

Temporary Career Transition: A Case Study of the Loan Transfer Process and Experience in the English Professional Football Environment

**Temporary Career Transition: A Case Study of the Loan Transfer Process and
Experience in the English Professional Football Environment**

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Abstract

The current PhD explores loan transfers in English professional football as a temporary transition. In sport, career termination has initially been prioritised, with wider transitions gaining greater attention over time (see: Ivarsson et al., 2018; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994). However, little attention has been given to supporting and preparing individuals for permanent and temporary transfers in football. This is particularly important to explore given the introduction, yet lack of evaluation, of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in 2012, which intended to increase holistic development and home grown talent development in England (Horrocks et al., 2016). To address this research gap, this thesis adopts a qualitative case study, drawing on interviews and document analysis, to gain in-depth insight to the experiences of an elite, high quality sample of players and staff across a range of Premier League and Championship clubs with regards to the loan process. The objectives of the research were to: a) explore the role of the Loan Managers (LMs) and their responsibilities in supporting loan players and processes; b) understand the perspectives of wider club staff, LMs and players to explore the loan process as a novel temporary transition; and c) develop recommendations regarding the LM role and broader loans process for individuals, clubs and policy-makers. There were a range of significant insights and novel contributions when addressing the objectives, including the lack of clarity for LMs and their day to day responsibilities. Similarly, consideration of wider perspectives allowed understanding of multi-disciplinary team (MDT) involvement as well as wider support and decision-making processes surrounding loan processes. Additionally, the current research recommends that professional football clubs ensure that a support structure is provided for LMs, whereby National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and organisations (e.g. Football Association; FA, English Premier League; EPL) could provide more formal support networks across clubs and leagues to ensure that sharing of best practice is in place. This may also help clubs and wider organisations place greater value on the loan transfer process, especially in line with the EPPP's prioritisation of holistic development of homegrown talent, along with continued developments implemented by Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA, 2022) regarding loan regulations.

Key Words: Transition, loan transfers, holistic development, professional football, support.

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List of Abbreviations

FIFA: Fédération Internationale de Football Association

UEFA: Union of European Football Associations

FA: Football Association

EFL: English Football League

EPL: English Premier League

EPPP: Elite Player Performance Plan

RSTP: Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players

Chapter One: Introduction

This introductory chapter will share the inspiration behind the thesis (1.1), provide key insight into the context of the thesis regarding talent development and transition within English football (1.2) as well as outline both the aims (1.3) and the structure of the thesis (1.4).

1.1 Inspiration Behind the Thesis

Whilst studying sport psychology at both undergraduate and master's level, I developed a strong interest in the area of career development and transition in sport, with a keen motivation to understand the experiences for a range of individuals and their circumstances of change or transition. Through research and development of knowledge in this area, along with having a strong personal interest in football, I began to acknowledge more investment and resources given to the area of loan transfers and youth development within the football industry. However, when looking to understand this more so from a social psychological perspective, it occurred to me that there was a lack of research attention and exploration of specific transitions involving club transfers, particularly regarding loans transfers, which have notably been acknowledged within practice as important in youth development and progression (e.g. FIFA, 2022). Similarly, with the significant number of cases, and subsequent attention, pointing to issues with deselection for youth football players being released from academies and the lack of support, and subsequent growing interest in this area, it appeared necessary to take the opportunity to dedicate specific research to understanding the loans process as a transition for football players. Similarly, with the introduction of the Loan Manager (LM) across several clubs, and greater support staff being employed, e.g. Player Care Officers, it inspired the desire to understand how wider members of staff within the football environment, specifically those who are commonly involved with supporting players during transition, viewed and supported the loan transfer process.

1.2 Talent Development and Transition in the English Football Context

1.2.1 Existing Knowledge

Football is the dominant sport within the United Kingdom (UK), possessing a significant global influence and media interest, with teams from the English Premier League (EPL) often outperforming those from wider domestic leagues within Europe (The Economist, 2021). Specifically, within England, more than 1.5 million males participate in youth football (Calvin, 2017), many of whom aspire to achieve a career as a professional footballer (McGill, 2001; Nesti, 2016). Despite this, around half of all academy level players do not remain in the academy beyond the age of 16, minimising opportunities to play at professional level and exposing an issue in the player development process (Reeves and Roberts, 2018). However, in 2012 there was substantial investment in the talent development system through the FA (Football Association, English football governing body)'s introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), implementing a holistic development structure across English football academies with the objective to produce a greater number of home-grown players within the professional game (Horrocks et al., 2016). Key here was the 'Long Term Player Development' (LTPD) plan, providing a four-corner model encompassing technical/tactical, psychological, physiological, and social components that clubs must consider within their development structure. With the implementation of wider support and development for academy football players, research has sought to detail their experiences of transition, particularly as they progress onto senior level football, or make the transition out of football (e.g. Barth et al., 2021; Drawer and Fuller, 2002; Morris et al., 2015, 2017).

Understanding transition and the circumstances of it are vital to supporting individuals as they experience it – this is true of any environment. Transition has been defined as “an event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and, thus, requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships”, with acknowledgement that transition is inevitable for all individuals, affecting one's identity, relationships and perspective in any given context (Schlossberg, 1981: 5). However, within the professional football context, with the cut-throat, ruthless and masculine-dominated culture (Champ et al., 2020), various

transitions can take place, some of which will be more anticipated, and hence planned for, compared to others.

Literature in this area has given strong priority to career termination through retirement and injury (e.g. Ivarsson et al., 2018; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994; Werthner and Orlick, 1986), with a more recent focus on within career transition, taking place as performers progress through their career (e.g. Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Pummell et al. (2008) researched the transition to regional level for event riders with findings that motivation, perception and stress largely influenced the transition experience for individuals. Similarly, the importance of support was acknowledged, which has also been evidenced in research on students undergoing the transition to university (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Pummell et al., 2008).

Martindale et al. (2005) proposed that organisations hold a pivotal role in supporting individuals throughout this transition to ensure they are able to develop holistically with purpose and identity. Similarly, with the acknowledgement of little or no support to youth players when they are released from clubs, there is also a growing interest in the experience of deselection¹, particularly with the miniscule chances of success that exist for young players in their attempts to secure professional football contracts (Gledhill et al., 2017), thus large quantities of academy players are being released annually, often resulting in a significant decline in mental health (e.g. Blakelock et al., 2016). A specific example of within career transition that has gained attention in sport is the 'youth to senior transition' that takes place as individuals move from academies or youth sport to professional environments (e.g. Larsen et al., 2012; Martindale and Mortimer, 2011; Morris et al., 2015).

Thus, talent development environments² (TDEs) in football have been frequently explored more recently (e.g. Larsen et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2015) whereby it has been recognised that players need to be prepared to cope with the changing environment at senior level (McNamara, 2011). Athletes need specific skills relevant to their sport along with holistic skills that will assist the psychosocial challenges of

¹ The experience of being released from a football academy (Blakelock et al., 2019).

² Environments that aim to develop and produce elite performers whilst also providing individuals with the resources to cope with demands of challenge and transition (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007).

transition, particularly that of the progression to senior level of sport (Larsen et al., 2012; Martindale and Mortimer, 2011). In line with Martindale et al. (2005), with any progression within the TDE as well as specifically with youth to senior transition, football clubs must be responsible for supporting and facilitating transition experiences for individuals within the club, regardless of career success (Gledhill and Harwood, 2015; Larsen et al., 2013).

1.2.2 Most Recent Evolutions and Gaps

With the introduction of the EPPP and recognition of holistic development within the football environment, there is evidence within practice of preparing players more widely as there will inevitably be off-pitch skills and abilities that are required in their lives regardless of their success in obtaining a professional football contract (Larsen et al., 2012), or the longevity of their footballing career. This is particularly significant with the possibilities of transition that they are likely to encounter, including those mentioned above, as well as likelihood of transfer between clubs, both on a temporary or permanent basis.

In the January transfer window during the 2021-22 season, EPL clubs spent over £322 million on permanent player transfers (Smith, 2022). Therefore, with transfers being a fundamental aspect of the operation and strategic planning of football clubs, there has also been significant utilisation of the loan transfer system within the football environment; however, only recently has this gained attention by international bodies regarding the intention and effective utilisation of such a system³. This is particularly important with increased focus around preventing large, wealthy clubs exploiting the system with several players out on loan at any one time, as well as the drive to develop greater quantities of home-grown talent within domestic academies, as seen with the introduction of the EPPP in English football academies.

Many football clubs across the world are utilising the loan system for both senior and academy players, with increasing interest and resources being invested in this.

³ FIFA began addressing the transfer system in 2017 in attempts to encourage home grown development and more effective use of transfer opportunities, such as loans (FIFA, 2022).

Following the January transfer window in the 2021-22 season, Chelsea Football Club had 24 players (Chelsea FC, 2022) and Arsenal Football Club had 23 players out on temporary transfers (Lakhani, 2022), whilst Manchester City Football Club had 38 players out on loan at this time (Macdonald, 2022). However, with both senior and academy players experiencing loan transfers, there are often a variety of reasons and intentions that come with such transfers which may be driven by the needs of the individual, the club, or a combination of both. Similarly, a number of football clubs are now providing greater support and dedication to the planning and operation of the loan system within their organisations, with clubs including Manchester United, Liverpool, Brighton and Wolves allocating specific staff to support and oversee loan player experiences during such transfers (Crafton, 2019). Similarly, with continued acknowledgement of the importance of the loans system, as part of the reform of the transfer system initiated in 2017, FIFA, the global governing body within football, are introducing new loan rules rooted in the aims of a) developing young players, b) promoting competitive balance, and c) preventing hoarding of players (FIFA, 2022), which has been a key focus since Gianni Infantino became President in 2016, with aims to become a “fast evolving into a body that can more effectively serve our game for the benefit of the entire world” (FIFA, n.d: online).

To meet the needs of these new loan rules, there will be requirements of a written agreement detailing the financial conditions of a loan, as well as a mandated duration of any loan period to, as a minimum, fulfil the duration between two registration phases, and last for up to one year, as a maximum. Additionally, players cannot be sub-loaned once they are at a loan club and football clubs cannot send more than three players to a single loan club. There are also new restrictions to be staggered across oncoming seasons regarding the total number of loan transfers to be made each season. Across the 2022-23 football season, a club may have a maximum of eight professional players loaned and eight loaned in at any time, this will be reduced to seven players, then six players across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons respectively, with the continuation of six players only from then on (FIFA, 2022). However, given the centrality of development and home-grown talent within academies, these restrictions will not apply to players aged 21 years and below, nor club-trained players. Additionally, national football associations will have a three-year period to introduce loan ruling which aligns with the mandates outlined by FIFA.

With regulations surrounding loan transfers for clubs continually being revised and amended to prevent football clubs from 'hoarding' players and provide a more facilitative system of development (FIFA, 2022), there remains to be a gap in knowledge around how this is perceived within, and impacting on, the practice of professional football clubs. This is particularly significant in understanding the relevance of the loan system as a developmental tool within latter stages of academy football and exposing players to the senior football environment, which needs to be acknowledged as an important youth to senior transition within the literature and applied practice.

However, there had been no acknowledgment of loan experiences before the initiation of this thesis, and only recently have insights been provided in terms of the loan transition (e.g. Kent et al., 2022; Abbott and Clifford, 2021). Therefore, this has established a clear need for further and wider research exploring the experience of the temporary transition during loan transfers for football players, whilst also considering the approaches of football clubs in planning and supporting such transition. Similarly, this thesis looks to understand how clubs are investing in the loans process through wider support staff and specific roles such as the LM in order to provide key insights and evidence of the experiences of those operating within the loan transfer process to further inform practice across the professional football context. The present thesis also looks to explore and inform current practice around player development within the loan system, with consideration of preparing players for loan transfers, supporting the process and identifying key features of challenge and success that could be further acknowledged to improve the efficiency and utilisation of the loan process and the staff involved within football clubs. However, these are also fundamental areas to explore to develop research knowledge and understanding of the loan transition, to develop existing literature within sport, and specifically football surrounding within-career transition, as a new area with little investigation, as well as enhancing literature on wider temporary transitions that happen in non-sporting contexts including universities and workplaces.

Therefore, the current thesis is a sport psychology and sociology thesis which focuses on how sociological social psychology (SSP) materialises in the sporting context, which has not been done before. Although sporting literature has considered some

perspectives within SSP, such as symbolic interactionism, the current thesis will consider the two additional perspectives of social structure and personality, and group processes in a holistic manner, given the inevitable collaboration of the three perspectives that can enhance understanding of complex social processes (Rohall et al., 2021), particularly when considering personnel in different roles within the footballing context and the idiosyncrasies of each club and individual. SSP encompasses a broad range of concepts that are relevant within any social context and can thus be utilised to develop understanding of wider circumstances of transition and social processes within the football context, with the aim to further understand the loan process. Therefore, with this thesis placing focus on the loan system and being the initial exploration of this area, integrating perspectives from both psychology and sociology can offer a lens to provide context. Through the specific framework of SSP, both disciplines can be incorporated to consider a wide range of processes and interactions within such an unexplored area of loan transfers, thus the current thesis does not aim to expand SSP but utilise it as a helpful tool in the exploration of the loan process in football.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Thesis

This thesis seeks to significantly add to, and develop, research that has initially explored the area of loan transfers by deepening understanding of the specific processes in place to support players in their development. Additionally, this research provides insight into the consideration around holistic development, as advocated by the EPPP, with critical discussion of if and how football clubs incorporate such holistic principles during the loan transition. One of the objectives of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the loans process for a range of individuals involved, including but extending beyond players, to also encompass the perspectives of individuals that work within football clubs and engage with various aspects of the loan transfer process. A SSP perspective, which has been recognised as adaptable to various contexts, but has not been used within the sporting context was employed within this thesis. This offered help in addressing the individual circumstances of the loans process for each participant within the study, as well as considering the wider relationships and social environment that also inevitably influences the loan transfer

experience and procedure. Thus, the overarching aim of the current thesis is to explore the transition experiences of professional football players that have been loaned to another professional club on a temporary basis, identify the support offered by the parent club during this process and develop the existing guidelines surrounding loan transfers. The subsequent objectives are to:

1) evaluate how football clubs support players prior to and during their loan through exploring the specific role of LMs that have been employed across various football clubs, with initial research into the responsibilities and operation of LMS, as well as looking to understand how players are supported by wider members of staff for the benefit of players and clubs alike.

2) understand the loan process from various perspectives of those involved, to provide insight into a novel youth to senior transition experience of loan transfers, not only from the players' point of view, but also various staff personnel who are actively engaged in the process. This will encourage effective understanding in both research and practice to recognise what is currently happening during loan transfers, but how clubs may improve or extend the involvement of staff and the support being offered to players during such temporary transfers.

3) develop best-practice recommendations relevant to the LM role and loan process for the use of individuals, clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs) and policy-makers to encourage greater attention, investment and support for those involved in the loan transfer process.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Following this initial chapter, the thesis consists of six additional chapters. Chapter Two presents a detailed review of transition literature across the fields of psychology and sociology. It then progresses onto transition within the sporting context, with specific insight to existing research and ideas regarding transition and talent development within professional football and acknowledgement of gaps in this area, leading to a discussion of the need for this research. Similarly, an in-depth review of the English professional football environment is provided, along with the development

of the loan transfer system, current policy and ruling on this, as well as critical discussion of engagement with the loans process within the English football system. Chapter Three provides the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as rationale for the use of qualitative methods within a single case study research design implemented to address the aim and objectives of the research. Following this is an in-depth explanation of the specific research methods and analysis utilised within the current study. Chapter Four, Five and Six present and discuss the findings of the thesis. Chapter Four provides insight to and discussion of the 'The Loan Manager Role', with specific address of the development of the role, its responsibilities and how the title and skillset is established across football clubs. Chapter Five presents the 'Strategic Management of Loan Transfers' across football clubs, offering findings and discussion surrounding reasons that players are sent on loan, how they are matched with specific loan clubs and club strategy regarding the development of the loans process. Chapter Six provides detail on the 'Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players', with specific discussion of preparation before a loan transfer, as well as the challenges and success experienced by players whilst on loan. Chapter Seven concludes with a summary of the overall findings of the thesis and recognition of the contribution and applied implications of the current research. Similarly, there is acknowledgement of the thesis limitations and recommendations for future research within this area.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of appropriate literature in relation to the thesis' aim and objectives. Initially, literature on transitions across an individual's life will be addressed, from psychological and sociological perspectives (2.1). Secondly, literature on transition in sport will be discussed (2.2), followed by discussion of the football environment, with particular focus on the loan system (2.3).

2.1. Transition, the Life Span and the Life Course

Transitions are a frequent occurrence throughout one's life, consisting of an element of change or mobility from an existing situation, such as stages of life and social, geographical or professional boundaries (Angouri et al., 2017). Therefore, whether perceived as positive or negative experiences, transitions are opportunities for an individual or group to learn and develop (Merriam, 1998). Researchers have explored the experiences of several transitions experienced throughout life, the current researcher has provided a visual overview of such transitional experiences as presented in research (see figure 1).

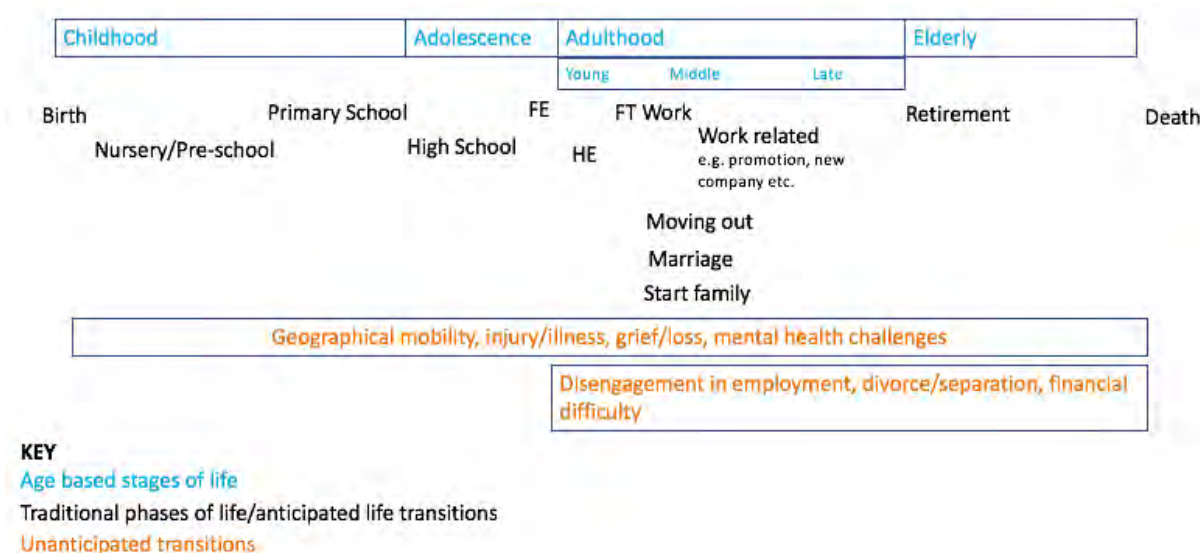


Figure 1: The current researcher's elaboration of various transitions that have been recognised across literature.

2.1.1 Erikson's (1950) Eight Psychosocial Tensions/Stages of Human Development

Within the field of psychology, different branches have considered the transitions that individuals face, these include developmental and life span psychology, and counselling psychology (Green, 2017). The former considers human development across all stages of life and comprises various theories and psychological disciplines, such as social psychology and individual differences psychology. Erikson (1950), taking a psychosocial perspective, proposed a lifespan theory of development whereby he conceptualised the psychosocial progression of the human lifespan (see table 1), incorporating both social and cultural factors within the theory. Throughout the eight stages, Erikson (1950) suggested that individuals encounter crises that must be addressed to successfully develop and progress onto the next stage. Although it was later advocated that elements of each crisis are fluid across stages, rather than restricted to their respective stage (Erikson, 1963, 1982).

More recently, these stages have been clarified as tensions⁴, rather than stages⁵, to avoid misinterpretation of crises being limited to a single stage (Syed and McLean, 2015). Erikson's (1950, 1963) theory highlights the commonalities throughout the lifespan yet has been criticised for omitting the intricacies of human development (Syed and McLean, 2015). However, this theory has been used to explore transition within populations such as retirees and employees (e.g. Antonovsky and Sagy, 1990; Fouad and Bynner, 2008) to understand challenges and development through applying this framework to a range of transitional experiences and contexts. Erikson's (1950; 1963) theory also offers practical benefits, permitting psychologists to assist individuals in confronting tensions and exploring solutions, encouraging successful transition (Fouad and Bynner, 2008). However, Erikson has been criticised by personality theorists, who dismiss the notion that change can influence an individual's personality, favouring the argument that stable personality characteristics are those most important in times of change and transition (Costa and MacRae, 1994).

⁴ Ongoing and recurring challenges that are not limited to one aspect of development but reappear or continue across development (Syed and Mclean, 2017).

⁵ Linear and chronological phases of development which imply that challenges do not occur once 'resolved' (Syed and Mclean, 2017).

Stage	Crisis	Age (years)
1	Trust vs mistrust	0-1.5
2	Autonomy vs shame	1.5-3
3	Initiative vs guilt	3-5
4	Industry vs inferiority	5-12
5	Identity vs role confusion	12-18
6	Intimacy vs isolation	18-40
7	Generativity vs stagnation	40-56
8	Ego integrity vs despair	65+

Table 1: Erikson's (1950) eight psychosocial tensions/stages of human development.

Erikson (1950; 1963) highlighted the importance of identity within human development, during the 'intimacy' stage, individuals will develop new relationships, moving away from familiar ones, which requires a strong sense of identity to achieve (Gilleard and Higgs, 2016). Similarly, Fouad and Bynner (2008) proposed that the concept of work identity, which according to Erikson, will first appear during adolescence and forms as one begins to foresee particular work-related opportunities and ambitions. Although, if individuals struggle with a clear vision of their future self, role confusion may occur and encourage identity crises (Fouad and Bynner, 2008). Marcia (1966; 1980) developed Erikson's work in this context, suggesting that a crisis of identity can facilitate development for adolescents, through re-evaluation of values and motivation to commit to a role. However, Erikson (1959) also introduced 'identity foreclosure' in his framework and despite a lack of definition (Brewer and Petitpas, 2017), this has become an important concept within identity, whereby one risks developing a narrow, singular identity based on a strong commitment to a particular role, leading to identity crises if that role is lost or can no longer be fulfilled (Petitpas, 1978).

2.1.2 Schlossberg's (1981) Model of Human Adaptation to Transition

The field of counselling psychology has also been fundamental to understanding transition, Schlossberg (1981: 5) defined transition as "an event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and, thus, requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships." This has been widely

influential and applied across transition literature in various disciplines (e.g. education, nursing, health and career research). However, despite the role that changing circumstances plays within the experience of transition, a distinction was made between 'change', which is situational, and thus more sociological, compared to 'transition' which is psychological, requiring the need for an individual to cope with, and acclimatise to, the situation of change (Bridges and Bridges, 2009).

To encompass the wider and specific psychological influence that transitions can have, they were described as "the behavioural and sociopsychological process of change between one previously established context and another, and adaptation to the subsequent new contextual norms and outcomes" (Mikal et al., 2013: A40). Much like Schlossberg's (1981) definition of transition, this highlights the behavioural consequences that an individual must consider when undergoing change. Additionally, both definitions indicate an important cognitive process, regarding psychological considerations, supporting Bridges and Bridges (2009) distinction. Although Schlossberg acknowledges the change in relationships following transition, it is important to note the inclusion of 'sociopsychological' factors in Mikal et al.'s (2013) definition, whereby there is indication of social influences on the psychological experience of transitioning.

Schlossberg (1981) suggested that during adaptation to transition, energy is primarily focused towards reducing the adverse effects of the experience, which leads to attempts to optimise development. However, an individual's ability to transition successfully and adapt to the new circumstances is influenced by various personal factors, such as emotional, social and financial elements of the individual's situation (Fouad and Bynner, 2008), reiterating the complexity of such changing circumstances and psychological adaptation. Schlossberg (1981) devised a model of adaptation to transition (see figure 2), whereby she suggested that an individual's adaptation to any given transition depends on a) the characteristics of the individual, b) the characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments, and c) the individual's perception of the transition. Therefore recognising adaptation as the progressive phase whereby one shifts from preoccupation with the transition, to incorporating the transition into their life (Schlossberg, 1981).

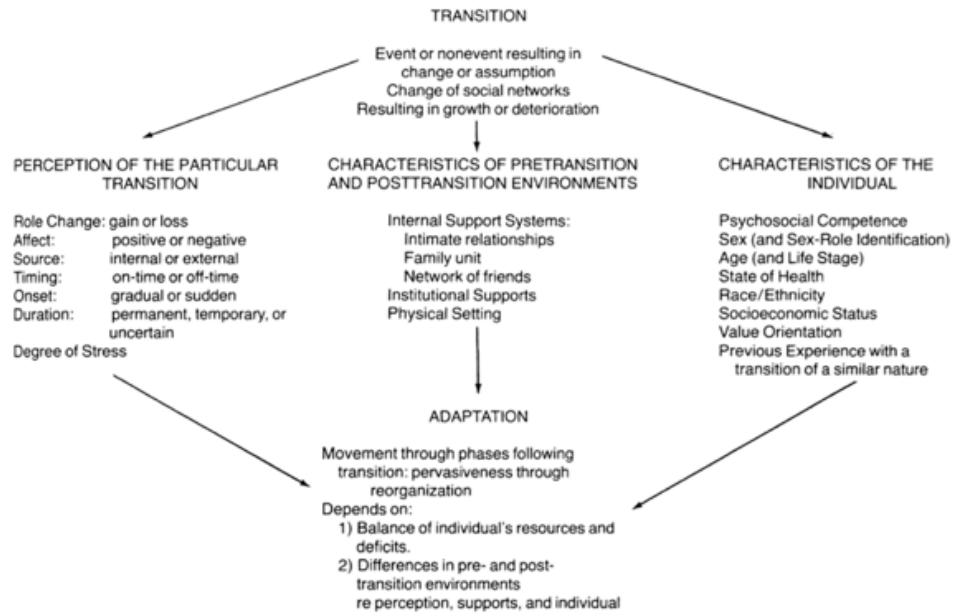


Figure 2: A model of human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Schlossberg (1984) also proposed three transition types that take place throughout different areas of an individual's life, these are: a) anticipated transition, b) unanticipated transitions, and c) non-events. Everyone encounters transition throughout their lives, influencing relationships, identities, perspectives and expectations, therefore it is essential that individuals understand their own transitions, and the experiences of others, to address the changing situation and facilitate the transition process (Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg (2007) later developed a 4S system, whereby four key factors were suggested to influence transition and how successful it is. These factors are: a) situation (at time of transition), b) self (inner strength for coping with transition), c) support (available at time of transition), and d) strategies (used to cope with transition). Schlossberg's (2007) 4S system can be applied to a range of transitions by identifying different types, the degree to which one's life has been affected, where one is in the transition process, and the resources needed for a successful transition (Schlossberg, 2011).

More recently, transition was presented as a three-phase process (Bridges, 2004; Bridges and Bridges, 2009), whereby the first stage involves the end of existing circumstances and thus, existing identity. In the second stage, the individual is positioned in 'the neutral zone' and experiences important psychological realignments to prepare for the new circumstances. In the final stage, the individual enters the new

beginning, providing a new identity and purpose. Therefore, it is proposed that, paradoxically, all transitions start with an ending and end with a beginning (Bridges and Bridges, 2009). Additionally, the psychological nature of transition is reiterated, with suggestion that successful transition is essential in order to achieve successful change (Bridges and Bridges, 2009). However, like many models of transition, this can be criticised for the assumption that all transitions are linear and chronological, oversimplifying the process (Green, 2017).

This has been a common criticism within transition literature whereby frameworks have omitted postponed or unanticipated transitions, along with expected transitions that did not take place (non-events), all of which could impact an individual (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1974). Transitions are characterised by the context in which they take place, and will be perceived and experienced differently, depending on the group or individual involved (Kralik et al., 2006). Nevertheless, during periods of transition in any context, whether they are perceived positively or negatively, the presence of stress and uncertainty often exist (Cook, 2017). Therefore, it is important that researchers continue to acknowledge different transitions, along with the complex and non-sequential nature of transitions that individuals encounter (Shilling, 2008), as opposed to assumptions of transition as predefined and predictable (Hörschelmann, 2011).

2.1.3 Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives

Additionally, within anthropology, Van Gennep (1960) produced a theory of development, identifying 'rites of passage' comprising socio-cultural experiences. He recognised that individuals progress through their life in three stages; a) pre-liminal rites (rites of separation), b) liminal rites (rites of transition), and c) post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation). During the first stage, individuals are distanced or separated from their typical social life/circumstances e.g. graduating university after completion of an undergraduate degree (Forth, 2018). In the second stage, the individual may experience a state of 'limbo' or confusion as they process the specific transition and respective changes e.g. making decisions regarding work opportunities after graduating university. Finally, during the post-liminal rites stage, the individual is reintegrated into society with their new role/status (Van Gennep, 1960) e.g. finding and accepting a job role after graduating university.

This was extended by explanation of the importance of rituals in managing transitions and their influence on timing and social circumstances of the experience (Turner, 1969). Turner (1969) also supported the notion of liminality between transitions, whereby he recognised the ambiguity that comes with the state of confusion, likening it to being 'in limbo'. However, like psychological literature on transitions, this theory can be criticised for its simplicity in describing the three rites of passage as a progression through life, although they only appear to describe a singular transition with relation to a specific social context. Similarly, such conclusions imply that individuals experience all three stages, when that may not be true of certain transitions. Thus, following recognition of the rites of passage, Glasner and Strauss (1965) employed the term 'life course' instead, to represent the fundamental transitions that occur as an individual moves between social states, comprising changes in identity, social status and roles, all being themes that have been supported in more recent research (e.g. Elder et al., 2003).

Elder (1994: 4-5) explained that the life course is an "emerging paradigm" that emphasises "the social forces that shape the life course and its developmental consequences". Therefore, as opposed to the life span perspective within psychology, many sociologists advocate a life course perspective, claimed to address the varied, historical and ambiguous nature of transitions across life, rather than presenting transition in a linear and predictable manner (Green, 2017; Hunt, 2016). Although both the life course and life span perspectives have the shared interest of human development, life patterns from birth to death and interpersonal functioning (Lang et al., 2009), the life course focuses on the influence of institutions and structures on the individual, through engagement in social roles and positions, allowing transitions to be explored with focus on both personal and social outcomes (Diewald and Mayer, 2009; George, 1993).

Patterns throughout the life course refer to a range of events, including starting school, the educational pathway, school to work transition, occupational careers, retirement, family environment, moving out of the family home, romantic relationships, parenthood and geographical mobility (Diewald and Mayer, 2009; Petch, 2009). However, such experiences, often referred to as the 'stages' of life, are increasingly viewed as

transitions in life, to denote the differentiation for individuals across these experiences (Hunt, 2016). Researchers have previously noted the challenges that come with facing various life transitions, and although often viewed as positive, progressive experiences, can have negative consequences on well-being and self-esteem (Lane, 2015; Lee and Gramotnev, 2007).

Sociologists have also compared the concepts of transitions and trajectories. The latter being identified as a set of interdependent collection of events that take place across different, yet interconnecting regions of an individual's life, such as education, work, mental health and parenthood, which consist of many transitions across each trajectory (Green, 2017). The term 'transition', in comparison, has been recognised as "a demarcated phase of life which incorporates the chronological progression of life events and subsequent change in self-image whereby the individual merges several social roles in order to forge their own 'life paths'" (Glasner and Strauss, 1965: 1-13). Similarly, Green (2017) recognised transitions as specific changes in an individual's circumstances such as role or status that are predominantly planned for, such as getting married or moving from full time education to full time work. However, this simplistic definition provided by Green (2017) appears contradictory, given her criticism of other theories and definitions surrounding transition that lack portrayal of the complex and non-linear nature of several transition experiences. Alternatively, Ashforth (2000) advocated an identity perspective to understand transition, whereby an individual's roles have corresponding identities, comprising goals, values and norms. Some role identities will become central, holding greater significance, whilst others are peripheral, with less contribution to an individual's overall identity (Ashforth, 2000). When facing transition, the experience will be determined as more or less challenging, depending on the extent to which identity is affected (Dukerich, 2001).

