

Using Sport and Performance Psychology in the Management of Change

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Using Sport and Performance Psychology in the Management of Change

I think ability is a 10 to 20 per cent requirement, you need 80 to 90 per cent mental strength.
(Glenn McGrath ex-Australian Cricketer)

About this special issue

In line with the editorial aims and scope of *Journal of Change Management (JCM)* we are pleased to present to the *JCM* readership two special issues dedicated to exploring key contemporary themes and research regarding the use of sport and performance psychology in the management of change. The two special issues advance the understanding and expertise regarding the effectiveness of sport and performance psychology principles in facilitating and managing change in organization and workplace settings.

A brief history of sport psychology

Glenn McGrath, one of the best fast bowlers this World has seen, illustrates in the above quote the importance of psychology within sport. Nevertheless, sport psychology is a relatively young discipline within psychology. To illustrate, in 1920 Carl Diem founded the world's first sport psychology laboratory at the Deutsche Sporthochschule in Berlin. Two further labs were established in 1925: one by A. Z. Puni at the Institute of Physical Culture in Leningrad and the other by Coleman Griffith at the University of Illinois where he published the first sport psychology book titled *The Psychology of Coaching* in 1926. From this starting point to 1965, scant research was undertaken within sport psychology until the formation of the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) which arguably prompted a revival in the subject area. Indeed, by the 1970s sport psychology courses were becoming increasingly common throughout North America and so too the academic profile of the discipline, which was demonstrated through the development of the *International Journal of Sport Psychology* in 1970 followed thereafter by the *Journal of Sport Psychology* in 1979. By the 1980s sport psychology became subjected to more thorough scientific investigation. To illustrate, researchers began to explore how sport psychology could be used to improve athletic performance along with how exercise and physical activity could be used to aid well-being. The research in sport focussed specifically on determining the key psychological characteristics of athletic excellence including the conceptual development of areas such as motivation (e.g. Duda & Allison, 1989), self-confidence (e.g. Vealey, 1986), competitive anxiety (e.g. Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump, & Smith, 1990), cohesion (e.g. Carron, 1982), the development

of sport-specific psychometrics (e.g. Gill & Deeter, 1988), and the exploration of effective psychological interventions (e.g. imagery, relaxation, and goal-setting) to aid athletic performance (e.g. Greenspan & Feltz, 1989). Today sport psychology is a diverse and multidisciplinary field with global interest and a wide-ranging scientific community including research publications spread across numerous peer-reviewed journals. In addition, professional bodies such as the Association of Applied Sport Psychology (AASP), the British Psychological Society's Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology (BPS, DSEP), the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and the European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) oversee the professional development of sport psychology, which includes the development of accreditation and certification pathways for university courses and individuals pursuing chartered and certified status as a Sport Psychologist.

Given the scientific and professional development of sport psychology during the last 40 years there has been an increasing appetite from elite sport to embrace sport psychology services. Generally, there is now a wide-ranging acceptance of sport psychology as a key facet of sport science support in the development of athletic excellence, and this is illustrated in the increasing number of new positions created to work in elite sport along with anecdotal evidence of effective sport psychology support in helping to develop highly successful athletes and teams towards fulfilling their potential (e.g., Barker & Slater, 2015; Clay, 2012).

What actually is sport psychology?

In its rawest sense sport psychology can be defined as:

Sport psychology is concerned with the psychological foundations, processes, and consequences of the psychological regulation of sport-related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject(s) of the activity. The focus may be on behavior or on different psychological dimensions of human behavior. The physical activity can take place in competitive, educational, recreational, preventive and rehabilitation settings and includes health-related exercise. (FEPSAC, 1996, p. 221)

In essence, sport psychology addresses the interactions between psychology and athletic performance, including the psychological aspects of optimal athletic performance, the psychological well-being of athletes, teams, coaches, and sport organizations, and the connection between physical and psychological functioning. Typically, evidence-based practice in sport psychology focuses on psychological skills (e.g. mental skills) development for performance excellence and/or restoration, as well as improving team dynamics and cohesion (Cremanes, Tashman, & Quartiroli, 2014). Sport psychologists have, consequently, gleaned a lot of information about how individuals and teams perform under extreme pressure and deal with the many stressors and challenges typical of high performing environments. Indeed, research over the last 40 years has yielded great insights into the psychological characteristics, correlates, and predictors of elite performers and teams. In addition, much research exists regarding the effectiveness of a plethora of psychological strategies used to facilitate important individual and team outcomes (e.g., self-confidence, concentration, and cohesion; see Barker, Mellalieu, McCarthy, Jones, & Moran, 2013). Importantly, a growing body of research also indicates that elite, professional sport offers an interesting context within which to explore employees' responses to

organizational change, given the volatile environment underpinned by an ongoing demand for sustained success (see Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2015).

What is performance psychology?

The success of sport psychologists in elite and professional sport has stimulated other domains where human performance is of paramount importance to embrace sport psychology principles and to invite sport psychologists to work and research in non-sport performance settings including business (e.g. Jones, 2002), military (e.g. Hardy et al., 2010), performing arts (e.g. Hays, 2002; Martin & Cutler, 2002), and law enforcement (e.g. Le Scanff & Taugis, 2002). Moving beyond the psychology of athletic performance has been advocated as an important development for sport psychology. For example, it allows sport psychologists to support individuals involved in other performance situations by applying their knowledge of performance enhancement, testing the generalizability of theories and research findings, and studying alternative approaches that top performers from outside of sport use to achieve peak performance (Gould, 2002). Additionally, non-sport psychology professionals (i.e. organizational psychologists, executive, and performance coaches) have joined the area of sport performance enhancement due to their applicable knowledge and skills base (Cremandes et al., 2014).

