a core
4 component of sport psychology training and qualification. These needs must also be
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6 communicated to education and training providers, where they exist outside of professional
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8 bodies (e.g., universities). The current preparation of sport science and medicine practitioners for
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10 the professional realities of elite sport is woefully inadequate. Indeed, neophyte practitioner
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12 reflections highlight inadequate preparation for the requirements of elite sport environments. For
13
14 example, Larsen (2017) recently reflected that the practical challenges associated with
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16 attempting to integrate oneself successfully into an elite sport organization was like “bringing a
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18 knife to a gunfight” (p. 7). Both sport organizations and PSRBs must work together to support
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20 and protect those they have a duty of care toward and sport psychologists are both a focus for
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22 this need, but also a key social agent for change.
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28 **The need for practitioner action.** I will finish with some thoughts on practitioners as
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30 agents for change toward better integration of organizational service provision. Recently, Sly et
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32 al. (in press) reflected on the professional development and ever-expanding roles and
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34 responsibilities of the applied sport psychology practitioner. Sly et al. observed that sport
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36 psychologists are increasingly regarded as not only a facilitator of performance enhancement and
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38 custodian of performer well-being, but an architect of cultural excellence. With growing requests
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40 for practitioners to advise on elite sport climates (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), as well as other
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42 diverse performance domains (e.g., military, performing arts, high risk occupations; Portenga,
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44 Aoyagi, & Cohen, 2017), the creation and sustainment of a high performance culture has now
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46 come to be regarded as a key function of sport psychology practice (Henriksen, 2015). As such, I
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48 urge sport psychology practitioners to prioritize the development of cultural and socio-political
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50 skills and knowledge of organizational psychology practices. The scope of these practices
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3 requires practitioners to adopt a more flexible and free ranging role, whereby micro-level
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5 psychological skills and counselling provision might be complemented by engagement in macro-
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7 level performance, organizational and management practices (Collins & Cruickshank, 2015).
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10 This macro-level service provision also necessitates active engagement in a multitude of working
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12 alliances with various social agent groups (e.g., performance directors, coaches, administrators
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14 and support staff), who operate across various levels of the organization (McDougall, Nesti, &
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16 Richardson, 2015). Eubank, Nesti and Cruickshank (2014) suggested satisfactory fulfilment of
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18 this wider social provision requires the adoption of roles similar to those of human resources
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20 managers and occupational psychologists, in an effort to improve communication, reduce
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22 conflict and promote a culturally congruent view of performance excellence. Consequently,
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24 practitioners might also seek to quickly establish a cultural appreciation of the complex social
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26 hierarchies, micro-political structures and cultural dynamics that exist within various levels of
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28 elite sport environments (cf. McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; McDougall et al., 2015; Mellalieu,
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30 2016; Nesti, 2016). Nevertheless, when operating within such environments, practitioners must
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32 remain cognizant of the barriers they may face when attempting to integrate themselves within
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34 an organization. For example, Nesti (2016) recalled the “often-experienced skepticism”
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36 surrounding psychology within sport. Elsewhere, Gardner (2016) noted the possibility of
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38 organizational resistance, should the sport psychologist fail to effectively establish their roles and
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40 responsibilities within an organization. As such, practitioners must do due diligence in the
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42 development of organizational service delivery skills and when attempting to gain trust and
43
44 develop credibility, they must acknowledge, assimilate and ultimately seek to influence the
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46 dynamic organizational cultures that exist in sport (Mellalieu, 2017; Nesti, 2016). Indeed, issues
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3 relating to congruence and assimilation with established cultural norms and expectations present
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5 a key consideration for sport psychologists offering organizational service delivery.
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8 Drawing on previous empirical perspectives, Schinke and Hackfort (2016) recommended
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10 that practitioners align themselves with the culture they are trying to influence or risk extinction.
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12 Yet, in an environment often dictated by a ruthless pursuit of excellence (cf. McDougall et al.,
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14 2015), such alignment can prove professionally and ethically problematic. Consequently,
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16 practitioners must at times resist cultural assimilation, despite the risk of team alienation and
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18 possible employment termination (Gilmore et al., 2018; McDougall et al., 2015). In sum, while
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20 practitioners should be part of the culture, they must also be apart from it, ensuring that one's
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22 support remains congruent with one's personal beliefs, values and wider professional
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24 philosophy. Moreover, although engagement in broader organizational operations now reflects a
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26 key practice function, practitioners must also ensure the pursuit of cultural and performance
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28 excellence is not achieved at the expense of professional ethics and individual wellbeing.
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