2.1.4 The Sociological Social Psychology Perspective

Within both sociological and psychological research, and the specific area of SSP, the concept of identity has been strongly promoted within transition, including role identity in sociology and self-identity in psychology. Identity was first acknowledged within 'symbolic interactionism' (SI) a term coined by Blumer (1962; 1969) referring to an approach that highlights the specific nature of individual interactions, with focus on the collective use of symbols – which may represent objects or events in an abstract

manner. SI is centred around how individuals attach meaning to interactions, whereby individual perceptions influence behaviour through communication of symbols and observation of others' behaviour (Blumer, 1969; House, 1977). Three core concepts were recognised within SI; a) individuals act based on meaning, 2) individuals interpret meaning through social interactions, and 3) individuals' psychological interpretation influences how they process meaning (Blumer, 1969). Thus, self-perception is largely influenced by interpretations of meanings and perceptions within society (Lancianese, 2014). The importance of self-perceptions of others' perceptions of the self has been reiterated within research surrounding self-identity for over a century (James, 1890; Howarth, 2002).

As a fundamental perspective within SSP, SI highlights the significance of the relationship between society and the individual, whereby small-scale interactions, language and meanings shape the broader relationship (Rohall et al., 2021). Cooley (1909) also initiated ideas in the field of SSP, recognising primary and secondary groups, with primary being closer, more intimate interactions with specific groups e.g. family and friends, and secondary consisting of broader, less proximal groups. The work of Cooley (1902, 1972) has contributed significantly to knowledge of identity and perception, he proposed the 'looking glass self', whereby one's self-concept is collectively influenced by their own self-perception, along with what they believe others' perceptions will be. Therefore, highlighting the mind as a crucial factor within interactions, which was supported by Mead (1934), who indicated that individuals have a reflexive sense of self, viewing oneself as both the subject and object. Accomplishing such a sense of self involves negotiation of various roles until 'the generalised other' is established, where an individual anticipates how they will be perceived by others based on societal norms and expectations (Lancianese, 2014). Similarly, there are two additional perspectives within SSP; social structure and personality, and group processes (Rohall et al., 2021; see figure 3).

Perspective	View of the Role of Individual in Society	Area of Focus
Symbolic interactionism	Individual is an active participant in the construction of society.	Meaning-making processes.
Social structure and personality	The nature of interaction is based on adherence to the roles that people occupy.	Emphasizes process of how larger social structures influence individuals.
Group processes	When individuals form into social groups, certain basic processes emerge.	Processes that occur in group contexts regularly emerge in interactions.

Figure 3: The three perspectives within SSP (Rohall et al. 2021: 13)

Social structure and personality highlights connections between wider circumstances of society and the individual, considering both macrosocial (e.g. organisations, societies) and microsocial (e.g. individual, small groups) interactions (House, 1977; Rohall et al., 2021). There is suggestion that our position in society, to some extent, determines the way others expect us to think and act, with key features of this perspective consisting of statuses, roles and networks (Rohall et al., 2021). House (2017) highlighted three specific principles: a) components principle, identifying important features such as status, roles, social norms and social networks, b) proximity principle, referring to the impact of interactions with people around us, and c) psychology principle, the processes that influence whether people conform to rules and norms. Although social structures affect individuals, we cannot assume this will determine their thoughts and behaviours, thus, it has been acknowledged that the way individuals perceive and process such structure and proximity, requires greater attention within this perspective to understand the fundamental compromise between social forces and internal experience (Rohall et al., 2021). Despite this, there is a clear requirement to consider both psychological and sociological factors within individual experience.

Additionally, the group processes viewpoint looks to understand group contexts and the social processes that occur within them (Smith-Lovin and Molm, 2000). Group formation processes and configurations, regarding size, function and goal, are of particular interest, along with status, power, justice and legitimacy as influential factors within group dynamics (Rohall et al., 2021). Similarly, both intragroup (within group)

and intergroup (between group) relationships and interactions are considered, allowing understanding of a range of group types and processes. Each of the three perspectives within SSP are not mutually exclusive, but often overlap due to the shared goal of understanding individuals, society and basic social processes (Hausmann and Summer-Effler, 2011; Miller, 2011). Collectively, they provide an opportunity to explore theories and research in the field of sociological psychology, which can be applied to different cultures and contexts, encompassing key components of both individual and social experiences.

2.1.5 Transitions, Identities and Culture

Across the lifetime, an individual will take on several identities and at any given time, one has a range of identities that could be set in motion (Burke and Stets, 2009). In relation to having multiple identities, either an internal or external framework may be used to explain how these could be employed. The internal process concerns how multiple identities operate within the self and general procedures of identity verification, whereas the external process involves how multiple identities are entwined into the intricacies of the social structure within which the individual is embedded (Burke and Stets, 2009). Identity theory suggests that meanings attached to identities are continuously changing, although this change often takes place slowly (Ryan and Deci, 2011).

Burke (2006) highlighted three ways in which an identity may change; a) changes in a situation that can modify meanings associated with the self in that situation which do not align with the identity standard, b) conflicts between two or more existing identities that an individual possesses, and c) conflict between meanings of behaviour and meanings of their identity standard. Markus and Nurius (1986: 954) proposed a cognitive theory of self, whereby all individuals have a selection of 'possible selves', these include the person we want to be, expect to become, or fear becoming. This theory could have significant implications for an individual's mental health, particularly where there is conflict between the possible selves. This range of self-representations form an individual's self-concept, which is often regarded as a dynamic and changing aspect of an individual's self-perception, each self-representation varies in prominence and the extent to which it influences behaviour (Markus and Wurf, 1987). Similar ideas were shared by Higgins (1983), whereby it was suggested that three

classifications of self-concept exist, these being; the “actual” self⁶, the “ideal” self⁷ and the “ought” self⁸. The misalignment of any two of these self-conceptions can have problematic consequences for an individual, resulting in frustration and discomfort. Such theories of self are relevant and helpful to those who work with individuals undergoing transitions as it may facilitate the recognition of identity in different contexts, as well as how one may be able to become the person they wish to be during the transition process (Palmer and Panchal, 2012).

Along with impacting one’s self-concept, culture has also been recognised as important during transitions (e.g. Burke and Stets, 2009; Sussman, 2000). Berry (1980) proposed that culture gives us a structure for self-definition and organising social relationships. Similarly, Oberg (1960) presented the idea of culture shock, stating that individuals experience a sense of anxiety when transitioning to a new cultural environment as a result of unfamiliarity and lack of social interaction. Adler (1975; 13) referred to culture shock as “a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one’s own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences”. Similarly, the notion of reverse culture shock has also been recognised within literature, which consists of the same characteristics of culture shock, but is experienced when returning to one’s native culture (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963). Searle and Ward (1990) provided a distinction between two interrelated types of adjustment to a different culture, these were: psychological adjustment (feelings of well-being and satisfaction) and sociocultural adjustment (ability to fit into new culture and interact effectively). However, Sussman (2000) gave preference to the term cultural adaptation, as it promotes the active effort to respond to the new culture with resilience and flexibility, rather than the negative experience of shock, confusion and helplessness (Adler, 1975).

Nevertheless, Sussman (2000) may be criticised for her optimistic perspective on transition to a new culture, as individuals experience this differently and may not feel

⁶ The attributes an individual feels they have (Newman et al., 1992)

⁷ A “self-guide” of desirable attributes that an individual hopes to have or acquire (Newman et al., 1992: 402)

⁸ A “self-guide” of characteristics that an individual believes they should have or acquire (Newman et al., 1992: 403)

flexible and resilient enough to have a proactive approach immediately, or at all. Therefore, it is worth considering both characteristics of shock and adaptation that may be encountered to different extents by individuals when transitioning to a new culture or returning to a previous one. Research on cultural transition has also presented acculturation theory, which highlights both an individual and collective response to permanent exposure to a different culture, assessing the relationship between dominant and non-dominant groups within a society (Sussman, 2000). Thus, this theory prioritises permanent or long-term transitions, rather than temporary, with researchers criticising the use of acculturation theory to explain the cultural transition experiences of sojourners, a temporary transition across cultures, often inspired by work or educational motivations (Sussman, 2000). However, despite recognition of different experiences for individuals migrating on a permanent basis, it could be argued that temporary transitions should also be explored within transition research. Temporary transition to another culture requires adaptation to the new culture over a period of time as well as a subsequent transition and adaption to another new culture, or back to the native culture of the individual, therefore potentially encountering both culture shock and reverse culture shock (e.g. Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Oberg, 1960).

Another example of a temporary transition is secondment, which provides employees with professional development opportunities and succession planning for employers (Dryden and Rice, 2008; Hamilton and Wilkie, 2001). The Department of Health (2004) stated that learning opportunities can be gained through secondment and NHS Scotland (2011) provided a range of reasons for secondments, including facilitating partnership working, developing employees personally and professionally, providing training/experience within another area, increasing self-confidence/competence, sharing resources within and between organisations and filling a position of absence (e.g. maternity, long term sickness). Secondments may take place on a domestic or international level, depending on the nature of the organisation and the specific role, however, cultures can differ within and between organisations and countries, so there is a need for employees and employers to be aware of how to effectively adapt to such new circumstances.

2.1.6 Coping, Social Support, Health and Well-being

Adjustment to transition, and coping strategies have also been widely studied by researchers in various disciplines. Theories of stress and coping are characterised by two specific processes, the first of which is appraisal, concerning how an individual evaluates a given situation regarding their wellbeing and how equipped they feel to deal with the situation (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2007). The second process is coping, being an individual's efforts to behaviourally and psychologically respond to internal or external challenges (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The distinction between appraisals and coping therefore assists understanding of why individuals react in different ways when faced with the same, or similar situations, as both processes rely heavily on context and emotions (Schoenmakers et al., 2015).

In relation to coping, many researchers have referred to two common approaches; problem focused and emotional focused strategies (e.g. Baker and Berenbaum, 2007; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The former method involves addressing the issues in the person-environment relationship to alleviate the causes of stress, the latter method involves attempting to reduce the emotional impact of stress (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). A third approach has also been identified within literature, meaning-focused coping, driven by an appraisal of the situation followed by use of individual beliefs, values and goals to trigger the coping process (e.g. Folkman, 1997; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2007). This coping method highlights that stressful events can include positive emotions and subsequently a process of coping was required to represent this whereby meanings had been reappraised and encouraged positive emotional responses (Folkman, 1997). Alternatively, avoidance coping has been recognised as the absence of specific coping strategies, usually through denial or distancing from the event or problem (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Thoits (1986) also highlighted the use of social support as a coping mechanism. The concept of social support refers to social relationships or connections that offer actual or perceived levels of aid to an individual (Sarason et al., 1991), with the key component of understanding the individual's circumstances and providing meaningful support (Petch, 2009). Researchers have suggested that receiving social support is an effective way of reducing stress when encountering challenging circumstances, such as transition (e.g. Ditzen et al., 2008), a concept that is often known as 'the stress

buffering hypothesis' (Cohen and McKay, 1984). Individuals seek social support in various situations and such support is frequently viewed as a successful mechanism of coping with distress and reducing the negative mental and physical consequences often suffered in the absence of social support (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1995). Martínez et al. (2011) also highlighted the positive impact on psychological wellbeing experienced when an individual perceives strong social support, which is imperative across the lifespan (Berk, 2003).

The powerful influence of social relationships on health has garnered interest among both researchers and practitioners, whereby individuals may have a wide social network, but not necessarily strong levels of social support, as relationships possess different functions, including social influence, social control, social undermining, social comparison and companionship (Heaney and Israel, 2008). Social support has been established as fundamental during emerging adulthood, a time of various transitions and stress-inducing situations (Lane, 2015). Murphy and colleagues (2010) explored the experiences of emerging adults after transitioning into a professional career and found that the most significant factor for adjustment was social support. Similarly, adolescence has also been recognised as a time when perceived social support is eminent due to persistent change and emotional turbulence (Wenz-Gross et al., 1997). Pittman and Richmond (2008) reported that when transitioning to university, young people's experiences were enhanced by a sense of belonging and good quality friendships. Similarly, Duncan (2015) found that female students were more likely to seek social support during transition to university and encouraged institutions to engage similar behaviours from males as they appeared to be hesitant to appeal for help when needed.

A requirement for professional support was also recognised during pregnancy, consisting of midwives providing both informational and emotional support to pregnant women to help them cope with the physical and psychological changes that they were experiencing (Seefat-van Teeffelen, 2011). Similarly, when studying homelessness and rehousing, it was reported that both formal (i.e. case managers) and informal (i.e. family and friends) means of support were utilised by individuals during successful transition back to housing and to maintain residency (Gabrielian et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the different and wider life areas where

individuals need support during transition, which may be required formally and informally, from a range of people. Social support has a notable impact on mental health (e.g. Brissette et al., 2002; Cohen and Syme, 1985), leaning on others to receive emotional and informational support can reduce feelings of distress and depression during stressful life events (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1995).

Thus, the holistic health and wellbeing of individuals must be considered during times of transition. Danna and Griffin (1999) explored wellbeing in the workplace, recognising that meanings and definitions of wellbeing were varied and ambiguous, thus requiring attention, given the significant impact that each type of wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional and social) can have within and beyond the workplace. Within the workplace, negative well-being can cause employee productivity, decision-making and attendance to be negotiated (Boyd, 1997), meaning that the employer or organisation will also suffer (Price and Hooijberg, 1992). Subsequently, issues may occur at individual, organisational and societal levels when there are challenges with wellbeing (Dana and Griffin, 1999; Harter et al., 2003). It has also been suggested that separating the self from work-specific issues is challenging for individuals, even when absent from the work environment (Conrad, 1988), extending effects across interrelated life areas (Caudron, 1997) and leading to stress being experienced generally, rather than exclusively in the relevant context (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994).

Therefore, social support is central in dealing with such experiences as social networks can enhance individual health and wellbeing (Smith and Christakis, 2008). Possessing strong relationships with friends and family has been linked with improved health, enhanced feelings of happiness and heightened subjective wellbeing across the life course (Chopik, 2017; Solomon and Jackson, 2014; Umberson, 1992). Such relationships offer control and purpose to one's life, mediating self-esteem and preventing the undesirable impact of stress (Leary et al., 1995; Rowe and Kahn, 1997) which can assist with the holistic experiences of the individual, regardless of the cause or context of the stressors.

2.1.7 Synthesis: How Will This PhD Thesis Use the Mainstream Literature on Transition?

Within this thesis, I will be taking a holistic sociological social psychology (SSP) approach to transition, focusing on the experience for the individual in all aspects of their life and identity. I will be using Schlossberg's (1981) widely recognised definition to outline the concept and incorporate Bridge and Bridge's (2009) distinction between change as situational and transition as psychological, to effectively represent and differentiate between the circumstances of the change and the psychological impact during the individual's transition. However, I will also be advocating sociological concepts within my psychological approach by considering the importance of role identities (Ashforth, 2000), relationships and institutional influences on individuals during their transition experiences (Diewald and Mayer, 2009). Along with this, I will include wider influences on transition, including identity, coping and social support, being fundamental concepts within the different perspectives of SSP, to address individual experiences and adaptation throughout their specific experiences in undergoing and supporting transition. I will also consider the development of career transition literature within the field of sport psychology and provide contextual insight to the English professional football environment. There will be discussion of extant literature, along with gaps in knowledge, to offer context to the current thesis, being the first to explore the loan transfer process in English professional football.

2.2 Transition in Sport

Looking broadly to the context of sport, transition research in this area has been underpinned by literature from a variety of disciplines (see Lavalley, 2000 for review), such as life span development (e.g. Erikson, 1963), occupational development (e.g. Hopson and Adams, 1977), education (e.g. Newman et al., 2000), social support (e.g. Cutrona and Russell, 1990), social gerontology (e.g. Cummings and Henry, 1961) and thanatology (e.g. Kubler-Ross, 1969). The previously mentioned definition provided by Schlossberg (1981:5) has also been widely applied within the sporting context, highlighting the occurrence of "an event or non-event", and an individual's subsequent changing "assumptions about oneself" (e.g. Baillie and Danish, 1992; Parker, 1994; Sinclair and Orlick, 1994; Swain, 1991). Sport psychology researchers introduced the concept of career transition in sport, with focus on the transition of career termination,

predominantly assessing the experience of retirement and how athletes cope with their exit from sport (e.g., Haerle, 1975; Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994).

2.2.1 Retirement in Sport

Retirement was initially viewed as a singular event, with suggestion that this form of transition was a traumatic experience and perceived negatively by retiring athletes, particularly when involuntary (e.g. Mihovilovic, 1968). The experience of retirement for former athletes was also likened to that of employees retiring from the workplace, encouraging sport psychology researchers to direct attention towards the disciplines of social gerontology, looking at the social effects of ageing, and thanatology, focusing on the processes of death and loss (Lavalley, 2000). Despite being viewed as relevant to retiring athletes, theories of social gerontology (e.g. subculture theory: Rosenberg, 1981) were later criticised for their lack of applicability to athletic populations, as athletes often retire at a much younger age than non-athlete retirees, with former athletes being likely to acquire an alternative occupational role during retirement (Wylleman et al., 2004). Similarly, borrowed from the field of thanatology, the concept of “social death” was deemed relevant to retirement from a sporting career, with regards to individuals being treated as if they were dead, resulting in isolation and negative social consequences (e.g. Lerch, 1982). However, this concept was criticised as former athletes have demonstrated effective social functioning following their exit from sport, thus the notion of “social rebirth” was instead proposed, suggesting that retirement is an opportunity for former athletes to develop new social opportunities (Coakley, 1983). This meant that the experience of career termination was progressively viewed as a transitional process, as opposed to a singular event.

Researchers then began to highlight the consequences of career termination on former athletes, such as alcohol and substance abuse, eating disorders, issues with identity and mental health issues which often lead to suicidal feelings (e.g. Blinde and Stratta, 1992; Ogilvie and Howe, 1982; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993). As well as consequences, research has evidenced a number of factors considered important when athletes face career termination, such as athletic identity, voluntary or involuntary retirement, health issues, injury-induced retirement, personal development, career development/achievement, educational/financial status, self-

perception, disengagement, coach-athlete relationship, life balance, coping techniques (e.g., Baillie and Danish, 1992; Crook and Robertson, 1991; Park et al., 2013). However, despite a shift in identity being recognised as a fundamental aspect of transition out of sport (e.g. Sparkes, 1998), more recent, longitudinal studies have recognised that this process is often initiated during the later stages of the sporting career, rather than subsequent to retirement (e.g. Lally, 2007), suggesting that various difficulties and changes may be experienced during the career, rather than specifically when terminating it.

In further attempts to learn from other disciplines, Schlossberg's (1981; 1984) transition models were drawn upon by sport psychology researchers to help define and understand the transitional process that could facilitate knowledge of career termination within the sporting domain. Researchers then adapted such models to utilise within the context of sport and further understand transitions such as retirement (e.g. Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994). Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) developed a sport-specific model which assesses various characteristics of career termination, specifically (a) the contributing factors that trigger the career transition process, (b) the developmental factors related to adapting to the transition, (c) the coping strategies that influence responses to transitions, (d) the degree of adjustment to the transition, and (e) possible issues regarding treatment for distress during the transition. Other conceptualisations include Kerr and Dacyshyn's (2000) retirement process among elite, female gymnasts as a transition consisting of the phases of "Retirement" (the withdrawal from sport), "Nowhere Land" (period of uncertainty and disorientation), and "New Beginnings", which shares similarities with Bridges and Bridges' (2009) model of the psychological process of transition, however, the latter extends beyond the transition of retirement, making it more applicable to all experiences of transition, in various contexts.

2.2.2 Models of Talent Development and Career Transitions in the Sporting Context

Following this changing perception of career termination as a dynamic process, researchers acknowledged the wider experiences of transition within sport, rather than narrowly focusing solely on exiting sport (e.g. Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004; Pummell et al., 2008). Therefore, the life span perspective was adopted from mainstream psychological disciplines and applied to the sporting context. This progression

encouraged researchers to consider the various transitions that athletes face throughout their sporting career, often termed 'within career transitions' (Wylleman et al., 1999), aligning with research from the domains of talent development, deliberate practice, and career development. Within the field of talent development, Bloom (1985) recognised a series of stages suggesting how talented individuals develop in the fields of art, sport and science. Such talent development within sport consisted of (a) the initiation stage where individuals first participate in organised sport at a young age and are identified as possessing talent, (b) the development stage whereby athletes become increasingly committed to their sport, with greater frequency and intensity of training, encouraging specialisation, and (c) the mastery stage consisting of peak levels of athletic ability (Bloom, 1985).

Similar to Bloom's talent development process, Stambulova (1994; 2000) developed a specific model following her research on Russian athletes' experiences of career transitions. She proposed that the sporting career comprises predictable stages and transitions, including (a) the initiation of the sports specialisation, (b) the transition to greater training demands in the specific sport, (c) the transition to high-achievement sports and senior sports, (d) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports, (e) the transition from peak career to the termination of the sports career, and (f) the termination of the sports career. Stambulova (2003) suggested that coping with transition occurs when athletes' have the necessary resources to overcome barriers, in response to the demand of the transition. If athletes are unable to cope with the demands of the transition, a crisis transition will occur, and psychological assistance is needed to develop appropriate coping strategies. Similarly, if interventions are unsuccessful or psychological support is not received, negative outcomes may be experienced (Stambulova, 2009). However, it is important that other support is available to individuals during transition to facilitate adaptation, as specialised psychological support may be available at high level sports clubs, but there is less opportunity to access such support within lower levels of sport (e.g. Heaney, 2006).

Additionally, researchers have reported that preparation for transition, which may increase an athlete's knowledge of the new circumstances, can help to improve the quality of adaptation because it can remove barriers to successful transition (Coakley, 1983; Pearson and Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas et al., 1997). Fundamentally, Stambulova

(2003) implied that coping with transition requires the creation of a dynamic balance between athletes' resources and barriers, to counteract the demands of the experience. For example, when athletes are appropriately equipped to deal with a transition, for example by having knowledge of the circumstances, along with resilience and motivation, it has been argued that they will be better prepared to cope with the challenges faced (Morris et al. 2015).

Stambulova's (1994;2000) model accounts for transitions other than retirement, including various within career transitions, nevertheless, it gives an idealistic account of such transitions with a very positive, progressive outline and the assumption that all elite athletes experience all of these transitions. However, many athletes will not progress onto later transitions and may terminate their sports career at a much earlier stage (e.g. Erpič, et al., 2004). Similarly, there is the implication that psychological assistance is only required during crises, whereas it should be acknowledged that support, professional or otherwise, is fundamental to successful coping and adaptation regardless of the nature of the transition (Ditzen et al., 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2004). With Stambulova's (1994; 2000) model being limited to an individual's transition in the sporting context, a more holistic perspective was later proposed to give an all-encompassing account of transition, allowing consideration of wider areas of life that also impact sporting engagement and development (Wylleman and Lavalée, 2004).

2.2.3 Wylleman and Lavalée (2004)'s Holistic Developmental Model

Maintaining recognition of the importance of the lifespan perspective, researchers acknowledged wider life experiences as fundamental to understanding athletic transition, due to the interactive nature of development in sporting, academic and social contexts (e.g., Petitpas et al., 1997; Wylleman et al., 2000). Therefore, with such holistic considerations being advocated, career transitions in sport were defined as "normative or non-normative turning phases in the course of a career" (Stambulova et al., 2012: 79) comprising of "a set of specific demands related to practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle that athletes have to cope with in order to continue successfully in sport or to adjust to the post-career" (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007: 713). However, elements of these definitions can be criticised for their connotations, for example, the term 'turning phases' suggests that transitions are either make or break for an athlete, with the implication of significant change and

specific positive or negative perceptions. Although this may be true of some transitions, others may be more complex and confusing, but equally significant, so this term cannot be applied generally to all transitional experiences. Similarly, all individuals experience transitions in a unique way, so even if circumstances are comparable, two individuals may feel very differently about a given transition and therefore their adaptation and coping styles are also likely to differ (e.g. Chay, 2011; Morris, et al., 2016).

Thus, to further promote a holistic approach to transition in sport, I will continue to advocate the definition of transition as presented by Schlossberg (1981: 5):

“an event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and, thus, requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships”

However, as well as promoting the distinction between psychological transition and situational change (Bridges and Bridges, 2009), I would also like to include the context provided by Alfermann and Stambulova (2007: 713) whereby “practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle” are each viewed as equally important experiences, all of which may enhance or interfere with sporting participation, as well as maintaining the notion that every individual experiences transition in their own way, depending on their personal circumstances in all areas of life (Chay, 2011).

Therefore, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) produced a holistic developmental model (see figure 4), accounting for transitions across all areas of life, as experienced by an athlete. The first level of the model addresses the athletic development of an individual, incorporating Bloom’s (1985) stages of talent development, as well as the termination of the sporting career. The second level acknowledges an individual’s psychological development during the life stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The third level represents the psychosocial development experienced by an athlete in relation to their individual sporting experiences and social circumstances. The final level portrays the academic and subsequent vocational development of an individual. The developmental model enables researchers and practitioners to identify the overlapping nature of transitions in the wider life of the athlete, as well as non-sporting transitions that may influence athletic experiences. Despite the age specifications being approximate, it is argued that coinciding transitions and

experiences across the individual's life can be understood using this model (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004).

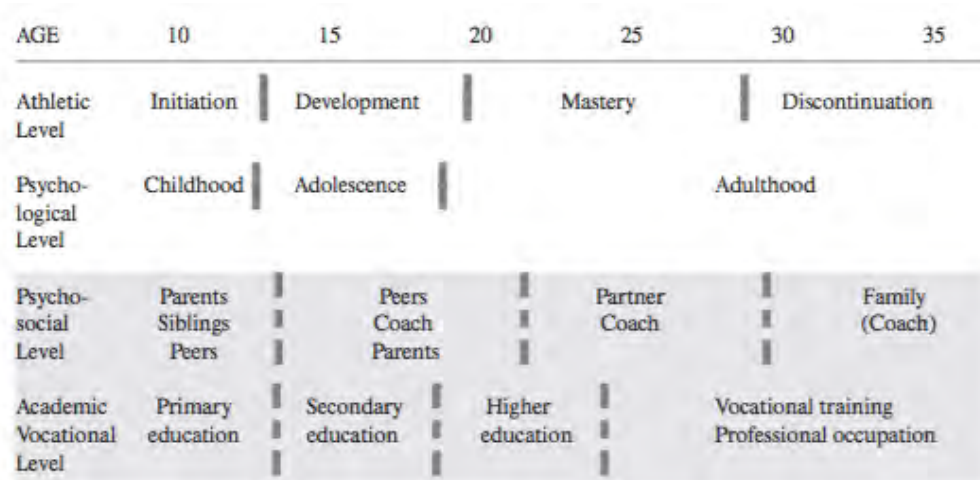


Figure 4: Developmental model of athletic transition (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004).

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) suggested that an athlete will enter the development stage of their sporting career at approximately 13 years old and progress onto the mastery stage at approximately 19 years old, with such age specifications reflecting existing research evidence from Olympic athletes (Wylleman et al., 1993), elite student-athletes (Wylleman and De Knop, 1997; Wylleman et al., 2000) and talented young athletes (Wylleman et al., 1995; Wylleman and De Knop, 1998). This pathway mirrors the stages of development as presented by Stambulova (1994; 2003), whereby similar talent development processes exist in Russia and the UK. The use of a developmental model allows practitioners to understand and facilitate athletic transitions such as youth to senior progression, as well as having awareness of wider life experiences and transitions that are not sport-specific but may have an influence on the athletic development of the individual (Wylleman, 2002; Wylleman et al., 2004). However, this developmental model is limited to the experience of normative transitions faced by athletes, it does not account for non-events or unanticipated transitions that may be encountered in any of the domains included (Morris et al., 2016).

2.2.4 Change-events and Wider Life Circumstances

The most commonly acknowledged unanticipated transition is the experience of athletic injury (e.g. Ivarsson et al., 2018; Werthner and Orlick, 1986). Within the field of sport psychology, two main approaches have been formed in injury literature, the first is injury prediction and prevention which concerns risk of injury and psychological influences prior to the injury (Johnson et al., 2014). Williams and Andersen (1998) developed a model of stress and athletic injury within which they proposed that an athlete's evaluation of a stressful situation is likely to influence the extent to which they experience cognitive or physiological responses to stress, subsequently increasing the risk of physical injury. The second perspective is injury rehabilitation which takes focus on reactions and coping mechanisms following athletic injury (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2014), these could include various cognitive and emotional reactions, for example stress, frustration, upset and anxiety (Brewer et al., 2003; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010). Researchers have also suggested that problem-focused coping strategies are effective when dealing with injury or disengagement with sport, in order to encourage confidence and therefore positive well-being (Carson and Polman, 2008). Similarly, Wierike et al. (2013) proposed that confidence and motivation are key factors in influencing an athlete's return to sport following injury, higher levels indicate a stronger chance of returning.

Research on injury has been widespread in the area of transition and contributes greatly to knowledge on such non-normative transitions (e.g. Wiese-Bjornstal, 2014; Williams and Andersen, 1998), however there are various other transitions and events that occur throughout an individual's sporting career and wider life, expected or not, that impact their level of engagement or development within sport (Debois et al., 2015). Another holistic model that has been put forward within research is the scheme of change for sport psychology practice (SCSPP; Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011a), a theoretical framework outlining various features, within and away from the sporting environment, that contribute to the change-events faced by performers (Samuel et al., 2017). Change-events are defined as particular experiences that may disrupt or encourage athletic engagement (Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011a; 2011b). The framework is underpinned by research in the field of career transition in counselling and sport psychology domains, therapeutic change and coping with life and career stressors, meaning that unlike other sport specific transition models, it accounts for all

individuals within and beyond the sporting environment (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007).

The SCSPP provides a descriptive outlook by identifying three stages that take place during the athletic career with regards to change-events, as well as an intervention outlook through emphasis on the beneficial therapeutic process which encourages effective personal change, portraying its applicability to professional practice (Samuel et al., 2015; 2017). The framework's first stage is 'stability' - here, the athletic environment is stable and consequently athletic engagement is undisturbed (Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011a). The second stage is therefore 'instability', often initiated by a change-event which interferes with the former stability (Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011a). The third stage is the 'implementation of the decision to change' which advocates the requirement to make and apply the decision to change. This is influenced by an athlete's appraisal of the circumstances as either positive or negative (Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011a). Although both applied and research support for the SCSPP exists, researchers have proposed that more extensive efforts must be established to increase validation of the framework (Knowles and Lorrimer, 2014; Samuel, 2013; Sanders and Winter, 2016). However, this framework adopts a change-based perspective as opposed to focusing on the psychological experience of transition (Bridges and Bridges, 2009), nevertheless, change is viewed as a multi-level occurrence which can take place both within and away from the sporting context (Samuel and Tenenbaum, 2011b) and therefore advocating similar ideas to holistic perspective of transitions.

It is therefore vital to consider how transition may impact wider life circumstances. Looking to research on within career transitions, Giacobbi et al. (2004) explored the experiences of stress and coping during the transition to university for five female student swimmers, through the use of focus groups. It was reported that performance expectations, training intensity, interpersonal relationships, relocation and academic demands were all factors that contributed to the stress that was faced during this transition (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Similarly, in a study conducted on event riders' transition to regional level, Pummell and colleagues (2008) used interviews to understand this within-career transition and found that motivation, perception, sources of stress and post-transition changes all influenced the experiences of the riders.

However, in each of these studies, transitional experiences were mediated significantly by strong social support and mentoring from peers who have previously experienced similar transitions, which was very beneficial for athletes as their peers could understand and help support experiences within the athletes' new environment (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Pummell et al., 2008). It was also reported that event riders made extensive sacrifices across their youth and developmental experiences, with wider life areas such as education and social contexts being disrupted, and risk of their identities being limited to their sporting world, rather than being developed holistically across all aspects of their life and personality (Pummell et al., 2008). This reiterates the crises that could result from identity foreclosure during development (Erikson, 1959). Brewer et al. (1993: 237) recognised athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role", a concept which has been widely studied within the sporting environment (e.g. Brewer et al., 1993; Brown and Patroc, 1993). The construction of identity in sport has been highlighted as leading to potential problems if performers associate solely with their sporting identity and isolate wider identities (Brown and Patroc, 2009; Donnelly and Young, 1988; Pummel et al., 2008), again encouraging the need for a holistic focus when working with athletes to support well rounded identity development.

2.2.5 Talent Development Programs and Environments

To further explore and encourage the holistic development of young athletes, researchers have invested efforts in assessing talent development programs within different sports and organisations. Martindale et al. (2005) suggested that organisations should aid development from youth to senior performance, by a) promoting a strong sense of purpose and identity, b) giving athletes personalised, holistic support to facilitate individual development, c) providing extensive support networks and positive role models, and d) communicating and encouraging the characteristics required to be an effective senior team athlete. Additionally, Morris et al. (2015) carried out a case study exploring the talent development programmes within two professional football clubs in the EPL, evaluating the process of preparing players to progress from youth to senior level. Stambulova's (2003) model was used to understand and interpret the programmes at each club as it recognised coping mechanisms that can negatively impact the transition experience as being either

internal (e.g. lack of knowledge/skill or interpersonal conflict) or external (e.g. poor training conditions, lack of support).