During the last 15 years, and due in part to an increasing appetite from performance domains outside of sport, we have witnessed the emergence of the professional field of performance psychology. Despite being a developing field, performance psychology is beginning to have an increased appreciation within the scientific literature. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 47 has the *Journal of Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*. Various definitions of performance psychology have been postulated, with the following contemporary definition being provided by Hays (2012: 25), 'performance psychology refers to the mental components of superior performance, in situations and performance domains where excellence is a central element'. Performance psychology is posited to focus on the psychology of human performance in domains such as athletics, the performing arts, surgery, firefighting, law enforcement, military operations, business, and music. Presently, evidence-based practice in performance psychology focuses on performance excellence and/or restoration and well-being in individual performers and groups (Cremandes et al., 2014).

In sum, sport and performance psychology are ever growing disciplines in which scientific principles are applied to sport and other performance domains. Specifically, sport and performance psychology is based upon evidence from psychological science research and is used to assist those involved in high performance settings to fulfil their potential, deliver consistent and sustained performance, and deal with market-led and organizational challenges (Turner & Barker, 2014).

Applying sport and performance psychology to organizational change situations

Arguably one of the most important aspects regarding successful organizational change is an appreciation and facilitation of key psychological principles (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). To this end, successful change management is dependent on effective and dynamic

leadership, cohesive teams, effective social support, clear communication pathways, robust coping mechanisms (including stress management and resilience), and the ability to deliver sustained performance under extreme pressure (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012). Organizational change is inherent in elite sport and in organizations, as we strive for continued improvement and, ultimately, success (Wagstaff et al., 2015). Therefore, much information gleaned from sport and performance psychology can be transferred to support organizational change in a much wider contexts. For example, the many structures and layers within elite sporting organizations creates a complex context to understand and sport psychology research is offering insight into this complexity through providing data regarding the negative effect of change on individuals (e.g. Gilmore, 2013; Gilmore & Gibson, 2007; Wagstaff et al., 2015), and offering insight into the strategies adopted by these organizations to optimize group functioning by harnessing the energies (e.g. mobilization of effort, co-operation) of the organization to allow thriving during change (see Wagstaff et al., 2012). In addition, sport psychology research has highlighted that the adversity associated with change within elite sport can be a catalyst for team resilience if managed appropriately (e.g. Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2015). Accordingly, it is postulated that effective change management in other contexts (e.g., business and medicine) would benefit further from engagement with sport and performance psychology principles, expertise, and findings, particularly given this recent research within within sport has explored organizational change in high performance and complex environments.

Aims and scope of the special issue

Given the potential for the work conducted by sport and performance psychology researchers to influence organizational change in, these two special issues (issue 1 & 2, 2016) aim to facilitate awareness and understanding of contemporary theories, research, strategies, and application of key psychological principles within our sport performance setting, and illustrate their relevance to the successful management of change in organizational and workplace settings. In many ways these two issues build on a special issue published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* in 2002 (volume 14, issue 4) which was one of the first postulations regarding the relevance of sport psychology principles above and beyond athletic performance (e.g. business; Gould, 2002). Therefore, it is with great pleasure that we present these special issues of the *JCM*. We anticipate the volumes will act as a contemporary resource for individuals involved in organizational change along with those in sport and performance psychology research or professional practice. We hope that this collection of works will provide an increased awareness of benefits and impact of sport and performance principles in the effective management of change. To achieve our aims for these volumes we have received submissions from a number of world leading experts regarding the use of sport and performance psychology in the management of change. We are delighted with their contributions in helping us to fulfil the aims of these special issues.

Special issue 1 is organized accordingly: Our introductory guest editorial here is followed by three articles comprising a review and original research. The first article authored by Slater, Evans, and Turner is a review article and outlines an innovative social identity approach for effective change management including suggestions for applied practice

and research. Second, Wagstaff, Thelwell, and Gilmore in a qualitative study report findings from 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with employees' from professional football organizations and highlights responses to repeated organizational change. Finally, Allen and McCarthy provide a thought provoking narrative around the importance of happiness and positive psychology in the workplace to facilitate individual well-being and performance during change situations. The article includes commentary on effective interventions which to promote happiness and well-being.

Special issue 2 comprises a further three articles and is organized in the following manner: First, Neil, Wagstaff, Weller, and Lewis present a multi-study article which explores the relationship between a number of performance psychology variables (including leadership behaviours, emotional intelligence, and cohesion) and performance within a UK Government Executive Agency during substantial organizational change. The article draws on qualitative and quantitative methods to highlight salient findings along with recommendations for practitioners and researchers. Second, Fletcher and Streeter present a case study analysis of developing and working in a high performance environment in elite swimming. Within their article a series of key reflections are presented. Finally, the special issue concludes with another thought provoking narrative from Dixon, Lee, and Ghaye who highlight the benefits of strengths-based reflection strategies at individual and group levels in the effective management of change situations.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their patience and diligence in responding to the editorial process, and the *JCM* Editorial Board, in particular, the Editor-in-Chief, Professor Rune Todnem By for his support in helping us to assemble these volumes. We would also like to thank all the reviewers for giving their time to provide thorough and insightful reviews of the various submissions we received. We are, as always, greatly indebted to them, and this collection of works would not have been possible without their contribution and support. Lastly, we hope you enjoy these special issues and that they provide a stimulus for discourse, increased awareness, and further sport and performance psychology research and practice in change management and business contexts.

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