The importance of support has been reiterated throughout literature surrounding transitions in a range of disciplines (e.g. Ditzen et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2010; Pittman and Richmond, 2008). Such support is required in various forms, within sport these include social, financial/tangible, psychological and technical/tactical (Morris et al., 2016). Each of these types of support often combine to form the overarching structure of psychosocial support. This broad level of support should be received both within the sporting environment (coaches and peers), as well as in non-sporting environments (friends and family), with findings indicating that close-knit support networks mediate the transition process and subsequent adjustment (Alfermann, 1995). Similarly, the significance of information support has been recognised, researchers have postulated that performers who received support and information prior to their retirement, evidenced less difficulty during their career termination than those who did not receive such support (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert and Wippert, 2008).

2.3 The Football Environment

2.3.1 Talent Development in Football

Similar to Morris and colleagues (2015), researchers have increasingly taken an interest in the specific talent development environments (TDEs) within football (e.g. Larsen et al., 2013). With many challenges faced by young players hoping to progress onto a professional football career, it is essential that researchers understand the developmental pathway and transitions that players must effectively cope with to prepare for the transition to senior level (McNamara, 2011). Additionally, it is deemed the responsibility of those environments and the various individuals within it to ensure that effective operation takes place to provide a positive, holistic talent development environment so that youth football players are equipped with the necessary resources to adapt to all transitions faced throughout their youth development, as well as future transitions that may be faced whether they are successful in achieving a professional contract, or not (Gledhill and Harwood, 2015; Larsen et al., 2013).

Athletes need specific skills relevant to their sport along with holistic skills that will assist the psychosocial⁹ challenges of transition, particularly that of the progression to senior level of sport (Larsen et al., 2012; Martindale and Mortimer, 2011). Larsen et al. (2013) investigated the TDE experienced by male under-17 players looking to progress to senior level in a Danish football club. Unlike other researchers in this area, Larsen and colleagues took an ecological psychology perspective, referring to models such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development, that emphasises the acquisition of an individual's skills through their involvement in a particular environment and subsequent impact on their development. The need to introduce an ecological perspective was recognised by various researchers (e.g. Araujo and Davids, 2009; Krebs, 2009), however, it was Henriksen et al. (2010) that proposed a holistic ecological approach within sport which presented the concept of the athletic talent development environment (ATDE), referred to as:

“a dynamic system comprising (a) an athlete's immediate surroundings at the microlevel where athletic and personal development take place, (b) the interrelations between these surroundings, (c) at the macrolevel, the larger context in which these surroundings are embedded, and (d) the organizational culture of the sports club or team, which is an integrative factor of the ATDE's effectiveness in helping young talented athletes to develop into senior elite athletes” (Henriksen, 2010: 160).

Morris et al. (2016) conducted interviews about the youth to senior transition of players, with various stakeholders including coaches, support staff and parents. They revealed that role-specific support was important for players and to adapt successfully, players require knowledge of the process as well as social support from those around them, resources of which are often developed through prior experiences of transition (Morris et al., 2016). Similarly, when assessing the youth development systems within 26 professional clubs in five countries across Europe, Relvas and colleagues (2010) reported the existence of homogenisation across organisations. It was reported that both player development and financial gain were the priorities of developmental youth programmes within the clubs, however issues of proximity and interaction between youth and senior departments were acknowledged in many clubs, resulting in

⁹ The interacting influence of both psychological characteristics (e.g. discipline) and social environment (e.g. parents) on one's behaviour (Gledhill et al., 2017).

dissatisfaction of staff and obstruction of a clear progressive pathway for youth players to senior level (Relvas et al., 2010).

Similarly, to address the different stages of transition experienced by youth players progressing to the senior environment, Morris et al. (2017) explored the players' experience two weeks before and two weeks after the transition to senior level. Players expressed strong levels of motivation as well as feelings of nervousness before their transition, however, following the transition, their confidence levels increased regarding their ability and high motivation levels were maintained (Morris et al., 2017). Multiple forms of support were also provided to players during the period of transition, including emotional, technical and tangible support from friends, family, coaches and teammates, the researchers therefore suggest facilitating players with buddy systems, partnering them with senior players during their transition (Morris et al., 2017). However, TDEs in English football have been criticised for the few homegrown players progressing through academy systems and reaching senior professional teams (Green, 2009; Richardson et al., 2013; Webb et al., 2020).

2.3.2 The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in English Football

To address such a lack of young English players, the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) was introduced by the EPL in 2012 to implement an improved and holistic support system for youth players (Horrocks et al., 2016; Roe and Parker, 2016; Tears et al., 2018). The subsequent aim was to enhance both the quality and quantity of home-grown talent in academies across England and Wales (Roe and Parker, 2016). Extending support to wider life areas, rather than exclusive focus on technical and tactical development, the purpose of the EPPP was to centralise the welfare, safeguarding and education of youth players to mediate their personal and professional development throughout their time in the relevant academy (Roe and Parker, 2016). Thus, the EPPP provided a 'Long Term Player Development' (LTPD) plan through a four-corner model comprising technical/tactical, psychological, physiological, and social elements (Crawley, 2021; EPPP, 2011).

Prior to the implementation of the EPPP, academies were appraised and placed into categories from one to four whereby mandatory requirements, regarding coaching, education and welfare provisions were introduced to provide a holistic structure

comprising of various support staff across academies (Crawley, 2021; Nesti and Sulley, 2015). Category one academies were considered the most effective development systems with greater expectation to produce professional players for the senior team, within these academies, sport psychology support also became compulsory (Crawley, 2021; Nesti and Sulley, 2015). Similarly, the EPPP introduced an increase in hours of coaching contact with players, progressing from 3,760 hours to 8,500 hours between the ages of 9 and 21 years old in category one academies, encouraging a more similar structure as observed across the rest of Europe (More et al., 2011; Tears et al., 2018).

Within English academies, three age-related stages of development exist; the Foundation Phase (FP) for U9-12 age groups receiving a maximum of five hours of coaching contact, the Youth Development Phase (YDP) for U13-16 age groups with up to 12 hours of coaching and greater sport science, medicine and education provision, and the Professional Development Phase (PDP) for U17-U21 age groups, receiving 16 coaching hours, with the first two years consisting of an academy scholarship programme, offering wider development and education as well as greater sport science and medicine support (EFL, 2021). Players in the PDP also receive financial remuneration with their contract to the club, many of whom will live with host families in close proximity to the training facilities. As players approach the end of their scholarship period, they will either a) receive a professional contract as an U23 player or b) be released/sold from the club.

Although such a focus on development and progression may have a positive impact on the football ability of young players, the professional football environment in England has progressively become more stringent (Parker, 2000), with players attempting to succeed within a limited window of opportunity and extremely challenging transition circumstances (Mills et al., 2014a, 2014b). Similarly, the strict and rigid management structure of youth programmes has been criticised for their potential of encouraging 'one-dimensional' self-identities for the players involved as their lives and routines are dominated by football (Manley et al., 2012: 3). Culture has been recognised to have an influence on the way in which individuals perceive and identify themselves and engage with their peers (e.g. Watson, 1995), thus the unique environment of a professional football club influences a certain type of identity on youth

players, in an occupational context that is distinct from the typical experiences of teenagers and young adults (Roe and Parker, 2016).

Football players are “immersed in an occupational world of intense emotionality and drama” (Gearing, 1999: 5) and given that their lifestyle is centred around football, it has been argued that a lack of attention and priority is given to players’ personal lives which can also be problematic (Roderick, 2006a). The self obtains meanings from work based on work processes, the prestige of the work role, the social context of work and the allocation of work compared to other life areas and commitments (Glaeser, 2000). This method of deriving the self is particularly relevant in professional football as players are perceived to have very prestigious roles and often viewed as having a “sacred profession” (Simpson, 1981: 5) therefore, such a romanticised view of the game means that players’ perceived value is influenced by their perceived talent (Roderick, 2006b; Sennett, 2003). However, McGillivray et al. (2005) proposed that the football environment immerses players to such a large extent that there is risk that they associate very closely to their footballing identity with the absence of a well-rounded identity based on other roles and responsibilities in their lives, previously labelled as ‘trained incapacity’ (Merton, 1957).

However, the introduction of the EPPP addressed this issue by providing a wider, more holistic approach to youth development within football, with the intention to produce well rounded individuals, rather than solely talented football players, which is particularly important given that approximately 5% of academy players are successful in progressing onto a professional football career (Nesti and Sulley, 2015). Although this has increased holistic development, the primary aim of football clubs is to develop talented players that can progress onto the first team (Bourke, 2003; Le Gall et al., 2006; Relvas et al. 2010), and inevitably, challenges will be faced by players within these clubs. Similarly, there has been a lack of assessment of the EPPP since its implementation within the football industry (Champ, 2018), thus it is important to understand the experiences and processes of support for those within the academy environment (Crawley, 2021; Mills et al., 2014b).

As previously recognised, the football environment is an intense and high pressured one, with players often also being directed to focus predominantly on their footballing development, so regardless of holistic support in place, many players may struggle to

overcome experiences of adversity; particularly as football players have been identified as a group that are often hesitant to seek support (Wood et al., 2017). Research on athletic identity has also referred to Erikson's (1968) stages of psychosocial development as facilitating the understanding of individual development, specifically in terms of influencing feelings and perceptions of identity through the crises or tensions faced across the phases and selecting appropriate methods to address them (Mitchell et al., 2014). Roderick (2006b) claimed that the progression of a football player from school years to professional career consists of similar stages of overcoming crises to reach the top level. However, Mitchell and colleagues (2014) recognised that although football players appear to possess extremely similar levels of athletic identity, whether this identity was exclusive to football, or eclectic of other roles and responsibilities, was dependent on relationships, practices and culture within the relevant club.

In relation to these experiences of pressure and adversity, male professional football players have been recognised as a group that are susceptible to challenges with mental health, both during and after their playing career (Wood et al., 2017). This population are also regarded as being resistant to seek help for support related to such challenges and therefore are placed at an even greater risk of developing mental health issues (Wood et al., 2017). Researchers have reported that experiences of injury or medical conditions such as osteoarthritis, organisational or financial stress, as well as significant reductions in media and public interest subsequent to retirement can trigger mental health challenges and hesitance to seek help in former professional football players (Gulliver et al., 2015; Gouttebauge et al., 2014, 2015; Kristiansen et al., 2012).

It has also been noted that physical, mental and emotional challenges are often viewed as showing weakness and therefore threaten the ability to successfully remain or survive within the professional sporting environment (Anderson, 2011; Gulliver et al., 2012). Similarly, recent research has highlighted the lack of attention given to psychological impacts and development within English football academies (Gledhill et al., 2017; Murr et al., 2018; Saward et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2017). Within a qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of football players' mental health, Wood and colleagues (2017) reported that mental health was linked to experiences of injury and

transition for professional football players. Such mental health difficulties may be influenced by the growing pressures experienced by football players due to global attention the game continues to receive, as well as the specific socio-cultural environment experienced at professional level.

2.3.3 Football Culture, Globalisation and Impact on Players

Culture has been defined as “the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments” (Schein, 1996: 236). This definition portrays culture as a compromised regularity which is influenced both by daily social interactions, as well as the degree of power held by the range of individuals and groups, to establish the norms and expectations set within that environment (Hallett, 2003). Additionally, Schein’s definition implies the absence of homogenous values within organisations (Gregory, 1983; Meyerson and Martin, 1987), it has subsequently been suggested that researchers highlight the wider range of values that exist within exclusive organisations (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). Conversely, the specific concept of organisational culture involves a desirable orderliness within an organisation whereby consistent values and behaviour are upheld by all individuals, subcultures also exist, these include manifold norms and expectations that are endured within the organisation (Hopkins et al., 2005).

Organisational culture within the football environment has been recognised to be similar across clubs (Relvas et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 2005), predominantly centralising psychological strength and performance focused thinking, often abandoning individual well-being (Nesti and Sulley, 2015). Nesti and Sulley (2015) also proposed the importance for sports organisations to ensure clarity and consistency in identification and allocation of staff roles, which helps to develop staff-player relationships, fostering trust and rapport between both parties (Roe and Parker, 2016). Club staff, such as coaches, are likely to become embedded within players’ support systems, such meaningful relationships, along with the support from family and friends, have been associated with encouraging various qualities that players require to address challenge and adversity, such as self-discipline, resilience and maturity (Harwood, 2008). Similarly, coaches have been recognised as instrumental in the holistic development and psychological well-being of players, particularly given

the extent of contact that they have with them, which permits coaches to not only influence footballing development, but also that of the players' wider life areas (Nesti and Sulley, 2015; Roe and Parker, 2016).

Football players must individually work within this culture and although certain highly valued players may be securely fixed within a club by long-term contracts, each player is evaluated for their match performances and contribution to achieving desired results (Nesti, 2010). Such pressure is likely to increase underlying stress experienced by individuals, along with any further challenges they may encounter, such as media attention, scrutiny from coaching team and fans, de-selection, animosity from teammates (Nesti, 2010) and any wider life stressors that may impact their performance. The ability to deal with such challenges across leagues like the EPL, rests on several psychological factors of the individual and the coping mechanisms and level of support they employ during such testing periods (Nesti, 2010), which are strongly supported within academies through implementation of the EPPP, however, may be harder to monitor and support as players progress to the latter stages of youth development and into professional football, despite the increasing pressures that players are likely to encounter. Specifically, within the context of the EPL, Nesti and colleagues (2012) recognised the importance of 'critical moments' in a player's career, including that of transferring to another team, whereby a player must address any anxiety that results from their transition and subsequent changing identity. Such moments may be perceived, in either a positive or negative way, based on the timing and personal circumstances of the individual and will likely influence the player's confidence, motivation, stress, anxiety and sense of self (Nesti and Littlewood, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012).

With recognition of being the world's most popular sport for over a century (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004, 2009), across the last 25 years in particular, association football has demonstrated its global interest and dominance (Elliot, 2017). Clubs are increasingly recognised as business enterprises (Bourke, 2003; Vaeyens et al., 2005), whereby the multifaceted nature of commercialised football has resulted in clubs competing on both a sporting and financial basis (Slack and Parent, 2006). Professional football is unique as a sport within the UK and across many parts of Europe, as team performances are given weekly, if not twice a week, making it an

intense and results-driven environment that can be compared to few other high-level sports (Nesti, 2010). Nesti (2010) referred to the 'shorttermism' of football, being a regular need to win and remain within the top league (e.g. EPL), which consequently influences the philosophy and culture in professional football organisations, likely encouraging organisational stress for those working in such an environment.

Similarly, such an outcome-oriented environment means that there is consequentially an uncertainty to player careers, as well as the identities and personal aims that players possess throughout their careers in the professional game (Roderick, 2006a, 2006b). Several aspects of operation within professional football clubs, such as impressive performances as well as staff and player well-being, become extraneous if the club is not achieving results (Nesti, 2010). With links back to the business-like orientation of professional football clubs in today's world (e.g. Relvas et al., 2010), it could be argued that a limited amount of businesses operate with such severity, whereby performance can fluctuate between extreme success and failure in very short cycles with major consequences (Nesti, 2010). Therefore, it is acknowledged that professional football clubs operate in a manner that differentiates from typical business organisations, notably due to the exceptional need for these clubs to demonstrate effective performance and survival both on and off the field of play (Bond et al., 2020; Fort and Quirk, 2004). Football clubs also face scrutiny on a global platform, adding to the unique nature of their operation, with emotional investment from many as well as an extensive range of stakeholders (Ogbonna and Harris, 2015). However, comparison between the football environment and wider organisational contexts have been made, highlighting the preferential treatment that certain employees may receive, for example, the difference in weekly wages for football players of different profiles or status may also be reflected in other workplaces (Dobson and Goddard, 2011; Gelens *et al.*, 2013; Szymanski, 2010; Van den Brink *et al.*, 2013).

Professional football clubs have become increasingly interconnected with foreign nations through player recruitment and international fan interest, contributing to an increasing global profile of the game and encouraging a shared culture and consequential homogenization (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007). Such connectivity of culture has also been recognised as a key component of globalisation (Tomlinson, 1999), comprising of the social interdependence that is fundamental in building social

networks across nations. Given the significant global profile that professional football has acquired, the free movement of players worldwide has become more frequent, further encouraging clubs to operate as businesses, selling and purchasing assets in order to maximise performance and profit (Liu et al., 2016; Matesanz et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, it is increasingly common for clubs to employ individuals to be responsible for observing and evaluating market values and player mobility to ensure they can engage effectively in deals and transactions with other clubs (Velema, 2019). Researchers have subsequently acknowledged football clubs as 'talent factories' that prepare players for top level football, increasing their values and reaping the financial rewards (e.g. De Minin et al., 2013; Tan and Rider, 2017). Alternatively, clubs may invest resources in 'home grown' players whereby TDEs strive to assist the development of youth players in preparation for senior performance and long-term careers within that club (Matesanz et al., 2018), however with the increase of global interest and player migration, although this pathway is observable, and may be the intention for players, it does not appear to be as common as buying and selling players within and between leagues and nations (e.g. Maguire and Pearton, 2000).

Therefore, players acquire a market value based on their perceived ability and reputation, with high ability and prowess giving players physical capital that contribute to this value (Wacquant, 1995). As players get older, this physical capital declines along with a player's prestige, however, with ageing comes wisdom and experience thus bringing a different form of power within the social context, often linked to symbolic capital, associated with respect and social status (McGillivray et al., 2005). Within football, these two types of capital contradict each other as a high level of one capital often reflects a low level of the other, however, as players age and retire from football, they may maintain their symbolic capital by transitioning into another football related role, such as a coach or pundit (Dubin et al., 1976). With the proliferation of football on a global scale, a player's reputation may now get them spotted by clubs all over the world which could enhance career opportunities, as well as increasing the pressure of performing on a global platform, encouraging professionalisation of young football players (Relvas et al., 2010; Roderick, 2006b).

2.3.4 Player Migration as Transfer Transition

The abundance of player migration was mediated by European Union (EU) legislation through the Bosman ruling in 1995 that permitted the free movement of players within the EU, which also legitimised the free movement of players between clubs at the completion of their existing contract (Giulianotti, 1999). Such movement increased competition of players and salaries through a wider pool of talent, as well as changing the structure of European football due to significant growth in player migration (Maguire and Pearton, 2000; Vaeyens et al., 2005). The increase of globalisation in sport has subsequently led to player mobility across clubs and leagues on both a national and international basis (Szymanski, 2013) widening career opportunities, therefore both sporting and wider life development is influenced and experienced within different cultures and nations (Agergaard and Ryba, 2014).

Similarly, the potential for financial gain also enhances the recruitment process within football, many clubs seek talented, internationally recognised players, perceived to be 'a finished product' (Richardson et al., 2005) that will conform to the results oriented and short-term nature of the football environment, facilitating competitive performance as well as merchandise sales (Relvas et al., 2010). Through advocating both psychological and sociological perspectives, Agergaard and Ryba (2014) suggest three normative career transitions encountered by migrating athletes: transnational recruitment (social networks and individual agency), establishment as a transnational athlete (cultural/psychological adaptation and developing transnational belonging), and professional athletic career termination (connected to a (re)constitution of one's transnational network and sense of belonging).

Geographical mobility is an important factor of career development within various fields of work, including finance, engineering, computing, health and research (Meyer, 2001; Vertovec, 2001). Temporary or permanent migration for work can be significant for an individual's future career path, in terms of both positive or negative influences, similarly, adapting to or terminating certain roles can have a significant impact on an individual's wider life areas, rather than solely their career (Agergaard and Ryba, 2014). An increasing number of individuals in the sports industry are also seeking opportunity in migration to different countries and cultures for work (Maguire and Falcous, 2010; Ryba et al., 2016). Football organisations comprise mobile, expert

performers with opportunities to move between clubs and players may experience such transitions multiple times across their sporting career, acquiring professional experience and reputation (Roderick, 2006b). The concept of sports labour migration has been of particular interest in the fields of sociology and geography, giving focus to macro-structures, global patterns, changes in migration, push and pull factors, as well as the role of national and international policy (Bale, 2004; Poli, 2006; Taylor, 2006). Similarly, sociological perspectives have presented the influence of global networks of power on patterns of sports labour migration (Bale, 1991; Poli, 2010a, 2010b). However, such research may be beneficial on a broader level of portraying movements and patterns on a large-scale basis, but it does not account for the individual experience and transition process for the players and clubs involved in such movements and the possible consequences at a more proximal level.

Therefore, Ryba et al. (2016) assessed the construction of sporting development and relationships in changing cultural patterns of meaning and found that social repositioning, negotiation of cultural practices and meaning reconstruction were important when transitioning and building career adaptability. The researchers adopted a cultural developmental psychology approach, drawing on the fields of both career development and cultural adaptation to observe the cultural construction of the self in human development (Ryba et al., 2016). This perspective is rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1930) and Vygotsky and Luria (1993) and proposes that the engagement between an individual's experience in a sociocultural context and the demands of the tasks that an individual is faced with influences their psychological processing.

When transferring to a new culture or country, not only do football players have to adapt to the tasks that come with migration, they must also prove themselves through performance within their new surroundings, which is often impacted by their ability to adjust to their new socio-cultural context and identity. Roderick (2006b) documented that one of the most challenging times for football players where they felt vulnerable was during relocation to a new club, although many players perceived their transition to be positive for their career development. Similarly, players' confidence was enhanced by the notion of feeling wanted by the new club, which even if time limited, facilitated feelings of apprehension during the transition (Roderick, 2006b).

Torgler and Schmidt (2007) also noted that when discussing potential transfer opportunities, although a player, agent, old/parent club and new/loan club will be involved in negotiations, each of these parties will not hold equal power in the decision making, which could also have a strong impact on how a player feels about the move. In circumstances whereby a player transfers to a club in a higher league (or position), or with a stronger financial profile, they may experience a change in status as a professional and although this may be a desirable move, it undoubtedly will come with the anxiety and pressure of the club's high expectations (Roderick, 2006b).

Equally, despite the positivity experienced when the opportunity to transfer to a high-profile club arises, the move can be complex and may not work out as a player plans, for example, the individual may experience deselection from the first team, or fail to reach first team player status (Roderick, 2006b). This may significantly impact a player's confidence, self-identity and lead to mental health challenges (Blakelock et al., 2016). However, there are also circumstances where transfer to another club is temporary (Liu et al., 2016), known as a loan transfer or temporary transfer (Premier League, 2022b), which consists of one club (loan club) temporarily borrowing a player from another club (parent club), whom the player remains contracted to as a registered player (English Football Association, 2021). Thus, loan transfers offer mutual benefits for the clubs involved, the loan club acquires players that they may not have the financial means, or competitive level to otherwise access, whilst the parent club benefit through the development of their players that are loaned to other clubs (Bond et al., 2020).

2.3.5 The Loan System

Loan transfers, otherwise known as temporary transfers (e.g. Dobson et al., 2001), enable professional football clubs to lend players to other clubs on a temporary basis (Velema, 2019). FIFA (2019a: 6) recognise a loan transfer as “the type of transfer conducted when a professional player is temporarily engaged by a new club on the basis of a loan agreement during the term of his/her employment contract with the former club”. FIFA article 10 paragraph 1 regarding player loans between clubs, states:

“A professional may be loaned to another club on the basis of a written agreement between him and the clubs concerned. Any such loan is subject to the same rules

as apply to the transfer of players, including the provisions on training compensation and the solidarity mechanism” (FIFA, 2020: 15).

Similarly, the regulations also state that the minimum time spent on loan shall be the period between two registration points and that the player’s loan club are unable to transfer the player to another club unless they have gained permission from both the owning club and the player himself (FIFA, 2020). As recognised in article 5 paragraph 4, a player is permitted to register with no more than three clubs per season, within which a player may only participate in official matches for two clubs (FIFA, 2020). Additionally, when a professional player transfers to another club before the end of their contract, any clubs that have been involved in the education and training of that player are entitled to a share of the compensation given to the former club (known as solidarity contribution; FIFA, 2020).

Within English football, the FA acknowledges three types of loan transfers that exist within football; a) standard loans, b) youth loans and c) emergency goalkeeper loans (English Football Association, 2020). Standard loans are temporary loans between two registration periods for a half or full season, however it can be ended after 28 days, or with mutual agreement from the parent and loan clubs (English Football Association, 2020). Youth loans occur for players between 16-18 years old whereby they continue to train with and play part-time for the parent club in matches which are age-restricted or at a level below the English Football League (EFA; English Football Association, 2020). Lastly, emergency goalkeeper loans are permitted when the usual goalkeeper is injured, suspended or called up for national duties which leaves the club without a goalkeeper, therefore allowing an emergency loan from another club for a period of seven days (English Football Association, 2020).

However, FIFA (2022) are introducing new loan rules with the specific intention of developing young players, thus players cannot be sub-loaned once they are at a loan club and football clubs cannot send more than three players to a single loan club. Similarly, new restrictions will be further introduced over oncoming seasons, with the 2022-23 football season ensuring clubs are limited to a maximum of eight professional players on loan and eight loaned in at any time, this will be reduced to seven players, then six players across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons respectively, with the continuation of six players only from then on (FIFA, 2022). Although, maintaining the

aim of development within academies, these restrictions will not apply to players aged 21 years and below, nor club-trained players. Furthermore, national football associations (e.g. The FA) will have a three year introductory period to ensure loan ruling is in alignment with the regulations set by FIFA (FIFA, 2022).

With regulations surrounding loan transfers for clubs continually being revised and amended to prevent football clubs from 'hoarding' players and provide a more facilitative system of development (FIFA, 2022), there remains a gap in knowledge around how this is perceived within, and impacting on, the practice of professional football clubs. This is particularly significant in understanding the relevance of the loan system as a developmental tool within latter stages of academy football and exposing players to the senior football environment, which needs to be acknowledged as an important youth to senior transition within the literature and applied practice. Annually, around a quarter of all professional football players across the world transfer to a different club, whether that be permanently or temporarily (Frick, 2009; Roderick, 2014). The time spent at the new club is often short lived and within a few seasons, many players will again move on (Velema, 2018), relating back to the 'shorttermism' and results driven environment that football players are embedded within. Specifically, with loan transfers, the player will spend up to one full season at the loan club before returning to the parent club, being sent on another loan elsewhere, or being sold to the loan club or a different club.

Therefore, football clubs have to establish professional relationships to ensure they can work collaboratively and professionally away from the pitch (Fort and Quirk, 2004; Bond et al., 2020), engaging in business deals and negotiations regarding players. Therefore, this reiterates the unique nature of business operation within the football industry, it is not only competitive performance that is prioritised within this environment, but also the wider distribution of revenue and resources (Bond et al., 2020). With a lack of research exploring the loan system in football, Bond et al. (2020) argue that it can be viewed as a cross-subsidisation mechanism that is exercised globally across the football industry. Typically, the loan system sees football clubs with greater resources or resource capabilities (players) loaning players to smaller clubs with fewer resource capabilities – which happens on both a domestic and international basis (Simmons, 2007). Frequently, clubs with greater resource capabilities are the

clubs generating greater revenue and clubs with fewer resource capabilities represent the clubs generating less revenue (Bond et al., 2020). For example, Chelsea Football Club (competing in the EPL) sent 41 players, within one season, on loan transfers to other clubs either in the EPL or below (Penn, 2019). The loan system within football is intended to facilitate some degree of redistribution of resources between large and small revenue-generating clubs, such distribution has been highlighted as fundamental to the effective operation of sports leagues, particularly as those leagues often promote competition through a cartel-style system (Fort and Quirk, 1995). This system provides opportunity for greater competitive balance amongst teams, as well as offering individuals continued development and playing experience within a different environment.

2.3.6 Transfer Market, Home-grown Talent and Loans

Transfer market activity has largely risen in recent years, with gross spend on transfers in 2016 hitting €4.38 billion across top flight clubs within Europe, with over 80% of that total being spent in the highest leagues of England, Germany, Italy, and Spain (UEFA, 2016). Europe has previously been recognised as the most influential continent for football growth and economy in the 21st century (Littlewood et al., 2011). UEFA (2019a: 6) recognised the development of the football industry within Europe that has taken place and evidence intentions to continue to “promote, protect and develop” football within the continent, across all levels. The European sports model advocated by UEFA (2019a; see figure 5), highlights the key structure, with non-commercial intentions, required to sustain the football ecosystem. Europe remains the most significant destination for player migration (Littlewood et al., 2011; Magee and Sugden, 2002). Therefore, it is within the interest of all members of football clubs, leagues and governing bodies to understand and support the processes of player movement between clubs, for individual and club benefit. Similarly, if this can be initially explored in European leagues – those that have been recognised as dominant – such processes can then be borrowed and applied to assist understanding of football clubs and leagues across the world.



Figure 5: The UEFA European sports model (UEFA, 2019a: 7).

Recruitment of players internationally has become more common in recent years, whereby clubs look to other countries and continents to acquire new players to introduce within their squad (Littlewood et al., 2011; Magee and Sugden, 2002; McGovern, 2002). Such recruitment strategies have been criticised for restricting the opportunities for the development of home-grown players within clubs, particularly as clubs often use the transfer market to seek and buy the finished product in highly talented football players, or promising young non-indigenous players (Relvas et al., 2010). Darby (2007) reported that European clubs are relying on this process of recruitment and referred to it as 'dependant development', which links closely to the claims of Wallerstein (1974) and a world systems approach, whereby certain resources are reallocated from the 'periphery' to the 'core', which in the case of football, would be when highly skilled players move from less-developed or underdeveloped countries (e.g. the Americas, Asia, Africa) to the more dominant European countries to play football (Relvas et al., 2010). Within the Greek Championship, Travlos et al (2017) reported a positive influence of investment in foreign players on league position, which is likely to encourage clubs to continue to use such strategies of recruitment if it appears to increase chances of success within domestic competitions, particularly in countries such as Greece whereby there is the absence of the infrastructure to successfully develop home grown players (Travlos et al., 2017).

Another of the aims of FIFA's (2022) updated loan requirements includes the development of home-grown talent. This progresses UEFA's eligibility regulations implemented in 2005, initiated from the 2006/07 season, also known as 'the home-grown rule', the intention was to protect young players, along with re-nationalise and re-localise clubs (Briggs, 2005; UEFA, 2006). Nevertheless, the 'home-grown' rule, does not require national citizenship to the relevant country, but rather that in each professional club, a minimum of four players within a squad of 25 must be locally trained (Lembo, 2011). Following this, UEFA mandated clubs to have six locally trained players, with three specifically club trained in the 2007/08 season, increasing to eight locally trained, with four club trained players in the 2008/09 season (UEFA, 2019b). To clarify, locally trained players can be club trained, whereby the player has been registered for a minimum of three seasons with their current club whilst between 15-21 years, regardless of their nationality, or they can be association trained which consists of a player that has been registered within the same national association for a minimum of three seasons between 15-21, despite their nationality (Lembo, 2011). However, there was discussion surrounding such ruling as to whether this would improve competitive balance between clubs and focus on youth development, or encourage clubs to sought after young, international players that could be acquired and developed locally, leading to compromise the well-being of players for the prospect of financial benefit (Lembo, 2011).

FIFA formalised and introduced transfer regulations entitled the Regulations for the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP) in September 2001 and in 2009, updated the RSTP, mainly with regards to the training and education of minors, whereby the RSTP (2009) defines a minor as "a player who has not yet reached the age of 18." Similarly, to prevent clubs from acquiring and hoarding young players (FIFA, 2019b), FIFA maintained the prohibition of international transfers for minors, with the exception of five circumstances. These circumstances were: a) the player's parents move to the country in which the new club is located for reasons not linked to football, b) the player is 16 or over and the transfer takes place within the European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA), c) the player and the new club are each situated within 50km of a national border, d) the player leaves "country of origin for humanitarian reasons" (FIFA, 2020: 25) affecting his life, whereby the parents are absent and the player is allowed to reside in the new country, at least on a temporary basis, and e) the player

is living in another country to pursue their education and take part in an exchange programme, without their parents, whereby the player may register for a new club until he reaches 18 years old, or the academic programme ends, however this cannot exceed one year (FIFA, 2020).

The recent advancements from FIFA (2022) aforementioned regarding the restrictions on professional football clubs' use of the loan system, with exceptions of youth development and players under the age of 21 further demonstrates the continuing focus on prioritising home-grown, young talent within the football industry. Additionally, this system offers loan clubs access to players on a temporary basis, where they are not having to pay large transfer fees and can provide opportunities for players from various leagues and clubs, depending on the standard of competition in which they participate. However, transferring to a different club, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, will carry various stressors and challenges for football players, depending on their individual perception of the move and personal circumstances (e.g. Nesti et al., 2012; Roderick, 2006b).

2.3.7 Towards a Better Understanding of the Loan Transfer as Temporary Career Transition

In terms of type of transition, the loan transfer has been categorised as a novel type; quasi-normative (Kent et al., 2022), whereby the transition is somewhat predictable but only for particular groups of performers, as not all football players will experience temporary transfer of this sort. Similarly, there is also the second inevitable transition, which may be unanticipated or uncertain at the time in which the loan transfer initiates, in which the player, and in fact, the parent club, may not know what the player's future will hold following the loan transfer. Players who are sent to another club on loan may struggle with factors such as organisational stress and pressure to perform at their temporary club, as they are not only being evaluated in terms of their footballing ability, but also their ability to adapt to a new club environment and its culture, new teammates and club personnel, as well as new circumstances of life, such as living away from home, possibly abroad. Similarly, it is both their new, loan club as well as their parent club, that are expecting to see strong application, performance and development from the player on loan, in order for the experience to be equally beneficial to the player and each of the clubs. It is therefore important that loan transfers are recognised as

important transitions in the professional and personal development of football players. As mentioned previously, research on transitions in professional football thus far has predominantly addressed career termination and retirement (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2006; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994), with more recent focus on TDEs and youth to senior progression (e.g. Larsen et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2015; 2016; 2017).

However, given the global platform upon which professional football is placed and the increasing financial and sporting competition between clubs, there is heightened pressure on players to adapt to the world of professional football and function effectively within it, whilst being under constant scrutiny (e.g. Roderick, 2006b), thus Richardson et al. (2013) acknowledged that professional football presents a more challenging environment for youth to senior transition, given the cultural climate of the sport compared to others. Similarly, there is a need to acknowledge the individuals within football clubs that operate within the loan system and support the players undergoing temporary transition, with previous literature identifying that coaches and wider support staff are vital sources of support for individuals experiencing youth-to-senior transition in sport (Morris et al., 2015; 2016). Similarly, such members of the football environment offer vast experience with performers experiencing transition and can therefore provide additional observations and insight that might not be considered or recollected by players themselves (Morris et al., 2016).

Existing literature on transitions in professional football, and sport in general, has been limited to the focus on retirement (e.g. Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994) and the youth to senior transition (e.g. Morris et al., 2015), often omitting the wider, varying transitions that performers may encounter between entering and exiting professional sport (Debois et al., 2015). The research that has previously addressed such within career transitions has emphasised the importance of considering the holistic experiences of individuals, accounting for wider life impacts or challenges that might exist alongside the demands of their sporting participations (e.g. Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004; Pummell et al., 2008). However, given the lack of acknowledgment to experiences of player transfers in professional football, particularly those of a temporary nature, there is a need for exploration and development in this area to ensure that players are understood and supported holistically during these periods, not only for the wellbeing of the individual, but also the mutual benefit of both the owning and loan football club.

Thus, to remind the reader that the overarching aim of the thesis is to explore the transition experiences of professional football players that have been loaned to another professional club on a temporary basis, identify the support offered by the parent club during this process and develop the existing guidelines surrounding loan transfers. With the subsequent objectives looking to:

1) evaluate how football clubs support players prior to and during their loan through exploring the specific role of LMs that have been employed across various football clubs, with initial research into the responsibilities and operation of LMS, as well as looking to understand how players are supported by wider members of staff for the benefit of players and clubs alike.

2) understand the loan process from various perspectives of those involved, to provide insight into a novel youth to senior transition experience of loan transfers, not only from the players' point of view, but also various staff personnel who are actively engaged in the process. This will encourage effective understanding in both research and practice to recognise what is currently happening during loan transfers, but how clubs may improve or extend the involvement of staff and the support being offered to players during such temporary transfers.

3) develop best-practice recommendations relevant to the LM role and loan process for the use of individuals, clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs) and policy-makers to encourage greater attention, investment and support for those involved in the loan transfer process.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Methods

This chapter looks to reveal the researcher's philosophical assumptions and identify the most appropriate research methods to effectively address the aims and objectives of the thesis. The chapter will initially highlight the role of scientific paradigms, leading onto ontological and epistemological standing, along with subsequent methodology. Next, the employment of case studies, semi-structured interviews and document analysis will be recognised and acknowledged as the most appropriate design and methods to explore the research questions previously mentioned. Therefore, this chapter also looks to elaborate on the rationale to explore the loan transition by collecting data from both players and members of staff involved in the process. Finally, details and considerations surrounding data analysis and presenting the findings of the thesis will also be included.

3.1. Scientific Paradigms

When developing or expressing scientific standpoints, Thomas Kuhn's (1962) well-known book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, has been influential in assisting researchers with challenging the notion of traditional science and positivism through acknowledgement of the cycle of scientific change. The conception of traditional science is that new truths are added to a collection of existing truths, with exceptions or contradictions being rare, yet dismissed when they are suggested, however, these exceptions may provide new knowledge. By portraying revolutions as typical and necessary for the progression of a scientific field, they cannot be ignored as they are fundamental to the nature of science, creating contradictory ideas to those of traditional science (Bird, 2012). Kuhn advocated the concept of a 'paradigm' – a worldview regarding knowledge acquisition that will inform and contribute to the methodological and philosophical underpinnings of research investigations (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Therefore, Kuhn's claims about the revolutionary nature of science encouraged a 'paradigm shift' away from traditional, positivist ideas, with wider acceptance of alternative paradigms and promoting the 'sociology of science' (Bird, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (1994: 105) also define paradigms as "the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways." The selected paradigm will

provide direction to the researcher and assist decision making processes in relation to philosophical assumptions and methodological procedures (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, associating with a paradigm and establishing a philosophical standpoint to initiate the research process is central in ensuring congruence and clarity throughout the subsequent investigation (Bryman, 2008), to understand one's paradigmatic assumptions there is a need to address one's own ontological and epistemological stance, hence the philosophical perspective of the researcher will be detailed next.

3.1.1. Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is concerned with the nature of social reality and being (Blaikie, 2000; Sarantakos, 2012), posing the question of 'what's out there to know?' (Grix, 2002: 177). Assumptions from Ontological objectivism involve the notion that reality exists externally, whereby social actors experience an objective reality that is present, regardless of individual interpretation, advocated in objectivist approaches which support the notion of a universal truth and conduct inquiry through traditional methods in order to attain objective and scientific validity without the presence of bias (Sarrantakos, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009). For objectivists, an identifiable and measurable reality exists, independent of social actors (Ponterotto, 2005). It is suggested that an absolute truth can be attained through the shared experience of reality that exists externally, uninfluenced by social actors (Bryman, 2008; Sarrantakos, 2012), as 'the knower adds nothing to the data' (Spender and Marr, 2005: 187). Reality is unconnected to human consciousness and therefore existed before it, remaining to be an external, empirical object, separate to the cognitive functioning of social actors (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, a fundamental belief of objectivism is that reality is a tangible object that can be captured within research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Alternatively, one's assumptions may promote constructivist ideas of a socially constructed reality, whereby individuals or actors are fundamental in the way in which reality is subjectively perceived and experienced (Wahyuni, 2012). Constructivists propose that a multiplicity of realities exist which are interpreted and influenced by the social actor involved (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Reality has no meaning or validation without human consciousness (Bryman, 2008) and knowledge is established through

the collaboration of the 'phenomena to be known and the knower' (Spender and Marr, 2005: 187). Therefore, reality and subsequent knowledge are structured and restructured by social actors, influenced by the specific context, idiosyncratic experiences and the relationship between the social actor and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). A constructivist approach is adopted as the ontological position within this thesis, supporting the notion that individuals experience their own version of reality, influenced by the meanings and interpretations they attach to their experiences.

3.1.2 Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology focuses on the ways in which knowledge can be constructed, obtained and shared (Bryman, 2016; Sarrantakos, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012), asking the question 'what and how can we know about reality?' (Grix, 2002: 177). The relationship between the research participant ('the knower') and the researcher ('the would be knower') is of pivotal importance here, as one seeks to understand the nature of such a relationship as well as potential methods of knowledge sharing and acquisition (Ponterotto, 2005).

A researcher's ontological position will strongly inform their subsequent epistemological standpoint (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). Three central epistemological perspectives are often recognised; positivist, post-positivist and interpretivist. Positivists are interested in cause and effect relationships between social phenomena that, they feel, can be established through objective methods of inquiry (Marsh and Furlong, 2002), therefore those supporting this epistemological position, will often possess an objectivist ontology. Similarly, the notion of dualism is promoted, whereby the researcher and participant have mutually exclusive roles within the research process, that hold no influence upon one another, allowing data to be collected without bias (Ponterotto, 2005). Positivists promote the use of scientific methods in order to achieve research that omits the values and subjectivities of the researcher, whereby knowledge can be produced through rational deduction (Ryan, 2006).

Post-positivists however, offer an altered view of dualism and objective methods, this position appreciates the potential influence that a researcher could have on participants, although objectivity is still placed at the centre of inquiry (Ponterotto,

2005). Post-positivist approaches do not identify as being either objectively or subjectively driven in their research, but rather highlight the multiplicity and complexity of humans (Ryan, 2006). Therefore, this approach is often positioned between positivism and interpretivism as it considers the importance of researcher objectivity in remaining separate from the participant, however, there is an emphasis on understanding the meaning, perceptions and experiences as provided by the participant (Ryan, 2006). Post-positivists acknowledge that it is not possible to determine the extent to which the investigator impacts the study, but it is still encouraged that researchers attempt to limit bias wherever possible, whilst recognising the contribution of the researcher's motivations and values within the research process (Ryan, 2006).

Interpretivist perspectives, on the other hand, are underpinned by constructivist ontology, embracing subjectivity, with question of the possibility of dualism and objectivity, it is instead argued that the researcher and participant work collaboratively to interpret the subjective lived experience of the individual (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). Interpretivism considers the differences between individuals, their experiences and interpretations of events and phenomena (Bryman, 2016). There is interest in the meanings, behaviours and relationships upheld by individuals within their context, culture and society (Whitley, 1984). Understanding and interpreting such subjectivities and meanings can be attained by utilising a range of methods such as participant observation and individual interviews, rejecting the traditional methods of natural sciences often advocated by positivists (Eliaeson, 2002; Schwandt, 1994).

In acknowledgement of the epistemological position taken in this thesis, an interpretivist perspective is adopted. The rationale for this is the belief that what we know of the world and its reality, is socially constructed and dependent on the consciousness of individuals (Mertens, 2005). Similarly, our particular surroundings are felt as having a strong influence on our knowledge, perception and construction of reality (Creswell, 2003), including social, cultural, historical and political norms and values that we subjectively experience due to the context in which we are embedded within (Whitley, 1984). Thus, adopting a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology is most suited to addressing the aims of the current thesis.

3.1.3 Methodology: Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques

Following recognition of the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions, it is important to establish the way in which knowledge will be acquired. A researcher's philosophical positioning, in terms of both ontology and epistemology will therefore strongly influence the methodological progression of research (see figure 6). Within objectivist and positivist perspectives, the need to avoid bias and produce value-free results will predominantly encourage the use of quantitative methods of research (Ponterotto, 2005). Quantitative data collection involves gathering numerical data gained from specific measurement with the aim of assessing and establishing cause and effect relationships between variables, and therefore phenomena, resulting in generalised conclusions and universal laws (Punch, 2013). Such measurement evidences how structure is manipulated by the researcher and statistical means are used to support or refute theoretical explanations of phenomena (Punch, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013).

By contrast, those favouring a constructivist and interpretivist paradigm, do not have a desire to manipulate phenomena, instead they prioritise the need to understand the natural, complex, and context-specific circumstances of an individual's life, as interpreted by that individual (Taylor et al., 2015a; Yilmaz, 2013). Within this philosophical standing, the researcher is viewed as a 'reflexive instrument' who is fundamental to the interpretation and development of the research findings (Etherington, 2004). Therefore, qualitative methods are frequently used with the aim of understanding the complex nature of social worlds through employing a range of techniques to address the various questions and versions of reality that exist (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Such techniques frequently accompany and intersect one another whereby the researcher looks to develop insights and understand the meanings and intricacies of the rich, in-depth data that has been collected (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Lune and Berg, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015a).

Qualitative methods have become increasingly popular in the social sciences in recent decades, confronting the positivist bias that previously existed within research (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Barnes et al., 1999; Denzin, 1994). In order to most effectively address the research aims of this thesis, a qualitative methodology will be utilised.

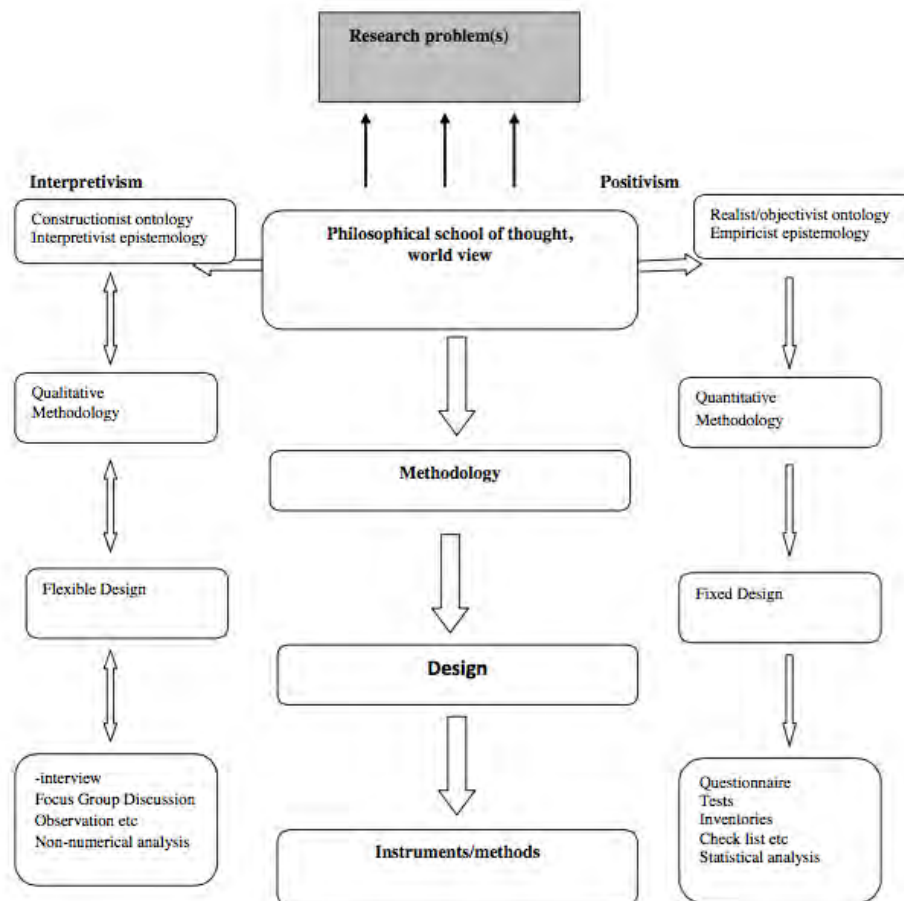


Figure 6: The foundations of the research process (Tuli, 2010: 104).

3.2. Research Design – Case Study

3.2.1 General Considerations

Qualitative research offers different designs that can be employed, with five main possible designs; narrative research¹⁰, case studies¹¹, grounded theory¹², phenomenology¹³ and ethnography¹⁴.

¹⁰ Involves investigation of how stories are structured, who constructs them and how they do so. Narratives consist of elements of individuals' lives that researchers hope to understand and explore (Andrews et al., 2013).

¹¹ Can also be applied for in-depth understanding of an individual through the use of different methods of data collection, however, they may also be employed to explore an organisation or phenomena within a specific context (Yin, 2009).

¹² Comprises the systematic, yet flexible process of qualitative data collection and analysis conducted with the intention of constructing theories from the data themselves (Charmaz, 2014).

¹³ Characterised by the exploration of consciousness and experience (Smith, 2011),

¹⁴ A form of researcher participation whereby individuals are studied or observed in their natural setting or environment (Brewer, 2000).

With consideration of each qualitative approach, a case study was selected as the best suited design for the objectives of this thesis. To identify research as a case study, there must be a larger category or setting of which the case study is a single example (Lune and Berg, 2016). A qualitative case study comprises employing various sources of data to explore specific phenomena and meanings within the relevant context (Anderson and Arsenault, 2005; Yin, 2009). To effectively understand the given context, the use of a case study aims to focus on a particular aspect of an individual or organisation, which allows in-depth, holistic exploration and understanding of the complexities of context and experiences (Noor, 2008; Smith, 2010). Case studies have been defined as:

“a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013: 97).

The use of case studies has been recognised as beneficial in addressing questions of “how” and “why” within social research as well as behaviour that cannot be quantitatively manipulated (Yin, 2009). Specifically, within this thesis, the case study looks to address questions such as a) ‘how does the loan process work for both players and staff within English Premier League and Championship football clubs?’, b) ‘how could the loan system be further developed within football?’, and c) ‘why are loans important for both football players and clubs?’ Stake (1995) emphasised that when employing case studies, various methods of data collection can be used collaboratively to enrich understanding of the case, shaped by context, allowing detailed exploration (Lune and Berg, 2016). Therefore, despite Yin’s (2009:48) assertion that cases can be established based on their ‘representative or typical’ nature, it is important to acknowledge, as indicated by Thomas (2011), that the validity of a case cannot be determined by how representative it is of wider populations.

Similarly, with a lack of desire to achieve generalisable conclusions, but rather focus on the more idiosyncratic details of a particular context, case studies also align with the interpretivist approach to research as they permit the development of relationships between the researcher and participants. Thus, they support the mutual involvement of both parties in the research process, prioritising the subjective lived experience and associated meanings (Stake, 1995). Individuals, groups and organisations are

required to make sense of their surroundings and those within their environment, therefore, the way in which information is perceived and interpreted will influence behaviours and approaches to problem solving (Lune and Berg, 2016). Use of a case study approach to explore how individuals make sense of a given concept or environment allows exploration and recognition of unique and collective approaches and characteristics across experiences or cases (Lune and Berg, 2016).

Case study research permits the extensive exploration of social situations and social phenomena within a certain context or organisation (Smith, 2010; Zainal, 2007). Therefore, in the present study, the use of a case study allows the specific exploration of the loan process and experience for English football players who have been temporarily sent to another club, as well as those of the wider staff that also operate within the loan system. This will not only offer an initial and detailed insight into the unique and shared first-hand experience of players but will also provide insight into the club's strategic and developmental processes along with experience and knowledge of staff members working directly with those players. Thus, in line with the philosophical assumptions of this study, as well as the data rich focus of case study research, the current study offers a holistic approach to the exploration of loan processes and experiences within EPL and Championship football clubs. It has also been proposed that vicarious experiences can be offered within case study research, with benefits including accessibility to 'hard to reach' contexts (Gomm et al., 2000; Stake, 1995). This is applicable to professional football, not only as it is a high profile environment with high public interest, but given the dearth of research, and thus insight into the loan experience, case study research will provide knowledge, through vicarious experience of this exclusive and professional context from those embedded within it.

Miles and Huberman (1994: 25) defined the case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, in effect, your unit of analysis". The importance of establishing the case has also been emphasised, with Baxter and Jack (2008) suggesting questions to ask in terms of what it is that a researcher wants to analyse, e.g. individuals, organisations or processes. Within the present case study, both the micro and macro units of analysis will be included, the micro concerned with the individual perception and experience, and the macro concerned with looking at the

broader social and organisational context (Grix, 2010). Thus, this provides different perspectives of the same phenomena, from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives, which in this thesis, will be presenting the views and experiences of individuals that have been on loan, the perspective of the parent club through staff that have frequent contact with loan players, as well as the specific policy surrounding loan practice, making the case, and hence unit of analysis, the loan system in professional English football.

3.2.2 Considerations Specific to the Case Studied

Simons (2009: 21) proposed the purpose of detailed exploration of complexities and idiosyncrasies from different perspectives regarding specific phenomena in a “real-life” context, that can be understood through case studies. This encompasses the importance of the current research in its study of the professional football environment, particularly in exploring a novel context that can offer practical implications for both existing practice and policy. However, Thomas (2011) asserted, supporting Stake (1995), that the case study should not be considered a method of exploration, but instead focuses on the chosen area of study and employs specific methods to explore the case. Therefore, Thomas (2011: 513) provided the following definition:

“Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates.”

Thomas (2011) therefore distinguishes between the subject – a unique or uncommon example whereby the features of the object can be exposed and understood – and the object – the central area of study that progresses or accumulates during the research process. There are three possible types of subject that may emerge according to Thomas (2011); a) a ‘local knowledge case’ – the subject is pursued due to researcher’s awareness and experience of it, whereby there is access or opportunity to conduct in-depth study, b) a ‘key case’ – a natural interest or curiosity surrounding a particular area, or c) an ‘outlier case’ – to identify and illustrate an object through its discrepancy or dissimilarity. In the current study, the subject is the English football environment, consisting of Premier League and Championship football clubs, a local

knowledge case, developed through the researcher's personal and professional interest in sport and recognition of a lack of research knowledge or insight in this area.

The object may be more complex in how it is recognised, which is not required from the inception of study, but may surface through the development of the research process (Ragin, 1992), although it is fundamental to have an approximate idea of a possible object from the outset, which is distinct from the subject (Thomas, 2011). Regardless of when the object is established, Wieviorka (1992: 160) proposed that:

“If you want to talk about a “case”, you also need the means of interpreting it or placing it in a context... Regardless of the practical approach for studying it, a case is an opportunity of relating facts and concepts, reality and hypotheses. But do not make the mistake of thinking that it is, in itself, a concept.”

Thus, in the current study, the object of the case, i.e., the unit of analysis, is the professional football loan transfer process, using EPL and Championship football clubs as the frame of analysis to develop knowledge and understanding surrounding the complexities and intricacies of this process from different perspectives of those within the football environment.

There are different types of case study that can be employed during research. Yin (1984) differentiated between exploratory, descriptive or explanatory case studies. An exploratory case study may be employed to explore circumstances whereby an intervention is evaluated with an unknown or unanticipated set of outcomes (Yin, 2009). A descriptive case study can be used to outline an intervention or phenomenon in its specific context (Yin, 2009). An explanatory case study assesses data at both surface level and a deeper level to provide a more in-depth account of the phenomena (Zainal, 2007). Stake (1995) also reported three types of case study; intrinsic, instrumental and collective. An intrinsic case study is driven by the specific interests of a researcher with the aim to increase their understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). An instrumental case study is employed for alternative reasons than to understand a phenomenon, usually to examine an issue or strengthen theoretical claims; understanding of a case may or may not be improved, but is not prioritised (Stake, 1995). A collective case study, also known as a multiple case study (Gerring, 2006),

provides an opportunity for the researcher to compare and contrast across different cases (Stake, 1995).

With reference to previously mentioned classifications, the intrinsic approach to a case study as proposed by Stake (1995) will be employed, due to the researcher's particular interest in the lack of existing knowledge and exploration of this area, therefore aiming to increase and expand understanding of the case. Subsequently, Thomas (2011) also recognises the need to explicate the purpose of a case study, which is deeply associated with the specific object. In this case, the purpose is the in-depth exploration of the professional football loan transfer process in England. Therefore, the object can be classified as either a) theoretical, through testing theory, specified from the start of research, or theory seeking, whereby theory progresses throughout the study, or b) illustrative, being more of a descriptive account of the particular case (Bassey, 2001; Thomas, 2011).

There also poses a question of whether a case study is single or multiple, specifically, is there an exclusive case or a comparison between two or more cases within the research? Single case studies are classified by Thomas (2011) in three ways, each of which being characterised by time; a) retrospective (data collection regarding a past event or occurrence), b) snapshot (the case is studied in a specific time frame or period), and c) diachronic (showing change over time). Thus, the current study can be considered a single, snapshot case study, whereby despite the use of multiple clubs, the professional football environment is viewed as a single case, with no comparisons made between clubs, to provide a more holistic understanding of intricate processes and focus on the system as a whole, rather than individual clubs as exclusive entities. Similarly, the research was conducted during the 2019/20 football season and is therefore representative of policies and practice at that specific time, which have, and will continue, to change over time.

Therefore, following Thomas' (2011) typology (see figure 7) and in justification of the separate factors comprising the case study, the present research is recognised as a local, exploratory, theory-building, single, snapshot case study.

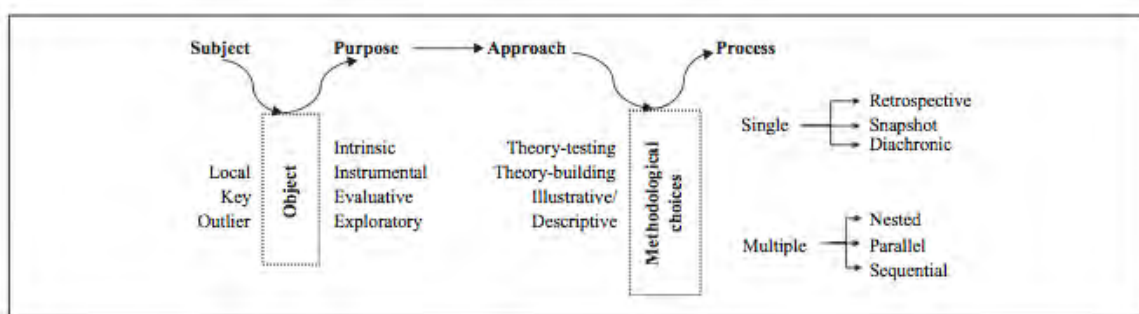


Figure 7: A typology of case study (Thomas, 2011: 519).

Consequently, the rationale for use of case study research is to explore and provide initial insight into the experience and process of loan transfers, as a transition phase in the career of professional football players, as well as the wider approach and resources that clubs have in the organisation and engagement in the player loan process. This will develop existing literature and understanding of both transition in sport and temporary transition, recognising a transition in football that has not previously been given research attention, despite the frequency and recognised value of loan transfers in the professional environment. Subsequently, along with contributing new knowledge to research, this thesis also looks to inform current practice, processes and support within clubs, developing the current knowledge within and beyond the sporting context. Qualitative methods will be used to explore each of these areas, thus offering rich and detailed data through subjective experiences and interpretations of loan transfers. Therefore, the overarching aim of the current thesis is to explore the transition experiences of professional football players that have been loaned to another professional club on a temporary basis, identify the support offered by the parent club during this process and develop the existing guidelines surrounding loan transfers. The subsequent objectives are to:

1) evaluate how football clubs support players prior to and during their loan through exploring the specific role of LMs that have been employed across various football clubs, with initial research into the responsibilities and operation of LMS, as well as looking to understand how players are supported by wider members of staff for the benefit of players and clubs alike.

2) understand the loan process from various perspectives of those involved, to provide insight into a novel youth to senior transition experience of loan transfers, not only

from the players' point of view, but also various staff personnel who are actively engaged in the process. This will encourage effective understanding in both research and practice to recognise what is currently happening during loan transfers, but how clubs may improve or extend the involvement of staff and the support being offered to players during such temporary transfers.

3) develop best-practice recommendations relevant to the LM role and loan process for the use of individuals, clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs) and policy-makers to encourage greater attention, investment and support for those involved in the loan transfer process.

3.3. Research Methods and Data Collection

Research methods consist of the specific techniques utilised to investigate or explore the given phenomena (Walliman, 2017). Qualitative research comprises various methods of data collection, including observation, textual or document analysis and interviews (Silverman, 2000). Such qualitative methods are employed to explore and gain in-depth insights and understanding of the phenomena under study, whereas quantitative methods are used to test hypotheses and achieve breadth, as opposed to depth, of understanding (Patton, 2002; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003).

Triangulation is the combined use of at least two sources of data, investigators, methodologies or theoretical approaches within a research study (Denzin, 1970; Thurmond, 2001), increasing confidence in the research findings (Bryman, 2004). In this thesis, within-methods triangulation will be applied, whereby two qualitative methods will be used concurrently (Kimchi et al., 1991) to conduct the case study. The use of two methods reduces the “deficiencies and biases that stem from any single method” (Mitchell, 1986: 19), therefore allowing the strengths of each method to counterbalance the limitations of the other (Bryman, 2004; Mitchell, 1986). In line with constructivist approaches, the incorporation of more than one method within research offers greater depth and detail through its different sources (Bryman, 2004). Within the case study design, individual interviews, member-checking and document analysis were used. Both players and club staff were interviewed on an individual basis and

document analysis was used on specific loan policies and professional football club regulations.

3.3.1. Timeline of Events

With the decision to employ within-methods triangulation, table 2 portrays the development of research collection in the current thesis.

	2020	2021	2022
January	Document analysis	Drafting finding chapters	Write up
February	Document analysis Interview guide research and development	Drafting finding chapters	Write up
March	Participant recruitment	Drafting finding chapters	Write up
April	Participant recruitment Interviews	Write up	Write up
May	Participant recruitment Interviews	Write up	Write up
June	Participant recruitment Interviews	Write up	Write up
July	Transcribing	Write up	Write up
August	Transcribing	Write up	Write up
September	Thematic analysis	Write up	
October	Thematic analysis	Write up	
November	Thematic analysis	Write up	
December	Drafting finding chapters	Write up	

Table 2: An overview of the progression of the research process.

3.3.2 Gaining Entry

A frequent challenge of conducting research in high profile, often private environments, is gaining entry (Craft, 2019; Welch et al., 2002). This has been recognised as particularly challenging in the elite sport environment (Ekland, 1993; Eubank et al., 2014). Specifically, the professional football environment has been identified as a “closed social world” (Law, 2019:1) known to be “hostile to outsiders” (Waddington, 2014:15). Within elite settings, including professional sport, there are “barriers that set their members apart from the rest of society” (Hertz and Imber, 1993: 3), making access extremely difficult and often more time-consuming than the typical recruitment process (Welch et al., 2002). Therefore, the most suitable way to contact potential participants was identified as being through the professional social media platform, LinkedIn (see Appendix A), in order to identify insiders as a means of gaining access (Høyland et al. 2015), whereby individuals provide details of their occupational role and organisation, permitting the specific search of particular job titles and football clubs.

The use of social media as a participant recruitment tool has been recognised as beneficial, particularly with samples that may otherwise be challenging to access, also being a more cost and time efficient method of entry (Stokes et al., 2019; Topolovec-Vranic and Natarajan, 2016; Whittaker et al., 2017). The specific use of LinkedIn, a platform with a professional focus (Papacharissi, 2009; Van Dijck, 2013), to recruit participants has been recognised as advantageous as it allows access to a wider representation and diversity of participants (Stokes et al., 2019; Whittaker et al., 2017). This approach to recruitment of participants through social media also upheld all standards as outlined by Harriss et al. (2019) in *‘Ethical standards in sport and exercise science research: 2020 update’*, the most recent version of their very highly cited and regarded biennial updates.

The use of LinkedIn was markedly beneficial during the time of recruitment and data collection which was initiated in March 2020, as the global coronavirus pandemic became very serious, allowing potential participants to be contacted and interviewed in an accessible way. Upon identification, an initial direct message was sent, explaining the research area and asking if the prospective participant has any contact with players that are sent out on loan transfers within their football club. After

responses from individuals that were happy to take part in the research, disclosing some degree of contact with loan players, an email address was requested, so greater detail of the research could be sent to them (see Appendix B), providing the participant information sheet (see Appendix C) and a consent form (see Appendix D) to all potential participants.

Therefore, purposeful sampling was used within this thesis to ensure that the participants selected for interviews had the relevant knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under study, to provide rich, context specific data (Creswell and Clark, 2017; Patton, 2002). Players with first-hand experience of loan transfers, as well as members of staff from professional football clubs that work directly with players before, during and possibly after the loan transfer, were selected to provide in-depth accounts and interpretations of those experiences. Similarly, it has been reported that participant availability as well as willingness to be involved and share experience are essential during the recruitment process, so that the researcher can access those that are deemed relevant or suitable for the inquiry (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Palinkas et al. (2015) highlight that whether quantitative or qualitative methods are employed, the method of sampling should align with the research aims and methodology of the investigation. Therefore, the inclusion criteria for the club staff that were interviewed is members of staff who a) work at an EPL or Championship club, and b) have some degree of involvement with the loan process and/or players that go on loan transfers. The rationale for these staff inclusion criteria is provided in table 3.

<i>Staff Inclusion Criteria</i>	<i>Justification</i>
They were working at an English Premier League or Championship club at time of research (2019/20).	Top two leagues in English professional football.
They are involved with players that go on loan transfers.	Have direct experience with the loan transfer process in English football clubs e.g. loan staff, player care, coaching roles.

Table 3: Staff inclusion criteria.

However, despite this being effective in identifying staff members at professional football clubs, access to current professional football players was significantly more challenging, particularly with the high profile and confidential nature of the elite football environment, as previously mentioned (Craft, 2019; Ekland, 1993; Eubank et al., 2014). Therefore, the three players included in the sample of participants were accessed through recommendation of staff members that had worked with them during their time on loan, with a snowball sampling approach being more effective in accessing this specific population of key individuals (Fletcher and Streeter, 2016; Mason, 1996; Patton, 1990). Although there may be risk of bias through such a sampling approach, Law (2019:2) stated that “without having an “insider” status, gaining access to professional football players for qualitative research, is almost impossible”, so any degree of access to professional football players provides in-depth insight to the loans process and is highly advantageous to the present thesis. Therefore, despite difficulties in access, the researcher felt it was important to obtain multiple perspectives of the loan transfer process within the football environment, to understand the differences in experiences of those involved, a research approach that has been identified as beneficial within elite performance settings (Fletcher and Streeter, 2016). Thus, the inclusion criteria in the current study for football players was that they a) are English or considered homegrown, b) were contracted to a Premier League or Championship club at time of research (2019/20 season), c) experienced at least one loan transfer within that season, and d) were aged 18-23 years old. The rationale for these player inclusion criteria is provided in table 4.

<i>Player Inclusion Criteria</i>	<i>Justification</i>
They are English/homegrown.	Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) – main focus is to increase quality of homegrown players in English academy systems, through providing holistic support and development. Therefore, the current research looks to consider the loan transfer system in this context.

They were contracted to an English Premier League or Championship club at time of research (2019/20).	Top two football leagues in English Professional football.
They have experienced at least one domestic loan transfer within that season.	Players can be loaned to a maximum of two teams per season (registered for three clubs but can play for two).
They were aged between 18-23 years old at time of interview.	Professional development phase in academy system.

Table 4: Player inclusion criteria.

Therefore, given the difficulty in accessing participants operating in such an elite and exclusive environment (Ekland, 1993; Eubank et al., 2014; Law, 2019), despite the limited size of the sample in the current research, its quality and exceptionality add to the significance of the research. Such a range of participants working within the highest levels of professional football offers unique and specialist insights, providing in-depth accounts of experiences and perspectives through case study research and specifically semi-structured interviews. This was particularly beneficial in exploring a novel area of research such as this, via pinpointing the experiences of loan transitions for players and wider club personnel embedded within the elite football environment.

3.3.3. Interview Guide

Prior to interviews, document analysis combined with use of existing literature on transition, was used to inform the development of interview guides as relevant. Interview guides are often constructed for semi-structured interviews to prepare and assist the researcher in their engagement with participants (Ritchie et al., 2014). In this type of interview, the guide provides a prompt for the researcher to refer to throughout the interview, as opposed to structured interviews, whereby there is a more stringent process and the guide is more heavily relied upon (Bryman, 2008). Prior to the development of the interview guide, key literature was looked at to develop a criterion to assist this process. Kallio et al. (2016) established a five stage framework to encourage the rigorous development of semi-structured interview guides within qualitative research (see figure 8). It is suggested that by following each of these stages and providing justification for decisions made at each stage, researchers will

be evidencing greater trustworthiness within their methods and therefore encouraging more plausible findings (Kallio et al., 2016).

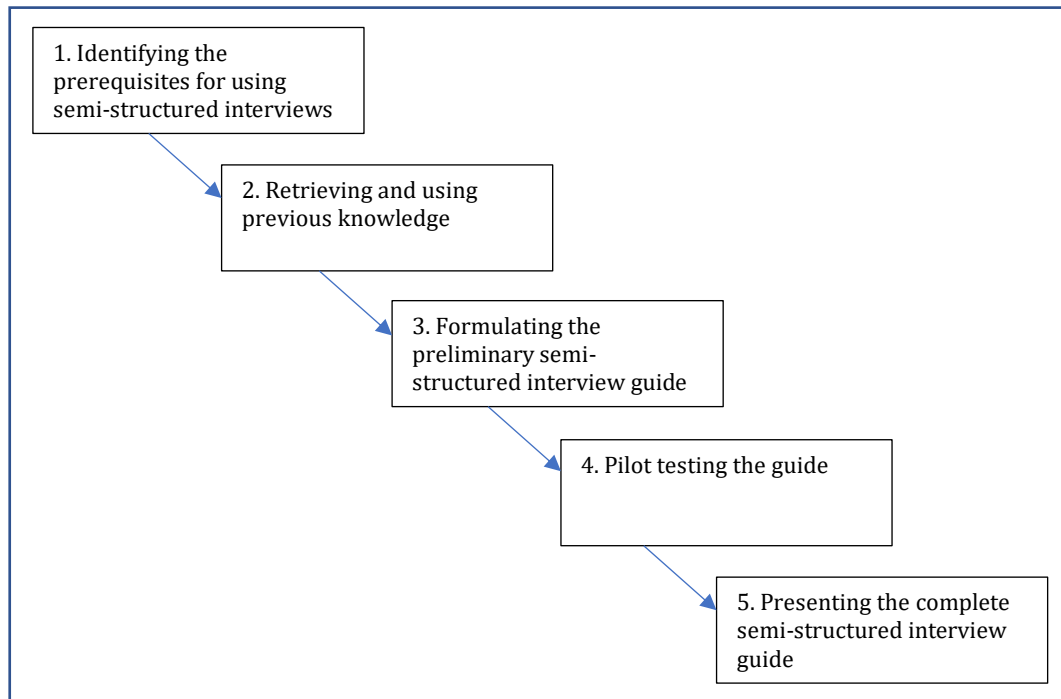


Figure 8: A five stage approach to the development of a qualitative semi-structured interview guide (adapted from Kallio et al., 2016).

The analysis of policy documents contributed to the interview guides to assist the development of specific questions relevant to ruling and existing guidelines regarding loan transfers. Similarly, to accommodate and create guides suitable for each type of participants in the study, depending on their role within football (e.g. player, loan staff or support staff), separate interview guides with role-specific questions were developed. Regardless of professional role within the club, all participants were initially asked broad questions such as 'tell me a bit about yourself and your experience within the football environment', before then narrowing focus onto their specific role and relevant experiences with the loan transfer process.

In terms of the role-specific guides, loan staff were questioned more specifically about their responsibilities within the loans department and how they engage with players throughout the temporary transfer process, with additional focus on challenges faced, benefits experienced, and support offered to players during their loan experiences.

Questions included; 'What are your specific responsibilities as a Loan Manager?', 'For what reasons are players sent out on loan?' and 'Can you tell me what support your club provides prior to and during loan transfers?' Support staff were interviewed in a similar way, with questions tailored more specifically to their personal role and responsibilities within their respective club, having varying levels of experience and contact with loan players. Each of the staff interview guides were influenced by Morris et al.'s (2015) interview guide for support staff which was adapted as relevant within the present thesis for both loan staff and wider support staff (see Appendices E and F). The football players that were interviewed were also asked broader questions which then narrowed to a more detailed focus on their loan experiences with regards to why they feel they were sent on a loan transfer, the transition itself, challenges or obstacles faced, what they feel they gained from the experiences and support received along the way. Questions included: 'Why do you feel you were sent on loan?', 'What challenges did you face whilst on loan?' and 'How were you supported whilst on loan?' (see Appendix G).

3.3.4. Individual Interviews

Interviews allow exploration of the experiences, perceptions, beliefs and opinions of individuals on particular issues, events and subjects, therefore providing an enhanced and more detailed understanding of social phenomena through qualitative methods (Gill et al., 2008). This method is also deemed to be the most appropriate when there is a lack of knowledge regarding a phenomenon or in-depth insights and accounts are necessary from participants (Gill et al., 2008), both of which are relevant to the current thesis. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted. They provide a structure of key questions to be addressed, however there is still flexibility for conversation to go beyond the given structure (Britten, 1999; Bryman, 2016). Semi-structured interviews offer both structure and flexibility within interviews to provide prompt for the interviewer, whilst allowing divergence where appropriate (Smith, 2017). Structured interviews involve a more stringent guideline of questions that the researcher does not deviate from, whereas unstructured interviews offer much greater freedom and allow the researcher and participant to converse openly with no specific guide (Smith, 2017). Therefore, the semi-structured interview offers the benefits and compensates for the limitations of both structured and unstructured interview techniques (Smith and Osborn, 2008). This type of interview therefore provides guidance for both the

researcher and participant, as well as allows either of them to diverge or elaborate throughout the interview (Gill et al., 2008). Similarly, interviews provide an opportunity for researcher and participant to develop a rapport, particularly when semi-structured, as questions are used to guide the participant, but wider conversation is permitted, lowering feelings of pressure (Cargan, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews permit an adaptable and participant-focused approach to research whereby preliminary questions can be shaped according to the responses of the participant (Smith, 2017; Smith and Osborn, 2008). Such an approach aligns with the constructivist epistemology advocated within the study, ensuring that the individual construction and interpretation of the participant's experience is prioritised (Creswell and Clark, 2017; Nilsson and Strupp-Levitsky, 2016). Use of semi-structured interviews therefore allows in-depth questioning of participants in relation to the case study (Lune and Berg, 2016). In the present research, separate interview guides were developed as appropriate for player and staff interviews within football clubs, permitting specific questions and areas to be addressed regarding loan experience and practice. However, use of semi-structured interviews also enables the interviewee to diverge as they feel appropriate and expand on any topics presented, as well as any additional areas that they deem relevant but may not have been known to the researcher. Similarly, the interviewer is able to ask further questions on topics or experiences which cannot be anticipated in an interview guide, offering structure and guidance to direct conversation that is not included in unstructured interviews, whilst providing flexibility that is omitted in structured interviews (Gill et al., 2008; Schensul et al., 1999). Thus, the most detailed and rich accounts of social phenomena can be gained through semi-structured interviews (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005).

The use of single interviews with players allowed insight to their experience of being on loan, shortly after they have completed the temporary transfer. The memories and perceptions of that experience were therefore fresh and easy for the participant to retrieve. Such interviews also allowed disclosure of the experience from start to finish and all events/experiences that players feel to be important, whether positive or negative. Staff members were also interviewed once, this took place while they possessed an ongoing role, working directly with players as they prepared for and experienced their loan transfer. This allowed insight into the specific role of the staff

member, current procedures in place for loan players and any support that is offered to them. These took place during the 2019/2020 football season which players were interviewed as they came to the end of their loan transfers so that experiences from both players and staff were concurrent – providing interpretation of the same time period/season. This permitted real time data capture as opposed to retrospective accounts (Schwarz, 2007), although aspects of participants' past experience were also discussed as relevant within each interview but given the younger age of the players (18-23 years), concurrent interviews allowed insight into the present experiences, thoughts and interpretations of those individuals, likewise with the staff in their day to day work routines at the time of interview. Staff and players provided detailed insight into their experiences and processes within which they are familiar with that were ongoing at time of research, offering a more accurate insight into the current circumstances and lived experiences of all individuals involved (Schwarz, 2007).

In total, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted within the current study, involving individuals from 8 EPL and 5 Championship football clubs. Participants consisted of 6 male loan managers, 2 male loan analysts, 3 player care and liaison staff members (2 females and 1 male), 3 sport psychologists (2 males and 1 female), 1 male coaching and development member of staff and 3 male professional football players (total: 15 males and 3 females). Participants had a wide range of experience within the football industry, with previous roles including playing, coaching, data analysis as well as broader involvement in the professional football environment. Referring back to the inclusion criteria mentioned above, the club staff all a) worked at an EPL or Championship club, and b) had some degree of involvement with the loan process and/or players that go on loan transfers at the time of interview. Similarly, the football players within this study a) were English or considered homegrown, b) were contracted to an EPL or Championship club at the time of interview, c) had experienced at least one loan within the 2019/2020 football season, and d) were aged 18-23.

These criteria were applied to ensure that all individuals were able to provide current and specific information on the loan process based on their personal role and perspective. Additionally, separate inclusion criteria for staff and players were deemed

necessary to ensure that players could share personal lived experience regarding the loan processes and support that are currently in place. Interviews lasted between 24-65 minutes, with an average duration of 44 minutes, each participant was interviewed individually, and all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Table 5 provides an overview of participants and interview durations.

Role of participant	Gender	Interview duration (minutes)	Club level	Date of interview
Loan Manager 1	Male	42	Premier League Club 1	3 rd April 2020
Loan Manager 2	Male	24	Championship Club 1	13 th April 2020
Loan Manager 3	Male	55	Premier League Club 2	15 th April 2020
Loan Manager 4	Male	57	Premier League Club 3	17 th April 2020
Loan Manager 5	Male	31	Premier League Club 4	13 th May 2020
Loan Manager 6	Male	56	Premier League Club 5	17 th June 2020
Loan Analyst 1	Male	50	Premier League Club 2	15 th April 2020
Loan Analyst 2	Male	45	Premier League Club 6	20 th April 2020
Player Care and Liaison 1	Male	37	Premier League Club 7	6 th April 2020
Player Care and Liaison 2	Female	65	Championship Club 2	21 st April 2020
Player Care and Liaison 3	Female	31	Premier League Club 2	24 th April 2020
Sport Psychologist 1	Female	31	Premier League Club 8	23 rd April 2020
Sport Psychologist 2	Male	41	Championship Club 3	6 th May 2020
Sport Psychologist 3	Male	34	Championship Club 4	22 nd June 2020
Coaching and Development 1	Male	65	Championship Club 5	29 th April 2020
Player 1	Male	37	Premier League Club 2	21 st April 2020

Player 2	Male	61	Premier League Club 2	27 th April 2020
Player 3	Male	35	Championship Club 5	4 th May 2020
Total		794		

Table 5: An overview of participants and interview dates and durations.

Researchers have proposed that face to face interviews encourage collection of higher quality data than telephone interviews (Irvine et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the collection of data was initiated as the covid-19 pandemic became a significant issue within the UK, removing the option of face to face interviews at that time. However, it has been argued that telephone interviews can successfully obtain valuable data in the same way as face to face interviews (Greenfield et al., 2000; Sobin et al., 1993), with Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) highlighting that the same level of depth can be achieved in both types of interviews, with participants actually preferring the telephone option, as there is greater flexibility with timing. Additionally, despite criticism of dismissing paralinguistic features, such as facial expressions, interviewers are able to find opportunities to ask probing questions based on verbal cues such as hesitations, sighs and rushed speech (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Besides, telephone interviews reduce response bias and permit the inclusion of participants from various geographical locations (Knox and Burkard, 2009), as well as allowing opportunity to contact those who may otherwise be difficult to access (Tausig and Freeman, 1988), meaning that in the current thesis members of the professional football environment across England could be reached, addressing some of the difficulties that arose with gaining entry to such a population.

3.3.5. Transcribing Process

Transcription is the initial stage of data analysis, consisting of careful observation and familiarisation of the data through recurring listening, converting audio or visual recordings into written form (Bailey, 2008; Duranti, 2007; Kvale, 1996). The transcribing process follows a progressive pathway of decision-making in relation to its use, with no universal guideline or criteria for what it should comprise (McLellan et al., 2003). Thus, the process of transcription entails a series of choices to be made by

the researcher (Kvale, 1996), representing and upholding their theoretical stance, as well as insight into the role of the researcher and others involved in the process (Jaffe, 2007; Mischler, 1991). Subsequently, the process itself is recognised as largely theoretical, with a spectrum ranging from naturalism to denaturalism indicating the significance of the process based on the researcher's theoretical position (Oliver et al., 2005).

Naturalism refers to a transcription process that looks to include "as much detail as possible", in attempts to reflect language used in "the real world" (Oliver et al., 2005: 1273-1274). Denaturalism, conversely, represents the "meanings and perceptions that construct our reality", whereby "idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalizations) are removed" (Oliver et al., 2005: 1273-1274). Frequently, qualitative researchers undermine the interpretive process of transcription through adopting a naturalized approach (Duranti, 2007), portraying transcripts as inclusive of all transparent details, as opposed to being characterised by a succession of choices that should be clarified (Ochs, 1979). All transcriptions must be considered as selective to some extent as it is unattainable to document all the intricacies of conversation and interaction from a mere audio recording, therefore, the transcribing process involves selectivity of specific phenomena and elements of spoken communication (Davidson, 2009).

Selectivity should be highlighted and explained in alignment with other decisions made throughout the research process, thus being a theoretical requirement (Cook, 1990; Duranti, 1997). Ochs (1979: 44) suggested that "a more useful transcript is a more selective one", ensuring that the transcript is clearly read and completed in support of the research aims. Therefore, in terms of theoretical positions, interpretivists promote the "theoretical constructions" of transcripts (Lapadat, 2000: 208), subsequently perceiving the process to be an interpretive and depictive one (e.g. Mischler, 1991) involving researchers selecting what and how they will document with regards to the transcripts (Davidson, 2009). By contrast, transcripts presented as transparent and standardised, including all aspects of speech in avoidance of selectivity, align with positivist approaches (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). Consistent with the philosophical position chosen in this thesis, denaturalism and selectivity were applied to the transcribing process.

3.3.6. Member-checking

Following transcription, member-checking took place, this is the process of returning data to participants in order to validate or check the accuracy of researcher interpretations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Birt et al. (2016) recommended that all participants should be asked if they would like to engage in any validation processes. Thus, within the current research, participants were sent their individual transcript and provided with the opportunity to validate researcher interpretations as well as have a follow up conversation around transcript, if they wish (Doyle, 2007). Utilising member-checking within case study research has been recognised as a beneficial method of appraising interpretations of data (Torrance, 2012). All participants confirmed that they were happy with the returned transcript, with no requests for follow up conversations around the data, allowing the researcher to proceed with data analysis.

3.3.7. Document Analysis

Document analysis was also used within the data collection process, involving the organised evaluation of documents (Bowen, 2009). Proposed by Atkinson and Coffey (1996: 47) as “social facts”, documents are produced and accessed for social or organisational uses. Therefore, as secondary sources of data, documents are analysed to enhance understanding of the meanings and interpretations that can be identified within them (Altheide, 2000; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Sandelowski, 1995). Similar to other methods of data analysis, specific quotations and sections of text within the documents were themed and categorised based on an organised analytic procedure (Labuschagne, 2003). Document analysis is strongly applicable to qualitative case studies through offering rich detail of a single phenomenon, event, organisation or program (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Use of document analysis permitted the evaluation of current policies and procedures that are in place across football organisations and clubs to understand how the loan process is operated within the football industry. Scott (1990) proposed four criteria to determine the quality of a document; a) authenticity, regarding how genuine the origin of the evidence is, b) credibility, regarding the accuracy of the evidence, c) representativeness, regarding the typicality of the evidence, and d) meaning, regarding the clarity of the evidence.

The types of documents that may be analysed include diaries, letters, autobiographies, magazines, newspapers, photographs, as well as official policies and publications (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Lune and Berg, 2016; Thies, 2002). A range of official documents were analysed within this thesis. Official documents provide insight to the guidelines and specific policy that club/loan staff must follow and operate within. Each of these types of documents not only provided greater insight and understanding of the specific context of loan transfers; but also complemented the interviews conducted by informing the interview guides that were used (e.g. Goldstein and Reibolt, 2004).

As well as complementing other methods, document analysis is a time efficient and cost-effective method within research, being a secondary source, if accessible, data is readily available often at little or no cost (Bowen, 2009). Initially, researchers will skim the document before reading it fully and then interpreting the content (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis therefore includes features of both content and thematic analysis, the former consisting of arranging information into relevant categories in relation to the research questions (Bowen, 2009) and the latter involving recognising patterns in the data set, with the themes that surface developing as categories for analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Available documents regarding football players were analysed, including FIFA's Regulations of the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP), Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), the English Football League (EFL) Section 6 – Players and the EFL Charter for academy players and parents. Each of these documents state the various policies and regulations across the football industry and its organisations regarding player transfers, development, support and processes.

The RSTP was analysed, this presents rules and regulations that “lay down global and binding rules concerning the status of players, their eligibility to participate in organised football, and their transfer between clubs belonging to different associations” (FIFA, 2020: 9). Additionally, the EPPP, a document developed by the EPL and Football League and employed since 2012 was used within the analysis, as well as the Youth Development rules 2019/20 provided by the EPL, which are updated each season with regards to the EPPP. This document presents a long-term strategy with the aim to enhance the quantity of home-grown football players across England and provide a

holistic support system (Roe and Parker, 2016; Tears et al., 2018). The present thesis also analysed ‘Section 6 – Players’ of the EFL regulations stating the specific rules and requirements regarding players that need to be adhered to across all EFL clubs and organisations. Similarly, the EFL Charter for academy players and parents was analysed, this document is provided to academy players and their parents to give an overview of the academy system (EFL, 2018). Table 6 provides an overview of the documents analysed. All documents used were a) publicly available and b) downloaded directly from official, trusted websites.

Document name	Description
FIFA’s Regulations of the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP)	Global rules and regulations in terms of player eligibility and transfers in professional football.
Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP)	Long-term strategy guidelines for youth development in football across England.
English Football League (EFL) Section 6 – Players	Rules and regulations regarding players in the EFL.
The EFL Charter for academy players and parents	Information booklet provided by the EFL for football players and their parents.

Table 6: Overview of all documents included in document analysis within the current thesis.

The inclusion criteria for documents used established that they were a) from official sources, b) available in English, and c) related to the English professional football environment.

3.4. Thematic Analysis

Analysis is the process of reading and interpreting data to acknowledge and communicate the understanding of the given phenomena through organising data, searching for patterns and relaying information perceived to be important (Fossey et al., 2002). Researchers should clarify the specific process of analysis used for their

data to enhance the quality of qualitative research (Kuper et al., 2008), therefore, thematic analysis (TA) is the method of analysis used within this thesis. TA consists of searching for emerging themes that are deemed important to the specific research phenomenon (Daly et al., 1997). Rice and Ezzy (1999: 258) proposed that the process involves “careful reading and re-reading of the data” to establish themes and subsequent categories during analysis (Bowen, 2009; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This method of analysis permits the development of themes in an accessible, systematic and rigorous manner (Howitt, 2010), and is a highly suitable method of analysis for understanding interpretations and phenomena (Marks and Yardley, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006) stated a six-stage approach to learning and conducting TA, the stages are as follows; 1) familiarising yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing potential themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. The use of thematic maps has also been advocated throughout this process (Braun and Clarke, 2006), whereby visual or text-based (Frith and Gleeson, 2004) representations of perceptions and analysis are used during the development of themes and categories, as well as potential connections between them (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

TA involves interpreting meanings and experiences within and between data, which enables the researcher to observe shared meanings that exist amongst participants in relation to the research area, reflecting commonalities and overlaps for the research to make sense of (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This method of analysis can be used to interpret meaning broadly across data or focus more narrowly on the specific relevance of the phenomenon under study. Similarly, it is not only the superficial or clear meaning that can be analysed, but also the concealed or less obvious meanings that the researcher perceives (Braun and Clarke, 2006). TA can be conducted in various ways, making it a flexible method of analysis that is applicable to a range of research areas (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Researchers should clarify the type of TA they have adopted and justify their use, ensuring it is in line with their philosophical approach to research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Inductive TA consists of a bottom-up process of coding and analysis, whereby the content of the data is the central focus, meaning that codes and themes that emerge correspond directly to the data being analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Conversely, deductive TA is a top-down process, involving a set of concepts or ideas, based on existing theory, that the researcher

contributes to the process in order to code the data, which does not necessarily correspond to the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Joffe, 2011). Themes driven by existing theory that the researcher brings to their analysis permit the development of existing literature (Boyatzis, 1998), however, it is also important to recognise new and additional themes that emerge within data to extend and add to such literature (Joffe, 2011).

Therefore, a combination of the two approaches, also known as abductive, is often incorporated within analysis (e.g. McGreary et al. 2021), as one cannot be completely inductive because researchers will always contribute something to the data based on existing knowledge, interests and intentions. Similarly, one cannot completely ignore the semantic content of data during analysis, particularly when it is relevant to theoretical concepts that are looking for and can develop existing findings on the given phenomena (Joffe, 2011). However, researchers indicate a dominant commitment to either approach to signify the way in which they intend to conduct analysis on the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012), for the researcher within this thesis, the dominant commitment was inductive TA.

When conducting TA in the present thesis (see figure 9), to initially familiarise with the data, the researcher repetitively read the transcriptions, whilst also repetitively listening to the audio recordings to engage with the meanings and contextual information presented during the interviews of all football players and club staff. Codes were created based on key themes and ideas perceived from the data regarding involvement and experiences with the loan process, specific roles within football clubs as well as various forms of support that is offered within the football environment. These codes were then grouped into larger themes whilst searching for further themes and reviewing those that had emerged e.g. themes around the LM role, loan system operations, club strategies and approaches, along with player pathways and challenges during loans. The finalisation of overarching themes and subthemes was then established, reflecting verbalizations of related meaning and key concepts, within an iterative process of reviewing and reorganising themes as more emerged, until the final themes were named and defined; a) The Loan Manager Role, b) Strategic Management of Loans, and c) Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players (see Appendix I for overview of themes). The researcher then progressed onto the writing

up stage whereby each overarching theme comprised a finding chapter of the thesis, producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2012).

1. **Familiarising with data** – Transcribing and listening to all audio recordings of interviews.
2. **Generating initial codes** – Involvement with loan players, important aspects of loans process/experiences, any themes of specific or holistic support.
3. **Searching for themes** – More focus on LM role and operational aspects of loan process for all staff, general player journey and experiences, as well as any other emerging themes coming from transcripts e.g. club strategy/approach.
4. **Reviewing potential themes** - e.g. themes about LMs, themes about players, themes about club-wide approach or strategy.
5. **Defining and naming themes** - clarifying main themes and sub-themes, grouping as relevant. *The Loan Manager Role, Strategic Management of Loans, Loan Player Preparation and Support.*
6. **Producing the report** - Writing up each of the themes as chapters based on thematic analysis of transcripts and documents, with inclusion of quotes, figures and tables to evidence and outline each of the sub-themes that emerged.

Figure 9: Braun and Clarke's (2006) stages of TA, applied to the TA process of the present research.

During the process of TA, debriefing also took place between the researcher and her PhD supervisors, permitting the collaborative exploration of meanings surrounding results of the thesis, rather than merely checking if the researcher has “got it right” (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 285). This approach aligned more appropriately with the constructivist position upheld by the researcher and became a feature of the triangulation approach itself, improving the trustworthiness of data (Cavallerio et al., 2020; McMahon and Winch, 2018; Sangaramoorthy and Kroeger, 2020). Debriefing enabled regular meetings with the supervisory team to communicate insight and interpretations during the research process, allowing collaborative reflection and sharing of perspectives, particularly around data collection and analysis (Eppich and Cheng, 2015; Chereni et al., 2020; Sangaramoorthy and Kroeger, 2020). This also

provided the opportunity to discuss challenges or issues that were faced regarding interpretations of data, with collective discussion and advice regarding solutions and next steps, increasing awareness and effectiveness (Byrd et al., 2022; Al Sabei and Lasater, 2016; Sangaramoorthy and Kroeger, 2020).

3.5 Writing-up of Findings

Following the completion of TA within the current research, the researcher was then ready to initiate the writing up process of the thesis, whereby two distinct approaches were evident: nomothetic and idiographic. A nomothetic approach involves providing an objective account of research, aligning with a positivist epistemology (Ponterotto, 2005), whereas an idiographic approach, advocated by interpretivist researchers, incorporates a more subjective, individualised account (Grice et al., 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher has therefore adopted an idiographic approach within this thesis to encourage a more in-depth, detailed insight to the research process and subsequent interpretations of findings based on the subjective accounts of the participants. This supports the representation of the specific context within which research has taken place, presenting the unique, individualised perspectives of those embedded within the professional football context. It is also advised that interpretivists portray their research data in raw form where possible to permit detailed understanding of the reader as they progress through the research process and findings (Polkinghorne, 1989).

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presents detail on the process that was used to explore the research aims and objectives of the thesis. Initially, the researcher's scientific paradigm was acknowledged, stating the philosophical assumptions of a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, subsequently highlighting the qualitative methodology that was employed. Following this, a qualitative case study design was portrayed, comprising of within-methods triangulation through semi-structured interviews, along with document analysis to explore the experiences of loan transfers in professional football from the club staff and players' perspectives. Finally, thematic analysis was

also highlighted as the selected analytical method to recognise and interpret themes from each source of data. Transparency with use of such analysis has also been provided, as well as insight to the idiographic approach of writing up findings.

Chapter Four: The Loan Manager (LM) Role

Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis within the present research; 1) The LM Role, 2) Strategic Management of Loans and 3) Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players. The first overarching theme, 'The LM Role', is presented in this chapter and comprises three key sub-themes; 'The Evolution of the LM Role' (4.1), 'LM Responsibilities' (4.2), and 'The Title, Skillset and Requirement of a LM' (4.3).

4.1. The Evolution of the LM Role

Being a new role in the professional football environment, the LM is an area of increasing interest in both research and practice in relation to what it involves and how it came about, the relevance and requirement of working with other staff across the club, as well as areas of uncertainty that are being inherited with the role. Therefore, this sub-theme presents three key points; 1) The introduction and evolution of the LM role, 2) Holistic support and multidisciplinary (MDT) contact, and 3) Roles and responsibilities still lack clarity.

4.1.1. The Introduction and Evolution of the LM role

The first key point to emerge from the analysis to form this sub-theme centred on the introduction and evolution of the LM role. Being a relatively new role, where in many clubs, an individual has been given the designated responsibilities of overseeing the loan process and all players involved in that process, the position of LM is now commonly being allocated within professional football clubs, particularly across the highest levels in England (e.g. EPL and Championship). This has become a role with increasing hours, resources and responsibilities over recent seasons, encouraging many clubs to assign this as a full time position, rather than a part time, or dual role (e.g. U23 coach). Therefore, usually involving some degree of job mobility (Hall, 1996; Ng et al. 2007; Sullivan, 1999), most LMs in the current thesis experienced intra-organisational transitions (within a club by which they were already employed) when committing to this role, with the exception of LM3 (Premier League Club 2) who experienced inter-organisational (joining a club to commit to the LM role), although he had fulfilled other roles at the club in the past.

LM2 was balancing the role with a coaching role but felt that it was important to have a full-time member of staff in place to oversee the loan process and players, and therefore maintained his previous, coaching role, to allow for a full-time LM to operate within the club. Similarly, LM4 at Premier League Club 3 reinforced that “having someone whose job is 100% dedicated to loans is really important”, due to the investment of time and resources that are required from that individual or team to perform the role effectively.

However, this exists in many clubs across the EPL and Championship whereby the individual responsible for overseeing the loan process within the club, has a wider role or alternative job title, often involving player development or coaching responsibilities, as was the case with LM6. Despite variation in how the role has manifested across clubs, there has been clear progression of clubs investing time and resources in their own approach to the loan process, as well as supporting the individuals experiencing loan transfers. LM6 claimed that:

It is an evolving role, you go back five years, probably the under-23s coach used to phone the lads on loan and check they were alright, and that was it. There was no planning to loans, it was just somebody would phone up and he'd go out then he would be forgotten and as there's more control over loans now, there's a need for full time staff.
(LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Before there was a specified member of staff supporting loan players, wider club staff would often lack clarity in the processes and responsibilities of managing loans, which participants recognised that there was either no one formally taking those responsibilities, or it would be assumed that the relevant age group coach was overseeing the process, as appropriate. Thus, placing additional pressure and expectation on such staff and resulting in loan players feeling forgotten, isolated, and subsequently unsupported during their time at the loan club, especially where support is not available within the loan club. One of the LMs in the current study explained how he acquired the LM role:

This job came up at [Premier League club] looking for someone to look after the loans and kinda be a loans manager where we started to get more players out on loan and there was no designated person to be able

to keep track of them or to sort the loans out or just to do all the things that come up in the loan scenario. (LM1, Premier League Club 1)

Additionally, although the LM is a new role that is not yet an established position across many professional football clubs, having a specific person managing the loans process provides clarity and structure, benefitting both staff and players alike, as explained by one participant:

It does offer structure for the loan process, in terms of the experience for the player, you'd like to think that they know who they need to communicate with, if there's any issues or problems, where they need to go if they want to talk about something initially. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

Such clarity for wider club staff allows greater communication and effective inter-disciplinary cooperation, it also encourages an extended and multi-disciplinary support network for loan players, providing holistic support and development during loans, as will be discussed further within this chapter. Such inter-disciplinary collaboration would also strengthen the perception of extensive and consistent support experienced by players, developing the findings of previous literature where players at category one academies had more positive perceptions of support networks compared to players at category three academies (Mitchell et al., 2021).

Therefore, with the lack of clarity that remains in the area of loan staff, football clubs may find it beneficial to allow some flexibility and job crafting for those in the LM role or equivalent, providing motivation, strong work identity as well as different types of crafting that can encourage important skills for the various tasks and relationships to be managed within this evolving area of the football industry. One participant expressed how they had been able to initiate tasks and processes as they settled into the role after increasing hours to a full time position, despite ongoing struggles with establishing a clearly defined role:

We still haven't come to terms, I don't think, with the fact well what do we wanna get out of it? So it's monitoring the players, I do visits on a regular basis which I didn't do last season as it was only part time. So that helped me build up relationships, I'd see them in a different environment, see them training, catch up with them and discuss some clips which [name of Loan Analyst] now does for me as well, so we

can give them a bit of mentoring, that's what it's like to me, being a bit of a mentor. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

LM3 describes aspects of both task and relational crafting; shaping the tasks being completed and adjusting the quality and/or quantity of communication with others whilst fulfilling the role respectively (Niessen et al., 2016; Wzresniewski and Dutton, 2001), which have benefitted his fulfilment of the role, supporting research which suggests that this is advantageous to motivation and engagement at work (Petrou et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2013) and encourage well-being (Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2012; Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014; Tims et al., 2013). Similarly, Premier League Club 2 possessed a small loan department, comprising a LM and Loan Analyst, therefore encouraging collaboration with regards to the support and responsibilities surrounding loan players. Several other clubs are in a position whereby an individual is operating independently to manage loan players, often with a lack of support or collaboration regarding the role and responsibilities. Similarly, it is not only communication within clubs that was noted, but also between clubs, this ensures that best practice can be shared, particularly whilst the role of supporting loan players is in its infancy. LM3 goes on to explain:

I've made contact with a few of the bigger clubs [names Premier League clubs] and they've been really helpful as regards just telling me the same thing really, there's nothing really to work to but this is what we do, it might be slightly different than what we're doing at [present club] so you know it's grabbing little ideas from people and stuff like that but I think that's how you get on anyway. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

The current findings therefore contribute novel insights to literature, highlighting the recruitment of LMs internally within football organisations, whereby individuals with established positions (e.g. coach, analyst) have been appointed to the LM position through their contribution to the club and relevance of previous experience to operate as the LM. Subsequently, there is indication of football clubs headhunting individuals with vast experience in footballing roles, deemed capable of taking on a new role. This supports and develops extant literature surrounding the need for a "high calibre" workforce within professional sport, whereby individuals comprise technical and leadership abilities to enhance the performance of the organisation (Taylor et al., 2015b: 6).

Similarly, from a group processes perspective in SSP, this evidences specific intragroup processes within football organisations, demonstrating the importance of status and power of individuals in existing roles who are trusted and influential within the wider organisational structure, but then appointed as LM, through the formation of a new group (loans team/department), with the need to form dyadic relationships with players and various wider staff members, some of whom they may have existing relationships with. This viewpoint thus allows understanding of specific group contexts and their processes, including formation and configurations (Smith-Lovin and Molm, 2000), with the current research being the first to apply this perspective to the loan process within professional football, understanding how LMs have been appointed and how they interact with other staff, loan specific or not, to provide effective support, whilst also understanding their need to build rapport and develop relationships with players over time, namely before the loan transfer is in place. However, more information on the desirable criteria and methods of recruitment of loan staff would further inform practice as this role continues to grow in popularity. The practical implications of this could also help the development of a more established LM within the wider structure of the club and contribute a new professional element to the holistic support system proposed by the EPPP.

4.1.2. Holistic Support and Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Contact

The second key point to form this sub-theme was 'Holistic Support and Multidisciplinary (MDT) Contact'. Wider methods of support across the various domains of a player's life and performance occurs continuously throughout their academy development, particularly since the introduction of the EPPP, and it is therefore important that this extends to the loan experience. The LM can be fundamental in ensuring this takes place. Although many players choose to engage independently with various support staff from their parent club, they are also encouraged to utilise the support and MDT at their loan clubs, where available. However, the extent of support will differ depending on the standard of club that they are temporarily based at. Where provisions are limited, parent clubs should ensure they are considering this when planning the loan transfer so that the player is not without MDT support. Thus, the LM will benefit from developing rapport with wider staff and ensuring that player has an effective range of support in place to assist their development whilst on loan. Such support is likely to consist of contact with coaches,

nutritionists, physiotherapists and psychologists, as well as wider support staff (e.g. player care). One LM recognised the benefits of collaborating with the MDT to build knowledge on potential loan clubs, an aspect that he plans to continue developing into the future:

I take the whole [multi-disciplinary] team with me to go into their environment at least once or twice a season so they will go and do an appraisal of what the environment is all about because being a loan manager, I don't know everything, I don't know about medical, I don't know about psychology, but as a group, between the two clubs together, we can look at it and they will come up with a report, number 1 to see if it is suitable for the player, number 2 for future loans, if we're gonna send a player on loan there next time, we know what to expect, so we're not surprised. So yeah that's something again we need to do next season, we didn't do that last season. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

There is also an increasing need within football to consider the non-performance based holistic support, in terms of the welfare and wellbeing of players (Ryom et al., 2020). Although the player's performance may be one of the key indicators of how successful the loan has been, there are several staff monitoring and evaluating their performance throughout the process, giving a range of performance based support during their loan experience. Therefore, it is fundamental to ensure that players are coping with wider challenges of loans, and more independent living, confirming that they also feel their support network extends beyond the football environment (Knight et al., 2018).

The current findings therefore support and develop research on holistic development and support in sport (e.g. Henriksen et al., 2010), with the extension of specific recognition of holistic support during loan transitions, highlighting the importance of both the parent and loan clubs in facilitating player development. The present findings also provide initial research showing the need for continuation of holistic support in the loan environment, whereby a player is still at academy age but not necessarily receiving academy level support, which would not meet the age group requirements of the EPPP whilst loan players are below 23 years. Additionally, novel findings identifying the omission of consideration of senior loan players are contributed,

generating concern for the lack of attention and acknowledgement being received by senior loan players. This is a particular issue in parent clubs where senior and academy departments operate independently, with the LM position most commonly being linked to the academy as a whole or specifically the professional development phase (PDP; 18-23 years old), with no involvement in senior team processes or decisions. Therefore, greater consideration of the experiences of loan players as individuals, rather than merely players needs to be prioritised for all age groups. A coaching member of staff advocated the advantage of developing individuals, as opposed to players:

It's all about games, all about winning, all about the team, which is 'we are a football club and we will live and die by our results as a football team' and we can't lose sight of that but if you can improve the individual as part of the process it will definitely help to achieve better results (CD1, Championship Club 5).

Again, depending on the specific club, their philosophy, organisational structure and allocation of responsibilities, as well as the skillset and approach of the individual overseeing the loans process, the LM role may be predominantly focused towards performance, which was recognised by some participants. However, other LMs possess a strong holistic approach and aim to support players away from the football pitch, or at least direct them to the relevant people who can help with welfare or wellbeing related issues, if they feel they are not equipped, or qualified to support such issues. Having an LM that can work with players holistically is much more likely to encourage positive relationships whereby a player feels familiar with and supported by their LM, regardless of whether the loan is going as successfully as they had hoped. PCL1 (Premier League Club 7) emphasised the importance of having "staff that are not geared towards performance. Staff within football clubs are skewed towards performance, when players spend 75-80% of time away from the pitch".

Thus, this indicates the importance of seeing every player as an individual and ensuring that football clubs are supporting all holistic aspects of lifestyle and development. Subsequently, there is a need for the LM to have strong communication and relationships with the club's welfare department, as individuals in roles such as those related to player care, could be really beneficial for loan players, particularly

where those members of staff are familiar and have relationships with players that have developed through the academy. Since the introduction of the EPPP, implementing a multidisciplinary approach and prioritising holistic development throughout academies was a strong focus of the document, supporting the goal of increasing the number and quality of homegrown players in professional football in England (EPPP: 17). To encourage support in areas wider than performance, the FA designed a long term development plan for players outlined by the four corner model, encompassing four key areas of development; technical, psychological, physical and social. The EPPP introduced by the BPL (2011:17) states that:

“The Multidisciplinary Approach is presented in clear recognition of the need to centre each player’s progression as a footballer at the heart of the Academy. It ensures that all the services and support functions of the Academy serve to uphold the primary purpose of the Academy which is to produce professional players for the first team.”

Given the competitive nature of sporting environments, where conflict often exists, the need for effective team work amongst the different disciplines within organisations, is vital (Reid et al., 2004). However, it is also acknowledged within the EPPP that such an approach will vary across football organisations:

“The adoption of the Multidisciplinary Approach may differ in its sophistication according to the resources available at a given club but the adoption of the principles of this approach will be a standard requirement for all Academies.” (EPPP: 18)

With this in mind, it is important to recognise that loan players are commonly aged between 18-23 years old, with the focus of the loan transfer being development, regardless of future intention for the player. Thus, players within that age range would be provided with comprehensive MDT support at their parent club, and although this may not be offered to the same extent whilst players are on loan to assist the progression of independence for that player, there should be clear communication between the MDTs at both the parent and loan clubs to ensure that the player is still provided with the level of support that is expected by the EPPP, relative to their age group, academy category (see Appendix J) and individual needs.

MDTs have been operating within other disciplines for many years, for example healthcare services, whereby teams may consist of doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, physiotherapists, and other relevant personnel (Reid et al., 2004). Davidson et al. (2015) investigated the support provided during transition from paediatric to adult health care for youths with special health care needs (YSHCNs), they concluded that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary to encourage the most effective transition possible, supporting previous research in this area (e.g. Betz and Redcay, 2005; Rearick, 2007). Similarly, in children's services, there is recognition of the need to incorporate different disciplines of health, social services, law enforcement, child welfare, housing and education to provide the most effective service possible (Salmon, 2004). Wenger (1998) proposed a communities of practice (CoP) model, explaining that knowledge is produced through a) participation (working with others towards shared goals, through day to day interactions) and b) reification (existing forms of knowledge that are accessible, e.g. policies and other documents). In MDT settings, each discipline will carry their own versions of knowledge and desired action, therefore these teams must communicate openly and have awareness of potential shifts in their own professional identities, to ensure they can operate in the most effective way for the environment and task at hand (Wenger, 1998). Such compromise and communication of differing ideas can facilitate the development of creative solutions and productive task conflict (De Dreu, 2006; Neale et al., 2006; Young et al., 2014).

However, despite the importance of holistic support and development as emphasised across literature (e.g. Côté and Lidor, 2013a; Ryom et al., 2020), and echoed in the EPPP, there appears to be a stronger performance focus that exists within professional football clubs (Newman et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the findings from this study challenge and develop such arguments, through interviewing a range of multidisciplinary staff, each of whom recognised the strong benefits and requirement for holistic support for loan football players, with identification of the influence that effective development of individuals within professional football, is likely to increase successful performance and inevitably benefit the parent club either as the player can progress to senior level, or encouraging them to reach their fullest potential and maximise profit if the player is sold. The operation of the LM, particularly within a broader MDT, can therefore have an instrumental impact, not only on the holistic

development of the player, but also the wider success of the club. Therefore, the current findings can offer guidance and suggestion to clubs and policy-makers regarding the addition of LMs within football organisations, specifically portraying the benefit of integrating LMs within a wider MDT to enhance and extend support that is currently mandated or recommended by the EPPP for young football players, based on academy category, to ensure the same level of support is being offered to players on loan, who are likely to experience similar and novel challenges as they experience senior football for the first time, increased competitive standard, or alternatively downward mobility to lower levels of the game.

4.1.3 Role and Responsibilities Still Lack Clarity

The third point to form this sub-theme is 'Role and Responsibilities Still Lack Clarity'. Despite the ability to develop a generic overview of LM responsibilities, being the new and evolving role that it is, many participants felt there was a degree of ambiguity and lack of clarity surrounding the role, particularly those who inherited the role at their existing football club. Despite having extensive experience within the football environment and direct contact with players prior to taking on the new position, many LMs expressed the difficulty and confusion they experienced in their own career transition, an area that has been overlooked. This is a novel finding, contributing an initial insight, not only into the key roles and responsibilities of the LM, but also demonstrating that greater guidance and clarity is needed from many professional football clubs when introducing this new role, highlighting an issue in practice. Transition literature in a range of disciplines, including sport, has indeed outlined the feelings of confusion, stress and anxiety (e.g. Wylleman et al., 2004) that are often experienced during periods of transition, but there is a lack of evidence showing the presence of similar feelings for individuals taking on new professional roles that are not well defined, even in circumstances where the role is acquired within an existing place of work.

Similarly, there is a lack of acknowledgment of the transitions and challenges faced by those working in wider roles within the football environment, predominantly giving attention to athletes, with more recent consideration of coaches and sport psychologists (e.g. Chroni and Dieffenbach, 2020; Kenttä et al., 2016; McDougall et al., 2015). However, with greater investment in holistic development and support, as

implemented by the EPPP, there is greater need to understand wider roles, such as loan staff and player care staff, designed specifically to support player transitions, a particular challenge when one is undergoing a challenging transition themselves, paradoxically, with a lack of support. When describing their own transitional experiences of moving from a previous role into the LM role, participants articulated certain challenges that they experienced, one explicated:

I found it quite tough to be honest, because I think there were a couple of things that made it difficult, first and foremost that I was moving into an area that was a complete blank canvas...it was my first time working in a brand new area and on top of that, there was absolutely nothing in that area, you know, there was nobody saying to me 'okay now you need to do that and that' it was very much just kind of me walking into the office on day one and thinking 'what the hell do I do now', you know, so that was quite daunting I'll have to say. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

This portrays that LM4 did not have a clear overview of the tasks he was supposed to fulfil. Similarly, another participant explained:

It's a new role to many clubs that have started taking it up, like especially some of the big clubs so there's really nothing, there's no like description in there and I've been trying to pick up bits and areas where I think 'oh that'd be good' and it's just like an ongoing thing for me in regard to picking bits out and seeing what we need. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

Therefore, this exposes the need for greater efforts from clubs to support employees within the present study, which will also improve the process and experience for players – at a critical time when clubs are hoping to progress these players into their first team squads or allow them to showcase their talent to other clubs in order to sell the players. LMs in the present study were not provided with a clear job description, this could lead to role ambiguity (Katz and Kahn, 1978), which occurs when the expected role behaviours are not clarified and can also onset role conflict, the misalignment of expected behaviours by the individual undertaking the role, and the personnel responsible for them (Tubre and Collins, 2000). Within the social structure and personality perspective in SSP, there is recognition of how one's role may impact

others, whereby role theory emphasises that with roles come expectations whereby one must meet specific requirements in that role (Biddle, 1986). However, there has been acknowledgement of ambiguity surrounding the notion of 'expectation' as this can have different connotations for individuals (Biddle, 2013).

This is supported in the current thesis as there appeared to be lack of clarity surrounding the expectation of the LM role, with different requirements and priorities across different football clubs, making it extremely difficult for individuals to meet the needs of their role. Thus, further supporting literature within this perspective suggesting that self-efficacy interacts with specific components in an environment to increase or decrease one's belief in themselves (Debies-Carl and Huggins, 2009). In the present thesis, the proximity principle can be applied, whereby LMs may depend on their networks and interactions with those closest to them to influence their approach to their new role, as well as how confident they feel in embracing that role, based on existing support and relationships.

Additionally, Hill et al. (2021) found that 'excessive workload' and 'a feeling of isolation' were two key risk factors in terms of reduced wellbeing and mental health for coaches and practitioners working within elite sport, which could also be a risk for staff, such as LMs, in high-pressured professional football environments. LM4 (Premier League Club 3) explained that "it was very much just me walking into the office on day one and thinking 'what the hell do I do now', so that was quite daunting I'll have to say." Wider research has also acknowledged the importance of understanding the experiences and challenges of those beyond athletes, especially those in positions to directly support those athletes, beyond coaching and sport psychology staff, who experience a range of stressors (e.g. relationship and interpersonal issues, physical resource issues, contractual and performance development issues, and organizational structure and logistical issues) that need to be addressed and supported (Arnold et al., 2019). Particularly with novel roles such as the LM, this can add rich knowledge to how football organisations can improve support for all employees, which may include the need for sport psychology support for club staff as well as players (Arnold et al., 2019).

As sporting organisations continue to increase the quantity and range of expertise of club personnel to provide support and competitive improvements within those organisations (Gilmore et al., 2018; Wagstaff et al., 2016), including the area of loans, there is a greater need to develop this process and the investment in such areas, through increased knowledge and guidance from football clubs. Not only is this support necessary when appointing an individual as the LM or an equivalent role, but continued support as the individual fulfils this position, particularly whilst it remains in its infancy and several clubs are in comparable positions of discovering how this role works effectively for them. There was also acknowledgement of needing greater investment from clubs to place necessary value and appreciation on the area of loans and planning ahead for players as they come to the end of their loan, with one LM sharing that:

It's almost like I need to run a programme and present a proof of concept, if you like, to the club so they can see the benefits, so hopefully that will scale this up and get the support and backing that I need from them to do that. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

This would further advance the provisions within the loan system, as well as improve the player experience during their continued development, especially as several young players face multiple loans in their early career, many of which will not be successful. Similarly, this will add to the perceived support and wellbeing of individuals in the LM role, with recognition and value from the wider organisation. This is further supported by the work of Hill et al. (2021) who proposed that improved wellbeing and mental health of staff in elite sport environments could be achieved through protective factors such as effective organisational culture, transformational leadership and a strong social support network, similar to the suggestions of LMs in the present study requesting greater appreciation, guidance and support with the loans process to support staff as well as players in this growing area.

Additionally, there is also an opportunity for greater collaboration from different clubs, leagues and governing bodies, to ensure opportunities to develop best practice and prioritise individual development and wellbeing of players throughout this process, alongside encouraging the development of performance based skills and experience. Such collaboration will also promote a support network amongst LMs and those with

similar responsibilities as it provides a method of open communication regarding best practice, as well as challenges and difficulties that they may have encountered so far – a strong support network. This further supports the need to understand intergroup process within SSP, whereby there is communication and networks developed between groups operating separately, but with mutual benefit from establishing relationships. This is particularly prominent with the opportunity to provide agency from individuals in the LM role to influence best practice and therefore the wider social forces in the football environment to bridge gaps in clubs where there is currently ambiguity around the role and expectations for loan staff – taking steps towards a more standardised process.

There was mention of collective meetings between LMs by some participants, along with individual contact and communication between specific clubs regarding the practice of loan transfers and support, however, this was not acknowledged by everyone. Therefore, a more formal procedure or inter-organisational mode of contact between all LMs and relevant support staff could be beneficial within the industry and specifically for the development not only of loan players, but an efficient and effective long term loans system. In line with this, the current thesis contributes original findings demonstrating the continued ambiguity and confusion surrounding loan staff within professional football, often being a position lacking clarity and guidance in terms of the necessary tasks and responsibilities that should be carried out. This also develops current research in this area, where it has been established that peer knowledge sharing and support from managers within organisations can increase performance, including in a financial sense (Muhammed and Zaim, 2020), this could be extremely helpful in informing football clubs to develop formal support systems, particularly where there is no existing literature presenting the challenges faced by staff in loan department roles. This may be encouraged by learning from those in wider support roles across the club and incorporating aspects of player support that may already be successfully inaugurated. Previous literature has suggested negative consequences for players, in terms of injury and availability, when poor communication exists within football clubs (e.g. Ekstrand et al., 2019), therefore greater exploration of communication and knowledge sharing both within and between professional football clubs would be beneficial to expanding knowledge in this area and supporting the experiences and development of loan players.

Despite this lack of communication and shared practice between clubs, LMs recognised the facilitative effect of having established relationships and intra-organisational support networks across the club when transitioning into their new role, which further supports the extensive and ongoing body of research advocating the advantages of social support (e.g. Cohen and McKay, 1984; Cohen and Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1988, 1995). However, there was no formalised LM networks within or between football clubs, which may be beneficial to develop in future, providing opportunities for sharing best practice and further clarity on how individuals can effectively operate within the role. Therefore, support and communication were key factors that assisted the transition to LM for participants, LM6 expressed his straightforward and adaptive transition into a role with LM responsibilities. Based on his extensive experience and acquisition of contacts within the football environment across many years, from being in positions with high levels of power and responsibility within professional clubs, he explained:

I found it quite easy to be honest, because of my background, especially at lower level, I probably know 80% of the managers, in League One and League Two, so I can speak to them...I can speak to physios in enough level, my PhD is in sport science as well, I've done a lot of sport science so I can speak to the sport scientists as well, so I'm not having to refer everything, I can sort of communicate directly with them, and because of that and because quite a lot of people sort of know me, and have my number and stuff like that, it's easier. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Again, this reiterates the importance of having strong, existing relationships within the football industry and not only the platform this gives individuals to operate within a specific role, such as the LM, but also the importance of confidence and esteem in their own personal ability to perform a role, particularly one with such a lack of clarity, when they feel they have an established network of communication, and subsequently support, around them. This further promotes the need for strong support systems in the football industry in general, both within and between football clubs, but also the development of a loan specific support network that provides a platform for sharing and encouragement, in order to collectively develop experience of loan players and

managers alike, which could be implemented by governing bodies to promote the LM role and support individuals within the role.

Additionally, the responsibilities of this role appear to be heavily focused around PDP academy age group players (18-23 years), with developmental objectives to progress players onto the first team of the parent club or reach their highest potential in football elsewhere (discussed in chapter 5). Therefore, a particular area that needs greater clarity and research is the experience and support of senior loan players, of whom are likely to face many of the psychological and social challenges that come with within-career transitions and even commonalities with the experience of career termination, as this is likely to involve downward mobility in terms of career progression. However, senior players are perhaps overlooked due to the perception that they have less long-term value to the club in comparison to loan players that are in the PDP of an academy. Within the present thesis, none of the LMs and only one wider member of staff disclosed having contact with senior loans players. Despite the different reasons for sending senior players on loan (also discussed in chapter 5), this appears to be an area that is overlooked within English professional clubs which could pose challenges to players' mental wellbeing, particularly if they do not feel support is available during this period of transition.

The need to prepare players effectively for the emotional and psychological challenges of deselection has been previously highlighted, particularly as there is risk of depression, anxiety, fear, frustration and embarrassment during this time, many players may experience clinical mental health issues, therefore needing support not only from the respective club, but also professional provisions (Blakelock et al., 2016; Brown and Potrac, 2009). However, at present, there does not appear to be sufficient support available for such players (Wilkinson, 2021). Despite greater attention and investment in understanding the psychological consequences of deselection, research in this area predominantly focuses on youth player experiences (Dugdale et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2021). Even with literature focused on retiring from professional sport, many difficulties with adjustment, including mental health and well-being concerns have been acknowledged (Stambulova and Ryba, 2014), with 81% of ex-professional football players feeling that the support offered for mental health was insufficient (Van Ramele et al., 2017). Furthermore, in their systematic review, Barth et al. (2021)

reported that retired players can struggle with adapting to their exit from professional football, along with reduced psychological well-being, for up to 20 years post-retirement.

Although there may be potential overlap with experiences of career termination in terms of challenges with psychological well-being and identity, the lack of insight into player transition between organisations, both in terms of development and progression to higher competitive standards, such as loan transfers, as well as downward mobility as players near retirement, exposes gaps in both research and practice for which further investigation could be beneficial to the football environment. Such knowledge could benefit those in roles such as the LM, player care officers and sport psychologists to ensure that no player is overlooked in terms of holistic support, regardless of their individual transition, whether that be within career or career termination. Thus, the current study again contributed novel findings, highlighting a bias of support and focus on loan players aged 18-23, abandoning the needs and wellbeing of senior loan players who are likely to face a plethora of challenges, both personal and professional, when experiencing a loan movement in the latter stages of their career.

4.2 LM Responsibilities

LMs, as well as various wider support staff, recognised the key responsibilities and duties of their respective LMs or those in equivalent roles, as presented in figure 10. Different clubs and individuals expressed a range of methods of operation, engagement with players and wider staff, as well as investment from the club, figure 10 and the following explanations therefore present the findings that emerged organically from interviews.

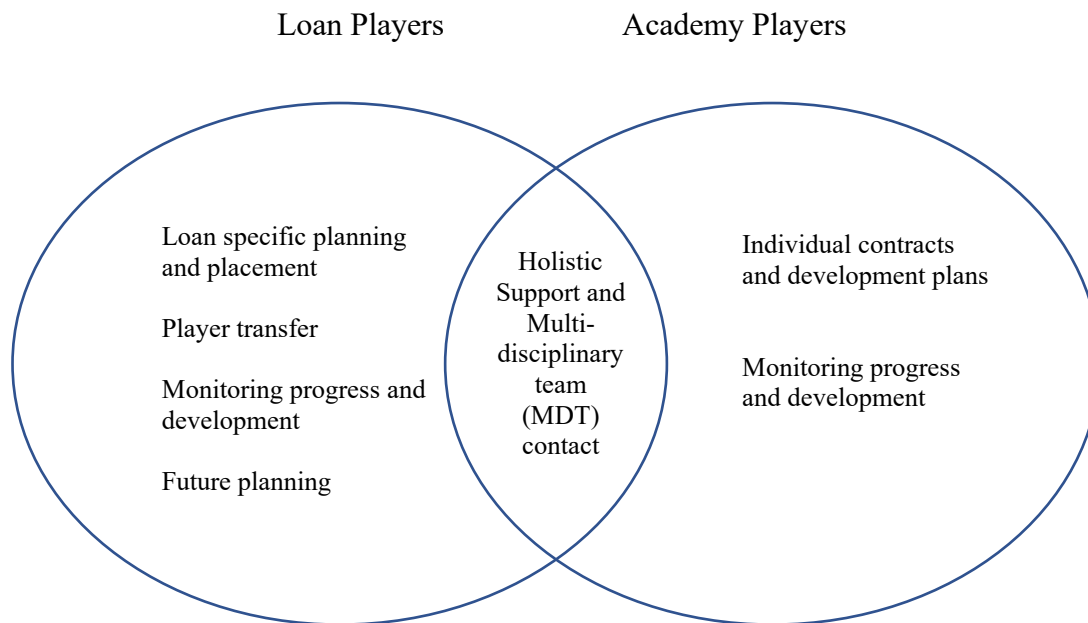


Figure 10: The involvement and responsibilities of the LM in English professional football clubs.

4.2.1 Individual Contracts and Development Plans

The first key point to emerge within the 'LM Responsibilities' sub-theme was 'Individual Contracts and Development Plans' which involved discussion and planning of a player's future and intended development. This takes place with all players within the academy, providing a 'road map' of where the player is currently and what their future at the club may look like and consist of, where potential transitions and opportunities such as loans and progression through age groups will be discussed. Not all LMs will be involved in this process but it appears to be beneficial for those who are in terms of relationship-building and familiarising with players, communicating and engaging with wider club staff as well as bridging the gaps between academy and senior football – facilitating the transition process. The need for football clubs to reduce separation between youth and senior departments in professional football clubs has been previously advocated, improving staff satisfaction and continued development of young players (Relvas et al., 2010).

Similarly, in an educational context, the importance of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) has been recognised; initially as a method of formative assessment, progressing onto ongoing performance monitoring (Hamilton, 2009). Students and their tutors work collaboratively to create and review goals for each individual student, a process that is pivotal in tracking and monitoring development, therefore not only beneficial to the

learner and their identity through considering their individual perspective, values and motivations within that context, but mutually advantageous to the mentor, for whom identity development also occurs (Hamilton, 2009). The present study also highlights how this can be beneficial to help establish the role of LM through relationship building and role identity. Like academy football players, students are organised by ability and lacking expert status, so the use of goal setting and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bounded) targets support the structuring of the necessary road map for that individual (Hamilton, 2009).

Additionally, the use of individual development plans with specific review meetings, encourages self-awareness, from both players and staff alike. Such an internal process of evaluating progress promotes the concept of self-development (Ashley and Reiter-Palmon, 2012) through our own, as well as others' perceptions, raised in Cooley's (1972) looking-glass self. The importance of perceptions in reviewing one's own development was also supported in the theory of objective self-awareness (Duval and Wicklund, 1972), where it was suggested that the social evaluation of the self allows consideration of self and other perspectives contributing to one's self-awareness, and subsequently helping to establish a clear 'road map' of development for individuals, based on goals, strengths and areas of improvement for each individual, in this case, player.

4.2.2 Monitoring Progress and Development of Academy Players

The next key point to emerge was 'Monitoring Progress and Development', which as with the previous point, also involves all players across the academy system, to continuously review and evaluate their progress at their respective club, regardless of their 'road map'. Again, as this process is not loan-specific, LMs may not be directly involved with this process, or there may be varying levels of engagement with a LM if relevant to the future intentions for a player. This will often consist of contact and input from MDT to facilitate this process and allow monitoring across all areas of the individual's performance and development.

Similar to the educational environment, employee progress and performance monitoring is also a pivotal process within many organisations, enforcing a cyclical feedback opportunity for employees and supervisors or mentors to provide both formal

and informal evaluation, support and future planning, as can be seen in figure 11 (Shields and Kaine, 2015). Within the football context, such progress monitoring is a requirement within the academy as the EPPP states it as “an essential entitlement for each player” (4.3.3 Player Progression:21). Therefore, progress monitoring is a standardised process for all academy players, regardless of intention for loan transfers, but many LMs, as well as wider club staff declared involvement in this process to discuss current progress and potential opportunities, including that of loan movements.

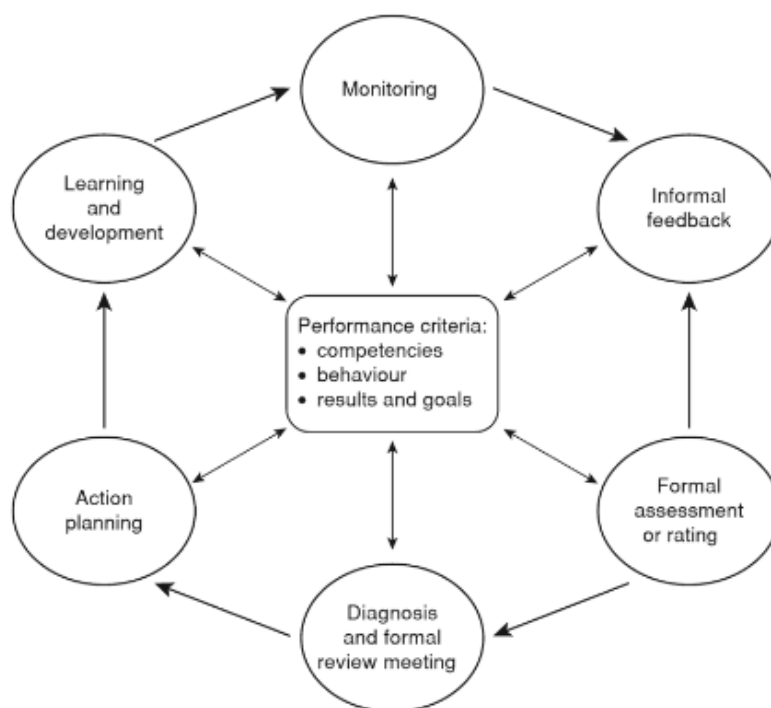


Figure 11: The performance management cycle (Shields and Kaine, 2015: 6)

4.2.3 Loan Specific Planning and Placement

Once it has been decided that a player will benefit from going out on a loan transfer, or the player has reached that stage of their development plan, or career, the LM will often become instrumental in this stage, leading and engaging in the player and club matching process. Within this, the LM will work closely with wider members of staff, other members of the loan team (where applicable) and the player’s agent to explore the potential loan options for the player, ensuring that careful consideration informs the decision-making process regarding where a player is sent on loan and why that is a beneficial transfer for them. Maintaining clear communication with the player, their

parents, agent and wider support staff within the club during this phase is optimal but may not always take place, as ideas of what is best for the player may not align between all parties involved, this supports the findings of Clarke and Harwood (2014) who suggested that parents show differing responses and levels of willingness in terms of allowing club staff to make decisions about their children's future in football.

Therefore, the person-environment (P-E) fit, defined as "the degree of compatibility or match between individuals and some aspect of their work environment" (Kristof-Brown and Guay, 2010: 3) has to be carefully considered and is of paramount importance when any employee is embedded within or entering a place of work (Lee et al., 2017), whether that be on a permanent or temporary basis. Thus, recruitment processes can prioritise individuals with experience and characteristics that closely match the demands and culture in the respective workplace (Lee et al., 2017). This method is largely beneficial within the loans process as it allows parent club staff to use their knowledge of the holistic individual to be sent on a loan transfer, as well as looking into potential loan clubs to ensure an appropriate match before a commitment is made to the temporary transfer. Particularly with the varying reasons that a player may be sent on loan, there should be great consideration as to which loan club the player will spend up to one season at. However, there are often difficulties that arise within this match-up process, whereby there may not be a great choice of loan clubs, or equally there may be very short windows of opportunity to complete a transfer, so such careful consideration may not always take place.

Communication with the loan club from this point onwards is pivotal in the loan process, for all parties involved. Not only does this encourage a more effective monitoring and evaluation process of the player's progression, it also provides a strong foundation for relationship building between the two clubs, which has been identified as facilitative for the loan process whereby parent clubs can regularly send loan players to that club each season.

A member of player care staff recognised the importance of building relationships with other clubs, particularly parent clubs of loan players that spent time at the Championship club she worked for:

We've had really good experiences with [Premier League club], there is more chance of [Premier League club] saying "oh we are going to send this player next year because they were really well looked after." So, I think it's bigger than just looking after the player it's building that relationship with another club and there is more chance of them sending other players to us. (PCL3, Premier League Club 2)

Communication with the player's agent is another important aspect of the loan club identification process. Both players and club staff highlighted the involvement of player agents at this stage, often with their own contacts and plans for a player to go on loan. Player 1 shared that:

My agent got in contact saying "[League One club] are interested in getting you in", it was basically confirmed, I think he's spoken with [parent club] and with [loan club] and the two clubs had spoken as well, but I didn't actually hear anything from [parent club], all communication was done with my agent. (Player 1, Premier League Club 2)

It is therefore essential that clubs, and more specifically LMs, have close contact with agents during the early stages of loan planning so that the holistic development and needs of the player can be accounted for and open communication about a player's options can be considered and discussed by all parties involved. Similarly, this would be beneficial when ensuring that the player and loan club are well-suited based on the aims of the temporary transfer. LM6 described how he prepares players for their loan transfer with the loan staff then monitors during the loan period:

I also sort of sit down with players just before they go and we set objectives that they're hoping to get out of the loan and that then I have an analyst that works with me and he analyses generally and also to the objectives, so if one of the lad's objectives is 'better quality in the last third', he has that in mind when he's analysing his match performance and we'll feed that back to the player. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Once the necessary preparations have been put in place, if there is sufficient time, prior to the loan transfer, the next stage is the successful transfer of the player.

4.2.4 Player Transfer

The movement of the player from parent club to loan club is a significant and differing experience for many football players. This may be influenced by the proximity of the loan club to the parent club, how many loan transfers they have experienced before, if any, as well as the player's perception of the loan transfer in relation to their career and future within football. Participants identified a range of circumstances in which a player may be transferred, including the summer and winter transfer windows, as well as the time period between confirming the loan transfer and deployment to the loan club.

Some participants described extremely quick turnarounds from the transfer being agreed to the movement of the player to the loan club, which therefore could encourage an increased feeling of stress or anxiety in a player, particularly where they are transferred in the winter window, with no break in competitive games. One player explained:

It's not like you can move to a team and then you've got two or three weeks to get to know everyone and then play games, you're straight in, you've just got to be ready, as quick as it is, you could sign on a Thursday and you've got a game the Saturday, that's just how it is, so you've got no time to settle into it, you're straight into it. (Player 2, Premier League Club 2)

However, any preparation, support or experience gained by players becomes noticeably beneficial in these circumstances, whereby a player going out on loan can draw on that preparation and experience to facilitate the transition to his new club and environment. Player 1 reflected on his previous experience when going on loan:

Because I'd been on loan the season before, I sort of knew what I was expecting, or what it was about. I mean obviously it was a lot different because it's a step up in club status so it was a much bigger club, but the transition was relatively easy, I knew what to expect. (Player 1, Premier League Club 2)

This is also the stage in which communication with staff, namely the LM, becomes fundamental and frequent, with several participants recognising that the LM will be in touch with players at least every one-two weeks, depending on the specific needs and

desire of the player. Thus, there is a need to have a strong rapport to support and facilitate the transition of the player to their new environment and ensure effective communication is maintained to mediate the player's application and progress. LA2 highlighted those involved in helping player preparation, from both the parent and loan club, once the loan transfer had been organised:

The coach will try and make sure there's a relationship with the player before he goes out, and then we'll have player liaison or other support staff who are also on call with bills and if they go to a new country then things like cars, flats, but most of the time the loan club will sort out most of that stuff for the player, so they'll have their own player welfare department that will look after them then we'll kind of just make sure that we pick up the loose ends, but most of the time we'll let the loan clubs sort that out. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

It is therefore vital that the parent club and the loan club have a strong level of communication and begin developing a relationship at this point, if there is not one in place already, to ensure that the loan player has an effective holistic support network in place. Research by Tobiano et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of established relationships and communication when completing the handover of information within hospital units. Thus, the parent and loan football clubs would mutually benefit from outlining responsibilities and relationships from the planning stages of the loan transfer, to ensure information sharing is clear and consistent, with focus on optimal development for each loan player.

4.2.5 Monitoring Progress and Development of Loan Players

This stage was recognised to be the same as stage two, but specific to players on loan and predominantly managed by the LM and loan team, or relevant staff within other roles. This involves communicating regularly with the; a) loan player, b) staff at loan club, and c) MDT at parent/loan club as appropriate, as well as monitoring performances using statistical and data analysis (input from loan analysts in clubs that have them). During this monitoring stage, many participants verbalised the involvement of LMs and other club staff visiting loan players, observing training sessions and competitive matches, as well as a range of virtual contact via telephone/video calls and text messages, with differences in frequency and mode of contact across clubs. LM5 (Premier League Club 4) stated that "it is my responsibility

to make sure I watch individual players live once a month”, whereas another LM recognised an example which suggests more of a focus on certain players at certain times, especially those placed at further distance:

We had a player whose in our first team at the moment he was on loan at (League Two club) which is quite a way from (location of parent club) and my focus for part of the season was to go and watch him so I had to go down there on a regular basis to watch him play. (LM2, Championship Club 1)

Similarly, one LM expressed the importance of being visible to players through face to face contact, despite some of the challenges in doing so:

One big part of my role is making sure I'm visible to the players as well, so I get to see them, again it depends where they are in terms of frequency and again, it's probably not crystallised as much as it could be in terms of a formal protocol but I'll certainly get to see the players, I would say on average, probably five to six times per season...obviously the ones that are on loan closer to home, it's far easier, the players in Europe I'll try and get out to every two or three months for a trip, even if it's for a couple of days just to spend some time with them, watch them train, see them in their environment, erm but yeah hopefully between that and the constant communication we can do what we need to, to iron out those problems. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Therefore, even with the lack of specific responsibilities that come with the LM role, there was consistent recognition of visits to loan players, but differences in approach to this which were largely influenced by the resources of the club and the location of loan players that the LM had to account for. The inclusion of in-person visits from LMs when supporting loan players is consistent with research conducted on a military sample, which found that social support through face to face contact was significantly more successful in reducing the impact of disruptive life events when compared to virtual forms of communication (Lewandowski et al., 2011).

Additionally, other participants also acknowledged how players may be monitored on loan, with SP1 (Premier League Club 8) stating “any player that is on loan and gets observed, there's a reporting system for how they performed and how they did”, showing an awareness across different club staff in terms of how loan players are

reviewed in terms of their development. This stage of progress monitoring will continue throughout the duration of the loan and will involve or lead onto the decision and planning of the player's next steps following the loan. This supports existing literature on secondments which has established that monitoring and evaluation is a fundamental part of achieving a successful and effective secondment, facilitating staff development (Ferguson, 1994; Dryden and Rice, 2008). The present thesis also extends this to reiterate the importance of progress monitoring in the football environment, both in terms of loan players, as well as part of the wider academy development process.

4.2.6 *Future Planning*

As a player approaches the end of their loan transfer, he and the LM will need to have a plan in place for his next steps. The future planning stage overlaps with progress monitoring in step five, and the decision may be made or confirmed at various time points of the loan experience for players, not necessarily at the end, however, it is at this time that preparations will need to be put in place, as necessary. Here, a player is likely to face a number of outcomes, some more desirable than others, which will be influenced by his performance and development at the loan club, as well as a number of factors at the parent club. It is usually decided that the player will a) return to the parent club with the intention of progressing to the first team squad, b) return to the parent club and continue to play for the under 23's age group, c) go out on loan to another club within the next transfer window, d) be sold/released by the parent club. The LM will have central involvement in this process, including communication with the player and their agent, however, this decision will be based on contribution and input from various members of staff at the parent club, namely first team staff to establish the intentions and desire for that player.

However, generally, LMs did not have formal processes in place at this stage, but with recognition of the evolution of the role, regarded this as an area for future development whereby they could look to improve the support and guidance for players as they complete their loan transfer. LM4 expressed his difficulty in exclusively overseeing the loan players and process, stating that preparation for the future would be an area that he would like to develop and feels he could, if he had access to greater resources:

It's certainly one of the frustrations for me that I can be spread quite thin and it's very difficult for me then to add the value in some areas and that [future planning] would probably be one. The only thing I would say is that throughout the loan, as part of my conversations with the player, there'll be a continual sort of review of the loan going on between them and myself and I'll invite other members of staff to be part of that as well, so coaches, other key stakeholders at our club that will constantly be giving the player feedback on how we think the loan is going, what we expect from them and with a view to next steps, and the plan. So that's kind of continually always happening and then there would just be one slightly more formal one of those at the end of the season, which would be kind of like a review of loan. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Depending on the intentions for that player going forward, their circumstances and involvement in the parent club will vary. For players that return to the senior team or U23s team, will be embedded back into the parent club environment. Even players that are provided with an additional loan move will be reintroduced to the parent club setting as necessary until the new temporary transfer is organised and implemented. However, it is less clear what happens for players that are sold or released following a loan transfer. Football clubs predominantly lack formal support and strategies to facilitate transition out of football for deselected players, at a very stressful time (Green, 2009). Mental health issues that may occur as a result of such deselection include anxiety and depression, as well as reduced self-esteem (Wilkinson, 2020). It is important to offer counselling to those players who may need it, particularly if being deselected (Wilkinson, 2021). However, similar support may also need to be offered to those experiencing downward mobility as this is also a type of deselection, whereby a player is sold to a team competing at a lower competitive standard than they expected to be involved in. Therefore, more research is evidencing that football clubs are becoming increasingly aware of and addressing mental health issues within the game (Calvin, 2017; Green, 2009).

For the players making the more successful transition to return to their parent club, particularly those progressing to senior football, advancing to a higher standard of competition, support is also fundamental. Consistent with extant literature, Pummell et al. (2008) advocated the importance of support during career transition in sport, specifically looking at event riders progressing to the next competitive level. They

highlighted that despite being a positive transition, stress was evident for the riders (Pummel et al., 2008), which is to be expected across sports given the changes and additional pressures that performers are likely to be exposed to at higher standards of competition. Regardless of this stress, various forms of support (emotional, technical, tangible and informational) from peers, parents, coaches and their sporting organisation was facilitative to the riders. In the present thesis, the LMs were highly responsible for such a range of support but depending on their experience and involvement in the football environment, may have felt more confident and comfortable providing some types of support over others, this therefore reiterated the importance of holistic and collective support from parents/carers, teammates, MDT, loan staff, as well as both the parent and loan football clubs.

Similarly, organisational support included engaging with teammates during warm ups and having a network of individuals who can support performers, whether that be experts or non-experts that can provide support, as needed by the individual. Additionally, esteem support was highlighted as beneficial from parents and coaches (Pummell et al., 2008), which also appeared to be important for players in the current study, knowing that people around them, both within and beyond the football context, had belief in them and reinforced their own belief in themselves – creating the self-fulfilling prophecy. Within the present study, one player shared his experiences of organisational and technical support at two loan clubs, a lot of which came directly from the manager of each club:

So in terms of the loan clubs and personal development, they both helped, so with [League One loan club] we sit down, we have team meetings, we have group meetings, so for instance, defenders are together, and then also if you want individual meetings as well. And that's pretty similar to what was the case at [Conference loan club] as well, we used to have team meetings and we did do a lot of video analysis meetings as well, so if there was something the gaffer did or didn't like at both clubs they would pull you up on it and show you. (Player 1, Premier League Club 2)

Similarly, another player articulated the importance of his friends and family as a support network whilst he was on loan:

I'm tight with my family and my friends, so everything that happens with me, they all know, so yeah I'm in regular contact with them anyway, so I'd go to them, my family would ring me every day or facetime me so I'd always be in contact with them, just like I would if I was at home anyway...they were probably ringing me more because I was so far away. (Player 2, Premier League Club 2)

However, when referring to support received when planning for the next steps, a participant expressed a desire for greater communication from the manager of the parent club in terms of his future with them, having been given previous indication of the manager wanting contact with him, he explained:

First team contact, that's the only thing I'd like to say I want more of, so for instance, after I finished my loan spell at [Conference club], erm I was told that the gaffer wanted to speak to me, then I think on the day I was told "no he doesn't want to speak to you", so I ended up speaking to the head coach, so it would have been for me, a personal benefit to sit down and review with the gaffer, my season with [Conference club], erm and then his thoughts for the season ahead, so then I could start preparing for the next season. And then, in terms of this season, it's just that first team contact again that I would like more of...my long term future with the club, what he's thinking, plus my short term future as well, where he sees me in the next sort of six months. (Player 1, Premier League Club 2)

Therefore, transparency and clear communication from the parent club as well strong support structures were very important when preparing for the future, in the present study. To ensure effective support is in place then participants also emphasised the need for multi-disciplinary contact for those players during their loan transfers.

Thus, it is evident that loan players are increasingly receiving support from both within and outside of the footballing context. McLeod and Lively (2006) provided a framework within the social structure and personality perspective (see figure 12) whereby they established several layers of groupings and relationships that an individual possesses within any given social context. The individual is at the centre, with a series of layers progressing outward, with the most intimate remaining central and closest to the individual, namely dyads followed by small groups, which progresses onto communities, organisations and institutions, and the social system forming the most outer layer.

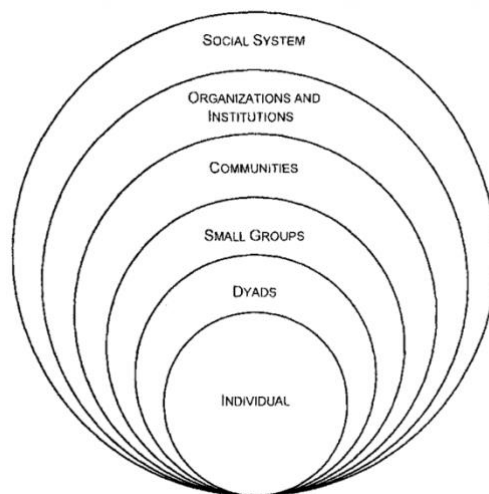


Figure 12: Social structure and personality framework (McLeod and Lively, 2006: 78).

When applying this model to loan players as the individual (inner layer), their relationship with the LM would be one of the many dyadic relationships in which they would possess, this will be explored further in chapter six. Similarly, with the LM as the individual in the centre, their relationship with each loan player would form a series of dyadic relationships that exist for them. The MDT would then form a small group that the LM would belong to, providing holistic support for loan players specifically, as well as becoming integrated with other small groups such as wider collaboration across the academy. Therefore, the academy itself could form a community, within the football organisation which is embedded in the wider social system of the football industry. Within some clubs, there may be collaboration between the academy and wider, or senior areas of the club, but in others, these departments may be separate or disjointed (Relvas et al., 2010), therefore the extent of relationships and involvement

that the LM has with the different departments may help or hinder communication across the club regarding player progression and loan opportunities.

However great instability exists within those groups and relationships in football, given the outcome-oriented and cut throat environment, that is before the consideration of the many new relationships and groupings that the loan player must adapt to when entering the loan club, many of which will also be lost when transitioning back to the parent club, or onto a new loan club. Therefore, it is important that parent club staff providing dyadic relationships for players, as well as colleagues, are well developed in attempt to provide some stability and support in an otherwise unstable and unpredictable social system for many. Thus, possessing a role that is clearly defined and well-structured, with specific focus on player support and development, is fundamental for LMs and other loan staff, along with wider MDT staff supporting all academy players, to encourage some constancy and consistency in support under circumstances which are likely to be very overwhelming for young players. This framework can also be used to refer to the importance of establishing relationships between organisations within the same industry, namely parent and loan clubs, strengthening bonds between clubs to provide support to LMs and players alike, also further demonstrating the need for understanding of intergroup processes alongside the intragroup mentioned previously.

These findings align with a wealth of literature on the importance of support during transition (e.g. Ditzen et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2010; Pittman and Richmond, 2008), whilst also adding the lens of social structure and personality (see figure 12) within an SSP perspective to identify the range of relationships and group involvement that is likely to be influential during periods of transition, as well as specifically for loan transfers. This not only contributes novel application of the social structure and personality framework to the sporting context but provides a model that can be utilised in practice to assist recognition and support for individuals during transition, to identify and reflect on relationships and groupings to ensure holistic support and development is being prioritised for individuals, regardless of the transition they are facing.

4.3. The Title, Skillset and Requirement of the LM

The final sub-theme to emerge from the analysis was 'The Title, Skillset and Requirement of the LM'. The description and expectation of LMs can vary significantly both within and between professional football clubs, much of this may be explained by the 'evolutionary' nature of the role, as highlighted previously, whereby uncertainty remains in terms of the specific responsibilities of the role. However, there is also differentiation with regards to a) the exact job title of the 'Loan Manager' and how they are placed or recognised within the club, b) the necessary skillset and experience of the individual in this role, or an equivalent one, and c) the requirement of having an LM at the club and if this should be enforced on a mandatory basis by the EPPP.

4.3.1. Title of the LM

Within this sub-theme, the first point that emerged within analysis was the "Title of the LM". The LM role is becoming increasingly established as a position across professional football clubs, particularly those in the top two football divisions in England; The EPL and The EFL Championship. With the growing set of responsibilities acquired by this developing role, there is however variation in the job title allocated to individuals operating within the position, as previously mentioned, particularly where individuals may share the role with another employee, or as an additional responsibility to their existing role at the club (e.g. age-group coach).

One Loan Analyst stipulated that there are a number of individuals at their club that are categorised under coaching staff, but these individuals oversee the loan process and players, on a full time basis:

We've got specific coaches who are responsible for the loan players...one coach will have anywhere between 8-10 players that he mentors and his job is being in regular contact with that player, WhatsApp, facetime, he'll also go and visit the club, he'll visit the player, the player's manager, sporting director, sort of create a relationship between [parent club] and the club that the player's on loan to and obviously keep that kind of relationship with the player...we haven't termed it as a loan manager, we call them coaches, I don't know if that's a good thing or not, I've always had personal qualms with that. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

This evidences the different ways that clubs may allocate roles to those working with loan players, as well as the difficulties that wider members of staff may have with the clarification of individuals in those roles, particularly where they are working in close proximity with the individuals in the LM role or equivalent. This could cause ambiguity across the club for both staff and players alike, depending on the clarity in organisational structure and the relationships built with individuals across the organisation. LM6 also recognised that his position is not entitled LM, despite predominantly fulfilling the responsibilities of this position, explaining “I get involved with other bits and bobs, but generally my job is loans manager, even though my title doesn’t say that.” (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This could again be reflective of the evolutionary nature of the role, as previously discussed. Additionally, this may be influenced by the time frame in which the individual was initially allocated specific loan responsibilities, with the recent emergence of the LM role, clubs that are now allocating those responsibilities within the club, are likely to adopt the modern and relevant title of LM. However, clubs that have maintained this role over longer periods of time and adapted it as the seasons have progressed may find that it was established with an alternative title which has now been maintained. Similarly, each club will have their own aims and intentions for this role, with differing priorities in what should be achieved and how it should be conducted in line with club philosophy and practice, therefore also influencing the title and nature of the role.

Additionally, someone possessing the loan responsibilities as part of a dual responsibility or secondary role within the club is less likely to hold an official title relevant to the area of loans, given that it is not their priority or primary responsibility within the club. Job titles are viewed as particularly important within workplaces and may be perceived based on the anchoring bias (Smith et al., 1989; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974) which suggests that a title acts as an anchor point for what can then be expected for the role, therefore influencing how people make judgements about the skillset and knowledge possessed by the individual in the role (Jenkins, 2014; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Titles are therefore labels through which individuals understand and develop expectations about the responsibilities of others, whereby additional tasks may be given despite not appearing relevant for the job role and perhaps being

more appropriate for an alternative position (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Melling, 2019). Thus, having a specific reference to 'loans' in a job title e.g. LM, loan analyst, is likely to impact the way colleagues and players anticipate the responsibilities of those role holders, compared to other titles possessed by individuals who share loan responsibilities with other areas, e.g. coaching roles, and do not have any reference to loans in their title, which may be harder for others to gain awareness of their range of responsibilities.

There is also research proposing that self-reflective job titles can have a positive impact through reducing perceived emotional exhaustion (Grant et al., 2014), new job titles have also been recognised to improve work satisfaction, identification with the organisation and reflection on one's contribution (The Harvard Business Review, 2016). With the different approaches to job titles for individuals that oversee the loan process, football clubs may benefit from discussing the job title for that individual within their club, to allow an appropriate self-reflected title to be established, in hopes of increasing satisfaction and organisational identity. All participants with loan responsibilities appeared to be happy with the title they possessed, whether loans was their sole job focus, or they shared those responsibilities with wider roles across the club.

Greater value may also need to be placed on the operation of the loans process in certain football clubs and allocation of responsibilities, particularly where there is no existing LM or equivalent, despite many top flight football clubs being very active within the loans market in terms of sending players to other clubs on a temporary basis. Understanding the importance of job titles, as well as understanding the value of the loans process for holistic player development could encourage the careful consideration of who possesses the role and how they could fit effectively into the club's structure and culture.

4.3.2. Skillset of the LM

Subsequent to the lack of clarity or blueprint that comes with the LM role, there is also ambiguity surrounding the desirable skills, qualifications and experience that suitable candidates should possess for this position. An extensive level of knowledge and familiarity with the footballing context may be assumed, but with so little detail

regarding what is expected from an LM, then many clubs have established differing ideas of the designated individual within their organisation, depending on the club philosophy and value placed on loan transfers. However, emphasis on having an individual who can competently fulfil the LM role has been asserted, PCL1 stated “having the right person is very important. If it’s the right person, it’s massive, if not, it takes away from the progress made over the years.” (PCL1, Premier League Club 7)

However, there is no explicit definition or outline of exactly what that ‘right person’ looks like or should consist of in terms of their skills and experience, thus, similar to many areas of recruitment/role allocation, football clubs are having to make this judgement based on what they feel would suit their organisation. Nevertheless, with new and evolving roles, such as the LM, it is helpful to establish an approximate guide of certain characteristics or attributes that would be beneficial for an individual possessing the role, to facilitate the progression and development of the loan system across the professional football environment in the UK.

With the young age of retirement for football players in comparison with other professions, as well as the expertise and experience that these individuals have within the industry, it is common, as with many roles in football clubs, that the LM position is allocated to a retired football player, usually someone that had a career with the club, or extensive playing experience across different clubs. Despite seeming like an obvious choice of candidate, given the first-hand experience that retired players hold within the game, this was not positively recognised by all participants and therefore holds both benefits and limitations in terms of evaluating if this should be a requirement for the individual possessing the role.

The benefits that come with having a retired football player in the LM role include; a) their strong understanding of the football environment, b) their personal experience as player which encourages relatability with loan players, c) their understanding of the club environment and how they want to operate, d) their existing relationships and contacts within the industry which could be beneficial when planning loan transfers and in facilitating the transition process for players. One participant highlighted the advantages he feels there is with being a retired player in the LM role:

I think there's gonna be an advantage to the role if it's occupied by an ex-player because you're trying to tell the players about things you have gone through yourself, some of the difficulties, some of the things that helped you to have the career you had and that has its place, definitely. Anyone can occupy the role, but like I said, for me, it's always an added advantage to try and guide the players as you've gone through that and I think the players respect you a little bit more as you've been there, you've done it. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

This clearly expresses the benefit of relatability and respect between the player and LM in this situation, whereby personal experience can facilitate or advise the loan player as they encounter their own opportunities and adversity within the football context. Similarly, a loan analyst explained the benefits of a LM having played professional, first team football when working with young players with hopes to do the same:

Different clubs might put different emphasis on what that role is, in terms of us, our loan managers, our coaches are kind of mentors, it helps that all of ours have played professional football, so they've already done it, a lot of them, well, all of them at the very highest level. So, they've got that experience, to be like "look I've done it before" and you automatically gain respect. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

However, PCL1 recognised that it could be problematic to assume that an ex-player would be best for this role:

It tends to be a role they give to a former player who they are trying to find a job for which I am not sure is necessarily the best approach always but that tends to be, from my experience, that it's always been a former club, I am not going to say legend, but someone they wanted to help out post-retirement so that's gotta come into the fore a little bit more. (PCL1, Premier League Club 7)

Therefore, despite their first-hand experience, a retired player may be allocated as the club wants to help them, following their exit from their playing career in football, rather than identifying them as the best candidate, which may not prove effective as a recruitment strategy if the only deciding factor is their playing experience. However, participants also recognised wider skills and expertise that retired footballers can

contribute to the LM role, that individuals without professional playing experience, may lack. One interviewee explained:

I wouldn't necessarily say it's essential, but I think it's important that they have experience of being a player, so I wouldn't necessarily say that someone like myself, who's not been a professional footballer, would be in the best place to advise a young professional footballer. Now, I think you could do a lot of the work in terms of pointing people in the right directions and facilitating but I think one of the really important skills of a loan manager is having those softer skills to be able to have those discussions with players about what it's like being a young professional, you know how to deal with certain situations that come up. So I think it's an ideal role for someone who has been a professional, but maybe they're not gonna be a head coach, they understand the game, they understand the demands of the game, technically, tactically but psychologically and mentally more than anything. (LA1, Premier League Club 2)

Therefore, it is not only recognising the relatability of playing experience from retired players, but the holistic, multi-dimensional footballing context that they can understand and support, in terms of technical, tactical and psychological experiences within football. However, again, it is important to note that such holistic awareness is required both within and away from the football context, which may be more challenging for retired players that may not be aware of individual experiences outside of the football environment that were not similar or relatable to their own, thus, despite being recognised as a largely beneficial characteristic of LMs, should not be considered essential or a determining factor when selecting individuals for this role. One participant promoted the importance of knowledge of transition which has been suggested as important to those possessing the LM role, with the skill of empathy, whether or not the feelings and experiences being disclosed, are comparable or relatable to the LM:

I'd say a prominent one would be transition, err understanding what it takes to go from academy to first team football, I think there's some skill of empathy, err in terms of understanding the players and understanding what they're going through and having maybe a relaxed outlook on that, making sure that actually yeah I can relate to this, let's have a talk about your experiences, but not maybe always basing it on personal experiences, trying to empathise with the player to understand their

experiences, but actually knowing that they've been through that experience to help them with it. I think sometimes it's easy to say "well we used to do this", well it's kind of every situation is different so that means it might need a new answer therefore actually having that experience will be good to think 'well how can we actually look address this, you're going through X, Y and Z, I went through X but not Y or Z, so actually how can I help you get through this?' and actually having those discussions. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

This highlights the importance of empathy and understanding as well as strong listening skills, with the knowledge and experience in the football environment to ensure that the best and most effective solution or coping mechanism can be found and utilised. Similarly, the ability to build and maintain relationships was acknowledged as a pivotal skill for a LM, one participant recognised the benefit of his long term experience at his current club and his network of support at the club:

I've been at the club for a long time, so erm you know the benefit of that is that over time, I've developed obviously very strong relationships across the club in different roles and many many different people, so...even if it was more informal, you know people nothing to do with my area, we've got some good people at the club that I can consult with or bounce ideas off or ask for their thoughts on something so that's always there as well which is, I guess the benefit of having erm been at a club for a long time. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Thus, the absence of professional playing experience does not appear to have disadvantaged LM4, particularly with his extensive experience at his current football club whereby he has been able to establish strong relationships. Equally, the significance of strong relationships was also recognised by a participant, who has played professional football for the club in which he now possesses the LM role, he stated "I know coaches, parents and player backgrounds from long term involvement with the club" (LM1, Premier League Club 1). Therefore, this highlights that having good relationships and familiarity within the club and with a range of people involved in that club is largely beneficial to the LM role, with emphasis on incorporating holistic support through familiarity with key members of the players' lives and support networks, such as coaches and parents. This is a skill which is achievable and established by LMs regardless of professional playing experience and appears

beneficial in the early stages of the LM role, as it continues to develop and evolve within the industry. Based on recognition of responsibilities, it is also essential to be able to develop and maintain relationships with a range of staff members across various loan clubs, with effective communication skills that will be vital for all stages of the loan process.

Similarly, given the large network of communication that a LM is expected to build and maintain throughout intra-club and inter-clubs operations, it was also suggested that the ability to work independently is important for this role, with frequently having to work alone in the area of loans, or within very small teams. Therefore, alongside the ability to build relationships with others, managing and organising those relationships may require a lot of work exclusively from the individual in the LM role, especially when transitioning themselves from other roles. One participant submitted:

I think to be a loan manager or loan coach, they have to be able to work fairly independently and quite separate because you're managing a lot of the individual relationships here and there. So, a lot of these coaches, I mean, a challenge is just using a laptop on a daily basis and sitting down, it's the normal transition from being a professional footballer to not doing that. But they have to be quite organised, they have to be able to manage relationships well, they have to be able to obviously have that technical and tactical assessment of player performances, but I think there are a lot of other skills that are underestimated in terms of day to day management of relationships, being organised, a lot of travelling, so yeah, depends on the person. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

Additionally, LA2 raised the potential challenges that may be experienced by retired players in this role, not only in terms of working independently, which depending on their career, they may not have frequently experienced, but also the technological and 'office-based' aspects of the role may increase the demand and difficulty of the role for those who have not previously operated in that way. Whereas individuals with previous experience in jobs of a similar nature, may find the transition to the LM role slightly easier, or less contrasting, having formerly worked in a similar manner within the football environment, albeit in a different area or department, there is likely to be transferable skills and knowledge, including office work, use of technology or specialist software. Although participants recognised a range of fundamental skills and

experience that are likely to benefit the LM, given the lack of clarity in the job role and description at present, as well as the different approaches that individual clubs take when utilising the LM role, it is difficult to establish a specific set of skills or characteristics that are desirable for this position. However, such a lack of essential criteria encourages flexibility in the role and within clubs, permitting the employment of an LM who can operate in a way that is appropriate for that club, their philosophy and aims regarding the loan process. Conversely, such ambiguity may also lead to confusion or uncertainty about how best to carry out the role.

It can therefore be concluded that further understanding is needed surrounding the key criteria for the LM role, nevertheless, at this stage, there are certain pre-requisites that have been identified as important by participants. These include;

1. extensive experience and knowledge of the professional football environment, which may include, but is not limited to, playing experience, which can be used to mentor players,
2. the ability to have empathy with others and build strong relationships with players, agents and staff (at both the parent club and loan clubs), and
3. the ability to work independently as either a single person department or exclusively overseeing certain LM responsibilities.

Additional desirable skills include: active listening, problem solving, language skills, management (when working within loan team), MDT understanding and communication.

The emphasis that many participants placed on the need for LMs to have previously playing experience at professional level supports literature on wider roles in football, such as Head Coach, which was acknowledged in association football as being an “exclusive preserve of former players” (Kelly, 2008: 410), although counterexamples exist (Potts Harmer, 2019). It has therefore been recognised that ex-professional players are perceived as having extensive value in the football environment, often being ‘fast-tracked’, meaning that there are “special concessions offered to former elite athletes so that their progress through formal accreditation structures is expedited” (Rynne, 2014: 300).

Such experience is viewed to carry significant benefits, both within the current thesis as well as extant literature (e.g. Cushion et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2003; Mallett et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2006), through tacit knowledge, only gained through personal experience, as well as context-specific understanding of the needs and demands of the environment (Blackett et al., 2017; Nash and Collins, 2006; Rynne, 2014). Therefore, Blackett et al. (2017) found unanimous agreement across their participants regarding the need to employ individuals as head coaches who had competed in the professional game themselves due to this unteachable knowledge that could not be gained purely through coaching qualifications. Therefore, the present thesis largely supports, but also extends these findings through the suggestion that playing experience is an advantage but should not be viewed as essential in the area of LMs. Particularly as the role is still in its infancy, but also with no formal prerequisite in terms of qualifications, then clubs should take responsibility in selecting individuals that they feel would be most suitable to carry the role effectively, but also are familiar enough with the specific club and wider professional industry to operate in such a fast-paced, results oriented environment.

4.3.3 The Requirement of the LM

In line with various roles stated as mandatory within the EPPP, there was discussion with participants, as to whether the LM role should also become a requirement on either a full time or part time basis respective to the necessary football club and academy category. With the introduction of the EPPP (2012: 88), the following staffing requirements for English Football Academies were provided, with the need to; develop an academy management team, establish a technical board to “link the Academy to the wider club”, employ a specialist coach to lead each academy phase, maintain standards for Chartered Physiotherapists and Doctors within academies, as well as have a fully licenced Senior Professional Development Coach (Reserve Team Coach) bridging the Academy with the First Team. Additionally, Categories 1 and 2 academies must possess; a full time Coach Developer to lead CPD (Continuing Professional Development) programme for coaches, two full time specialist coaches for each academy phase, a Head of Sports Science and Medicine or equivalent, a full time Lead Sports Scientist or equivalent, and at least two full time match analysts.

Participants in the current thesis broadly agreed that the LM should be a requirement under EPPP guidance, largely as it adds structure, clarity and wider support to both staff and players within the club. Similarly, this role operates in congruence with wider support staff roles, such as player care teams/officers and with the dominant focus on player development, as with other roles, it is viewed as a vital part of holistic development whilst players remain within academy age groups. This also provides a continuation of the support that players have access to throughout their academy development, so it is important to provide that additional level of support as an extension of the academy, whilst they face a new, developmental experience. Players within the PDP would also have access to various support staff if they were still playing at parent club, thus it is important to provide consistency and ensure they also have a key contact to bridge their experience on loan and act as first port of call. Even if independence and resilience are being encouraged, all players should know who they can call upon for support if and when necessary. One LM strongly supported the need to have a mandatory team to support players that are out on loan:

I think that's going to be the next discussion from the Premier League, I think in the next season or two it is going to be made mandatory. Every club now that is sending players out on loan should not just have a loans manager but a team surrounding the young boys. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

The need for a wider support system for loans players is therefore emphasised, whereby there is not only demand for an individual supporting player development, but a more holistic team of staff that are able to effectively support the player during their temporary transfer. While it is established that loans are intended to challenge and further develop players, the fundamental requirement for clubs to oversee this process and maintain communication and support to ensure all parties get the most out of the experience, was also advocated by PCL1 (Premier League Club 7), who stated that "anything that we can do to support players is key". In terms of wider player support, another participant also expressed a positive view on the mandatory staffing in this area:

I think it's quite an important process, especially in terms of transitioning players into the first team, so I think it would definitely

help...I think it is important, for sure, to have a loans manager in place to operationalise the loans situation, so yes, I would definitely say there's scope for that. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

However, despite a unanimous agreement that such support roles have a pivotal place within all professional football clubs, the need to make the LM or equivalent role mandatory was not assumed by all participants. One participant asserted the need to have the right individual in such a position and it was not a priority that the role is mandatory, but more so the importance of having someone appropriate in the role, to meet the individual needs of the loan players:

We're not clones, we're all different, if the EPPP had the same way, we'd all operate identically with the same staff doing the same things and you know we'd just churn out widgets all the same. We all have different structures, we all have different ways of doing things, if you could sort of work the loan system between your existing staff and you could guarantee somehow, I'm not quite sure how you'd do it but you could guarantee that you've still got the same level of service for the lads that are going out on loan, I don't really see that somebody could prove well we've got the 23s coaches and somebody does this and you can see how things are then yeah, I can say "no that's fine as long as the job gets done, as long as the loan experience of him, cause I don't want him training with the 23s", erm I really don't see that somebody where the buck stops here, as long as it all gets done, then no I don't think it should be compulsory. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This highlights the prioritisation within some clubs to ensure that the position is fulfilled effectively, not because it is a requirement of the club, but because the combination of the individual LM (or equivalent) and the philosophy of the club encourages the authentic operation of the loans process, as a valued area within the organisation. Thus, in this sense, recognising a role as compulsory, does not guarantee competency or effective operation of that area, which is particularly difficult with the LM position, due to the lack of role clarity that has currently been established within the football industry in the UK.

Additionally, another difficulty of making the role mandatory at professional level is the varied resources that clubs may have available in fulfilling the role, as with many

positions within football clubs, the category of the academy will influence the extent to which that role has to be carried out, on either a part time or full time basis. However, some clubs may feel that their current structure, which may include shared roles, fits their existing needs and resources to support loan players. An interviewee expressed:

There's not just one designated person and that probably could be better, but I don't think it's justified, for a club like [name of Championship club] with a limited budget, it's probably a part time role for someone, but I feel like the process is probably as efficient or as good as most, within our resources. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

Therefore, the requirement for loan staff is likely to be reflected by the idiosyncrasies of the relevant club, the availability of financial resources, along with the value that they place on the operation and support of the loans process. Subsequently, many clubs may advocate the need for a mandatory LM or loans team if they believe this would enhance their current organisational structure and they have the resources as well as philosophy to implement this as a means of support and development. Other clubs, however, may feel that a shared, dual, or part time role, not necessarily recognised as a LM or loans department, is a more suitable arrangement for their club, particularly if there is a lack of financial feasibility for a specific member of staff. Regardless of whether the LM role is perceived as a mandatory requirement, it is evident within this study that the value placed on the development and wellbeing of loans players is paramount and that it is essential for clubs to appreciate the benefits offered by overseeing this crucial transition phase in players' careers. Thus, given the collective agreement that having a suitable individual in place to support the loan players and process, it is recommended that all clubs are required to evidence that their holistic support provisions extend to loan players, with identification of responsible personnel and their specific duties. Clarification of the LM role and responsibilities, as previously recognised, would also provide a helpful guideline for football organisations to do this.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has offered initial and novel insight into the LM role in professional football, recognised within the first sub-theme of 'Introduction and Evolution of the LM'. With a lack of understanding of this role across sporting literature, the key aspects of recruitment and progression of the role in its infancy were discussed. Many LMs expressed having extensive experience in the football environment, either having previous roles in their existing club, or being approached specifically for the role by a new club, based on their relevant industry experience. There was also support for the need for holistic support, encouraging development of the individual rather than merely the player in professional football, which has also been widely recognised in sport psychology literature, in both football (e.g. Henriksen et al. 2010) and wider sports. This shows successful application of the EPPP in professional football club academies, however there was a need to recognise the importance of extending this to the loan environment, which is not specified in the EPPP, for loan players that are still members of the parent club's PDP and would receive such support within the academy environment.

There was also novel contribution of the lack of priority and support identified for senior loan players, of whom the LM role does not appear to be responsible for, which indicates a gap in both research and practice, to ensure that holistic support and consideration for mental wellbeing is being considered across all loan experiences, regardless of their purpose. Similarly, the role and responsibilities still lack clarity for loan staff, providing insight to the paradoxical notion of those in place to support transition, having themselves struggled with accessing support for their own transition. This further extends the need to understand the experiences of those beyond performers and coaches in sport, particularly through sport psychology literature, looking at the wider organisational structures, roles and experiences within professional sport, and specifically professional football. This is in line with the need to place greater value on loans departments.

This chapter also presented the key responsibilities of LMs that emerged, including involvement in academy-wide processes such as individual contracts and development plans, and monitoring progress and development for all players within

the academy whereby it may be beneficial for LMs and players to familiarise, developing relationships that are likely to be advantageous as players progress through the system. There were also a series of LM specific responsibilities that were identified; loan specific planning and placement, player transfer, monitoring progress and development, and future planning. Each of these were key demands of the LM role, with varying tasks and challenges depending on the club and its approach to loan transfers. However, it was acknowledged that across all responsibilities, MDT support and contact was vital to ensure holistic support was provided throughout the academy system, supporting and extending literature on support within sport psychology (e.g. Pummell et al., 2008).

With regards to the title of an LM, there was variation regarding the term 'loan' being present in the job title, which could be helpful to ensure that other members of the club, as well as external personnel, have clarity in the area of an individual's responsibility. Equally, the presence of dual roles within football clubs was evident, whereby individuals may not hold the title of LM or similar, as loan responsibilities may only be a partial area of their role and therefore would not be representative of the duties they carry out within the club. The necessary skillset of an LM was also discussed, with a lack of formal pre-requisites that are seen as essential or desirable for this role, therefore it is difficult to decipher what makes an effective LM in terms of skills and characteristics.

There was also indication of the need for individuals to have professional playing experience if they are to successfully take on the LM position, although this view was not unanimous as there were participants who had progressed through professional roles within the football environment, without having competed at the highest level. However, being a support role within a fast-paced and ruthless environment, it was suggested that an LM should have a strong experience in the football industry, whether that is constituted by playing experience or not. Similarly, the possession of empathy and strong relationships skills were seen as important, as well as the ability to work independently. Within the final theme, there was also general consensus that, in line with many other roles stated in the EPPP, the LM should become a mandatory requirement of professional football academies, particularly within higher category organisations. Although, there was also acknowledgement that having the right person

in the role, who can effectively carry out the necessary support duties, should be prioritised rather than filling the role merely because it is made compulsory by governing bodies.

The SSP perspective was also applied within this chapter whereby intragroup processes could be understood through the group processes perspective particularly when gaining insight to the role of the LM in terms of their position within the club setting and groups they fit within or are having to form from scratch e.g. loans department with Loan Analysts. Similarly, the social structure and personality (figure 12) framework was applied to LMs, allowing analysis of their wider social context, consisting of several relationships with players and staff alike, as well as consideration of how the academy fits into the wider organisation as a community in itself, with different levels of integration across clubs, whereby the LM may be well embedded within academy and senior departments, or exclusive to the academy. Therefore, providing initial application of this framework from SSP within the professional football context and to the LM role. This framework could therefore be referred to when looking to develop, and promote the loans department within club, showing the wide-reaching benefits of having an individual in the established LM position and the various relationships that can facilitate effective operation of the loans department and supporting the transition of loan players.

Chapter Five: Strategic Management of Loan Transfers

The second findings chapter of the present research 'Strategic Management of Loan Transfers' consists of three key sub-themes; 'Motivations for Sending Players on Loan' (5.1), 'The Player-club Matching Process' (5.2), and 'Club Strategy and Support for Loan Development' (5.3).

5.1 Motivations for Sending Players on Loan

Within this sub-theme a range of reasons emerged regarding why players are sent on loan transfers by football clubs (see table 7), much of this was recognised to depend on the player's individual progress, the club's philosophy, as well as a number of factors regarding the strategic decision making within the club. However, the participants in the current thesis recognised a specific set of motivations that indicate how the decision to send a player on loan is likely to be reached.

Motivations for sending players on loan	Description
<i>Initial exposure to senior football</i>	Relevant to the first loan experience of a player where they have outgrown the U23s environment and need to gain exposure and experience playing at a senior level. Beneficial during PDP.
<i>Continued development</i>	To encourage further development of a player through greater challenge, increased competition and need to prove themselves at a higher level.
<i>Performance loan</i>	Intended to help parent clubs establish whether there is a future for the player at their club, if not, help establish the appropriate competitive standard.
<i>Running contract down</i>	Parent club do not see a future for the player, but they cannot be sold as they need to

	complete existing contract period, therefore sent on loan – frequently senior players.
<i>Showcase player</i>	Parent club do not see a future for the player, so they are sent on loan to increase interest from wider clubs to purchase that player. May link to running down contract but relevant to both youth and senior players.

Table 7: The motivations for sending football players out on loan as emerged from thematic analysis in the current thesis.

One of the LMs established that players “can’t always be categorised and must be treated individually” (LM1, Premier League Club 1) but that there are certain reasons that might commonly be referred to when planning loan transfers. Another LM recognised that these reasons are “predominantly developmental” (LM4, Premier League Club 3). As presented in table 7, there were five main reasons identified in the current thesis, that emerged from thematic analysis, as to why players are sent on loan, namely a) initial exposure to senior football, b) continued development, c) performance loan, d) running contract down, and e) showcase player.

Firstly, exposure to senior football involves a player gaining an initial experience in men’s football, as opposed to the academy setting that they are familiar with. This is usually encouraged when a player is perceived to have outgrown the U23s environment, providing them with the opportunity to bridge the gap between youth and senior football through an initial loan experience. To again apply the social structure and personality (see figure 12) framework to the current findings, as previously mentioned, academies will often form a community within the wider organisation of the football club, whereby players progress to a stage where they need to be challenged within a more advanced senior environment. However, when undergoing a loan transition, this will involve entering a separate organisation, to aid development and opportunity to transition back into the parent club’s senior community. Thus, such exposure confronts young players with the hard-hitting consequences of senior football that do not exist to the same extent in academy football, showing the importance of the win at all costs culture, the vulnerability of the manager’s job and

increased physicality that exist at senior level. This was emphasised by one of the LMs in the current thesis:

Maybe they've outgrown the 23s team...err...and the next step the gap between the 23s and the first team might be too big at this period so then probably send them out on loan to see how he did and then obviously to experience the realism, 23s football is okay but it doesn't give you the realism of actual players that are playing for their mortgages and their bills whereas there's more realism playing in front of more fans, bigger stadiums and a massive three points. Even though we have three points at U23s it's not as taxing and needed as in real life football, day to day in the league and also to stretch them against bigger stronger men that have probably been playing year in year out to see if they can adapt and its maybe for them to get that comfort blanket away from them. (LM2, Championship Club 1)

Therefore, reiterating the fundamental development to be gained for young players looking to develop through exposure to senior football, as opposed to the sheltered academy experience that many players will be embedded in, up to the under 23s age group in the professional development phase (PDP). However, despite the benefits to be gained through such exposure, another of the participants recognised the importance in acknowledging when a player is ready to compete at senior level and ensuring they are not sent on loan before reaching this point:

Some of the younger players are still maybe a little bit under developed and then there is no point in us just sending them out to kinda men's football where they may get injured or it may just be too physical at that moment in time, so we would like to kinda not guarantee it, but we hope that within that time they can go out on loan. (LM1, Premier League Club 1)

Again, emphasising the importance of monitoring the holistic development of players and making the judgement of what is the most optimal next step in their pathway for their individual needs and progress. These findings support existing literature on the youth to senior transition in football, whereby Finn and McKenna (2010) also found that training within a first team environment encourages a significantly higher level of physicality due to the requirement of more efficient reactions and decision making through higher intensity activity and competition (Abbott and Clifford, 2021). Therefore, this type of loan is a specific example of youth to senior transition, whereby it is not

taking place within the same club, as often shared in literature (e.g. Martindale, 2005; Morris et al., 2015; Wylleman, 2002; Wylleman et al., 2004), and thus, should be understood further through future research to ensure this type of transition is being considered not only in circumstances of within-club transition, but also between clubs.

Similarly, continued development comprises of a loan move with the intention of encouraging the development of the individual, this could prioritise a specific type of development (e.g. physical, psychological, tactical) or more holistic development across a range of areas. Whilst being similar to the previous reason and potentially involving the need for exposure to a senior environment, this may also include instances whereby a player has experienced a loan transfer but is perceived to be ready for greater challenge, to better prepare them for first team football at the parent club, which may take form of higher competitive standard or further geographical location from parent club, for example. One participant explained:

Loans should equip the player to add value, and I don't mean in a monetary sense, even just in terms of experience sense, that he comes back more prepared, better equipped to be in the first team that you're expecting him to go into. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

Therefore, portraying the valuable experience to be gained through loan transfers in broader ways than just performance or in a financial capacity. The third reason recognised for loan movements was the performance loan. These circumstances arise when a parent club is not sure regarding the future of a player, so there is a need for that player to prove themselves for a place in the club, and failing that, this loan will help establish the level they are capable of competing at. A Loan Analyst expressed:

What I kind of call a performance loan. This is make or break, you show whether you're good enough to play and come back to the first team or you show what you're level is. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

This further indicates the role that loans play in contributing to decisions made regarding a player's future, similar to the two reasons provided above, where loan moves are primarily seen as developmental in purpose, with the priority of preparing players to progress onto the first team at the parent club. Loans should therefore be used as a means of developing home grown talent, supporting the fundamental aim

of the EPPP and its introduction in 2012. Therefore, as proposed by talent development literature (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999), there are a range of stages, primarily centred around age and ability whereby individuals are faced with greater demand and therefore given the opportunity to progress their development in a specialised area. Such understanding of the investment and exposure needed for successful development in sport, the FA were able to produce a football specific development model; Long Term Player Development (LTPD) model (Premier League, 2011), giving a Four Corner Model for development of recognising the need to acknowledge “technical/tactical, psychological, physical and social elements of the players” environment” (Premier League, 2011: 14). This model should therefore integrate loan transfers as part of an individual’s development where necessary, whether such transitions are planned (normative) or not (non-normative), the use of a development model can facilitate the tailored needs of the individual and the intentions of the loan transfer for that player. However, the model does not give explicit detail on how these areas should be considered and incorporated into the development of academy players and thus, could be revised to provide stronger guidance and support to clubs in their utilisation of it.

However, the final two motivations for sending players on loan exhibited a greater focus on guiding players away from the parent club. One of these reasons was running a contract down, which predominantly involves senior players whereby they possess an ongoing contract with the parent club that is not yet complete, but there is not a future for them at the club, thus they are sent on loan to run down the current contract. This benefits the parent club as the loan club can either pay or contribute to the player’s wages, but it can also be mutually beneficial for the player to get playing time elsewhere, rather than not playing at parent club. It is also uncommon that the LM would work with these players, as discussed in chapter 4, there was no insight from the current participants of LMs taking responsibility for senior loan players. This is a particular area of concern given the heightened awareness and advocacy of male mental health, particularly more recently in football (e.g. Heads Up Campaign, February 2020), whereby a Player Care member of staff shared that these senior players are “getting pushed out, and often treated poorly” (PCL1, Premier League Club 7).

In response to the above, there has been increased awareness around deselection and psychological challenges at elite youth level in professional football (e.g. Blakelock et al., 2016; Blakelock et al., 2019; Brown and Potrac, 2009; Wilkinson, 2021), as well as established interest around experiences of retirement in sport (e.g. Alfermann, 1995; Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007; Park et al., 2013), specifically for senior football players (e.g. Drawer and Fuller, 2002; Jones and Denison, 2017; Schwenk et al., 2007). However, there appears to be an obvious lack of attention to football players between the stages of academy development and retirement, which is particularly problematic given that senior players are exposed to the most brutal, high pressured environment, along with intense media and public scrutiny (e.g. Kristiansen et al., 2011; 2012; Roderick, 2006b). Yet these players and their unpredictable experiences appear to be abandoned in research and potentially overlooked in practice, as seen in the current thesis regarding loan transfers. Particularly with greater investment in understanding the experiences of deselection for young players and identification of the short term psychological distress that players can suffer from (Blakelock et al., 2016) and the lack of support available to player before, during and after the transition out of football (Wilkinson, 2021), many senior players may be faced with similar challenges through being released completely or sold to a lower level club. Therefore, to support suggestions made in chapter four, more attention in both research and practice is needed surrounding the experiences and support for senior loan players to better understand this area.

The final reason recognised for sending players on loan was providing an opportunity to showcase themselves. In these circumstances, when the parent club are no longer interested in keeping or progressing a player then they will arrange a loan transfer, which may overlap with running the player's contract down, but also aims to encourage the player to showcase themselves and their abilities through gaining playing time at another club and generating interest from other clubs, whilst also increasing their market value to benefit the parent club. Therefore, this is relevant to both senior and youth players going out on loan, as opposed to running contracts down predominantly involving senior players. When referring to this type of loan motivation, one participant expressed:

We're trying to get them a job so anyone who's coming towards the end of their contract with us and they're not gonna be offered anything else, the prime reason to get them out on loan is to get them somewhere where they can put themselves in the shop window to get themselves a job once we release them...we hope we can realise some sort of value in the player even though he's never gonna play for our first team so again, get them in the shop window, get him playing as high level as possible then sell him. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This highlights the mutual benefit that exists for players and parent club alike in this situation whereby a club tries to help a player secure a contract elsewhere when they are released from the parent club and equally, the club are then able to maximise profit collected on that player. However, the extent to which players are aware of this process and feel supported throughout is likely to vary, hence the need to have the role of LM involved, to ensure there is guidance and support for those players. This again reiterates that such support appears to be increasingly present for youth players, but there is greater knowledge needed to understand any support offered to senior loan players. There may also be less anticipated circumstances where players are sent on loan whereby clubs and players have to adjust to the fast-paced and unpredictable football environment. For example, one participant shared a specific example at his club:

Sometimes as well there are some players that have gone out on loan that may have originally been an U23 players loan and the U23 player has become injured, so the loan club still want a player and maybe one of the U18's has gone in their place so sometimes that can be a reason for players going out on loan. (SP1, Premier League Club 8)

This also exposes the difficulties that can arise when there are problems with intended loan movements or players, whereby two clubs have entered a contractual agreement with the expectation of that loan player to contribute to the loan club during that period, therefore they may expect solutions to be offered. This could provide a positive opportunity for a young player to gain new experiences and develop but could also put a lot of pressure on a player who is potentially not ready for a move that was intended for someone else, therefore may not optimally facilitate their development. Therefore, it is also important to recognise and reinforce the individual needs of the player, whereby a player may not be ready for a loan, or certain level of loan, as well as

exceptional circumstances in which a player may be identified as capable of progressing into the first team at their parent club, with no loan experience, LM4 acknowledged this:

Not every player would have a loan on their development plan or road map, you know we have some exceptionally talented young players that will just take a direct route almost from the academy and straight into the first team...now that's not common, it's much more typical for a player to take in a loan or multiple loans that can help them develop to then eventually return to then come back into the first team...So not every player would have a loan on their development plan. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Therefore, despite the often developmental prerequisite of loan transfers, this is not the only reason that players are sent on loan, and some players may not be recognised as needing a temporary transfer before progression to the senior team in a professional environment. However, the findings of the current thesis show strong indication that players in the PDP of an academy are likely to experience multiple loan movements before achieving first team player status, or alternatively, are sold by, or released from the parent club.

5.2 The Player-club Matching Process

Along with the reasons as to why players are sent on loan, within thematic analysis, the sub-theme of 'The Player-club Matching Process' also emerged, whereby it is important to consider and understand how loan clubs are selected as appropriate for each loan player and who is involved in this matching process. Thus within this sub-theme, 3 key points emerged; 1) Staff Involvement, 2) Looking for the Right Fit, and 3) Wider Influences on the Decision-making Process.

5.2.1 Staff Involvement

In many clubs, a collective approach was utilised, again ensuring involvement of MDTs to consider the holistic development and needs of each player intended for a loan transfer, but the extent and breadth of MDT involvement varies from club to club. LM6

explained his role in the matching process by stating: “so I’m involved with identifying the players that need to go out on loan, so that’s with the head of player development and the u23s coach (LM6, Premier League Club 5). Similarly, LM5 identified the range of personnel that are involved in the planning of loan transfers at his club:

It would be the academy manager, myself, it would be the coaches, it would be the sporting director, it would be the welfare officer, the player care manager, the psychologist, because there are different stages of mental states as people, I think it’s important looking at the psychology of the players and begin to prepare them, but again, the preparation starts early so there are lots of experts around them to help with this decision and preparation. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

This displays the importance placed on a player’s holistic needs, with specific prioritisation of psychological development and preparation for a loan, supporting the work of Adler (1954) who proposed that holism is imperative in understanding individuals. In line with this, one of the sport psychologists who participated in the current thesis recognised the MDT input that exists at their club regarding loan decisions:

There will always be a consideration, and these happen in a multi-disciplinary team meeting where this club is a potential loan option for this player, what are the benefits, what are the challenges, are they gonna be able to cope physically, mentally with this particular challenge, is it part of their development plan/pathway that we foresee. (SP2, Championship Club 3)

Therefore, showing the importance of considering the intention of the loan and what a potential move could offer the player, in terms of both challenges and benefits, to encourage holistic development. The social structure and personality framework (see figure 12) will be discussed further in Chapter Six regarding the loan player’s social context, but to further encourage holistic development, staff supporting players throughout their loan transition could refer to this framework to help individuals build and strengthen relationships with peers and staff at the parent and loan club, as well as those outside of the football environment e.g. friends and family, that could foster the support received during their loan experience. Similarly, another member of the

sport psychology staff interviewed in the current thesis also explained his involvement in contributing to decisions about loan transfers and supporting players in preparation for the process:

I sort of have the conversations of who we might be looking at to send out on loan, erm and maybe players might come to me and talk about, maybe they've been told that they're going on loan and their thoughts feelings behind it. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

Having a sport psychologist that can contribute to MDT decisions surrounding loans, as well as having strong relationships with the players involved can ensure that such decisions are made with great consideration of a player's holistic needs, along with considering what is beneficial for the club in terms of that player's development. This supports previous research that suggests decision making is a central process in organisations which requires knowledge and processing with the intention of finding a solution, achieving a target or take an opportunity (Harrison and Pelletier, 2000; Karacapilidis et al., 2006). Therefore, this applies to the loan process in that both parent and loan clubs are making decisions to take an opportunity in hopes to reach the best decision for their organisation, and the use of an MDT can also ensure that the individual player is maintained as the priority. However, as recognised in the current findings, there are different levels of influence that individuals have on the decision making process regarding loan transfers, supporting the findings of Torgler and Schmidt (2007) who stated that regardless of involvement from players, agents and clubs of interest in transfer talks, there are power imbalances that effect not only the decision, but how the player feels about the transfer. Therefore, the current findings support and extend this by not only showing the range of involvement, but the differences in opinions of different personnel across clubs around whom should be involved or input in loan transfer decisions.

5.2.2. Looking for the Right Fit

Another point that emerged to form this sub-theme was 'Looking for the Right Fit'. Once making the decision to send a player on loan, many participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that the player is effectively matched to a suitable loan club, based on why they are being sent on loan. Therefore, the reason for the loan plays a

fundamental part in how a decision is made regarding the loan club selected, one of the LMs explained the importance of this:

Picking the right club will depend on where the club sees them. Now what do I mean by that, if it's a very good player who's path has been blocked to the first team environment but needs to develop to then come back into our first team environment to come and play for our football club, then the club that he goes to is very important in terms of the style of play, the manager, the players, the position he will play when he goes out on loan, development, objectives, you're going to learn while you're out there, that's very important. If a player is equally good but doesn't look like he'll make the first team of the football club, that becomes, for lack of better phrase, a surplus requirement, it's about finding his career, so we look for clubs that suit the players strengths rather than the system of play. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

Therefore, with links back to the motivations for loan transfers, LM5 gives a very honest insight into the influence of the intention of the parent club to keep the player and progress him within the club, on the decision of where to send him on loan. Additionally, LM5 went onto explain the importance of first time loans and how they are chosen for a player:

For a first loan for young players, we generally don't send them too far from our base, so we look at clubs and a lot of the time we like it to be clubs that are a part time basis, they train Tuesday, Thursday and play Saturday, we want to just see that experience for them, we don't want to sort of ram it into their throats. So, Monday, Wednesday, Friday they will still be with us, so it's a gradual easing them into it. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

This shows how individuals are considered with a gradual introduction of challenge, particularly early on in players' careers as they learn to adjust to senior football and progress onto greater challenge if they experience more loans in the future. Similarly, PCL3 also acknowledged the importance of ensuring the individual's best interests with a loan move:

We would look at what is best for that particular player so if we were sending them to the other end of the country, sometimes there was

more of a welfare combination of do we really want to do that send this lad to the other end of the country but ultimately it would tend to be down to football decisions. (PCL3, Premier League Club 2)

Thus, despite the significance placed on player welfare, there is likely to be stronger influences based on footballing decisions when it comes to selecting a loan club, in line with this, another LM highlighted that “finding a playing style that suits player allows easy transfer” (LM2, Championship Club 1). There were also participants in the current thesis that advocated a more systematic and analytical approach to identifying suitable loan clubs to match players with. One Loan Analyst explained:

I've done quite a bit of work previously on what leagues erm are more appropriate for younger players and where younger players tend to get more minutes, that sort of stuff so we can advise a bit on that and also find leagues that are suitable in terms of playing style, but it's kind of a 3 stage process in terms of 1) you have to identify what level this player could play at, 2) within that level, what league and 3) which clubs are most appropriate, so I've done quite a lot of looking at individual clubs and strengths and weaknesses in the team. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

This evidences a more strategic approach through a three step process to attempt to establish a level, league and club that is perceived most beneficial to the development of a loan player. The two previous participant quotes also support extant literature that has acknowledged the importance of recognising and understanding playing styles when analysing performance and making effective decisions within football (e.g. Garganta, 2009; Martindale et al., 2005; North et al., 2014), with the current thesis extending such findings to the context of loan transfers. A LM within the current study outlined the systematic process of placement ID that he utilises when matching clubs and players in the loan process:

Again, using objective data where possible and generally just logical thought processes to try and find optimal markets for players to go and play in and then kind of auditing clubs within those markets to try and find optimal solutions. So I've developed sort of different processes and frameworks that can help us assess potential loan clubs and that's taking in a lot of information, it's looking at the market, so what league and what country they play in, it's looking at what kind

of style football the team plays, it's looking at the head coach profile, it's looking at what sort of MDT support they have at the club, erm facilities, it's looking at the culture, it's looking at lots of different things that all sort of go into the pot to try and understand 'okay what's the kind of specific challenge we're looking for, for this player and is this the sort of club we think can provide that challenge?' (LM4, Premier League Club 3).

LM4's comments portray the complex decision-making process involved whereby loan staff are using a range of objective data, as well as broader, holistic considerations to find the best placement for each loan player. This aligns with existing research in business management, La Valle et al. (2011: 22) stated that high performing organisations "make decisions based on rigorous analysis at more than double the rate of lower performing organisations" which can develop long-term strategy and everyday operation. The use of such analysis was more evident in clubs which possessed wider Loan Analyst roles as part of the loan department, along with circumstances in which LMs had previously worked in wider analytic roles, with a more systematic procedure identified in the loan planning process.

In the football environment, Ward et al. (2019) also acknowledged the benefit of sport science staff supporting effective decision making, including the collection, analysis and communication of data. Similarly, such operation is facilitated through strong relationships amongst sport scientists and wider staff members to optimally support decision-making processes (Ward et al., 2019). This aligns with holistic support for players and strong organisational support for LMs as proposed in the current thesis. Football clubs can benefit from using a range of data regarding individual players and loan clubs to ensure they are effectively making decisions when it comes to identification and allocation of players to loan clubs based on their needs and the intentions of the loan.

However, despite the amount of planning that goes into this process, there are often difficulties and unanticipated issues that may arise. For example, one participant admitted that they "try to get a good fit but can't always be perfect, but we don't want it to be because football isn't perfect so want them to experience challenge" (LM1, Premier League Club 1). Similarly, another LM provided insight to the aims of meeting

the specific needs of the player, but the difficulties that may create obstacles in doing so:

We discuss the level of club, the type of club, the type of football that they play that would be suitable for each player, then I try to identify clubs to match what the player needs. Erm that sounds good but it doesn't always work like that, a lot of the time you might only have one club that's interested in a player, so then it's a case of do we send them or don't we send them, rather than which one shall we send him to. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Therefore, depending on the specific circumstances of the intended loan transfer, there may be limited options in terms of clubs that are interested in taking the loan player, significantly affecting the choices of where may be best to place him, meaning that it is important to further understand the complexity of the process through the wider impacts on how decisions are reached.

5.2.3 Wider Influences on the Decision-making Process

The third point to emerge to form this sub-theme was 'Wider Influences on the Decision-making Process' whereby participants recognised that building positive relationships and partnerships with other football clubs, to establish clubs that could be regularly used as loan clubs for players in the future, through effective contact and communication was important within the loan transfer process. One LM explained the importance and difficulty with this:

I think one of the big things that you can forget sometimes is that you can build the most amazing loan management programme at your club but ultimately, you're still basically reliant upon finding good partners, because ultimately, they're the ones that have the most important job really, which is to continue the development of your player and to look after them. So, it doesn't matter how good your processes are pre-loan and all of that work that you can do in terms of contract road maps and performance assessment and placement ID, ultimately, you still need that club to erm look after the player, to deliver on the things that they said to you. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Therefore, there is great value placed on developing and maintaining good relationships between clubs, as well as ensuring that all parties are upholding the

terms and agreements of the loan transfer. This reiterates the previous mention of mutually beneficial inter group processes, ensuring that separate organisations (or smaller teams within them) can build effective relationships to contribute in a positive way to their operation. In line with this, another participant clearly expressed the advantages of establishing such positive relationships, being mutually beneficial for parent and loan club alike, which she spoke about from experience of being involved as a loan club:

We've had really good experiences with [Premier League club], there is more chance of [Premier League club] saying 'oh we are going to send this player next year because they were really well looked after.' So, I think it's bigger than just looking after the player it's building that relationship with another club and there is more chance of them sending other players to us. (PCL3, Premier League Club 2)

This demonstrates the impact that well-established relationships can have on the loan transfer process, encouraging future opportunities to be taken between the two clubs, also contributing to the holistic experience of the player, likely to involve better communication and support from both the parent and loan club, where they have developed an effective working relationship. Similarly, one of the sport psychology staff reiterated the significance of relationship building between clubs:

There is an element of having good relationships with the club I don't think you can underplay the importance of that club so hopefully the loan manager will speak to his fellow coaches and people in the environment. (SP2, Championship Club 3).

Again, not only highlighting the importance, but also the specific need of having a LM (or equivalent) to drive this process within the club. This supports a plethora of existing literature in the area of marketing, whereby it has been recognised that dyadic business relationships are mutually beneficial (e.g. Anderson and Narus 1990; Anderson et al., 1994; Dwyer et al., 1987; Frazier, 1983). Within such relationships, the organisations maintain a level of influence over each other (Anderson and Narus 1990), encouraging negotiation of control whereby there is both a gain in control within the organisation's environment, along with the loss of an aspect of control regarding an internal aspect of the environment (see figure 13).

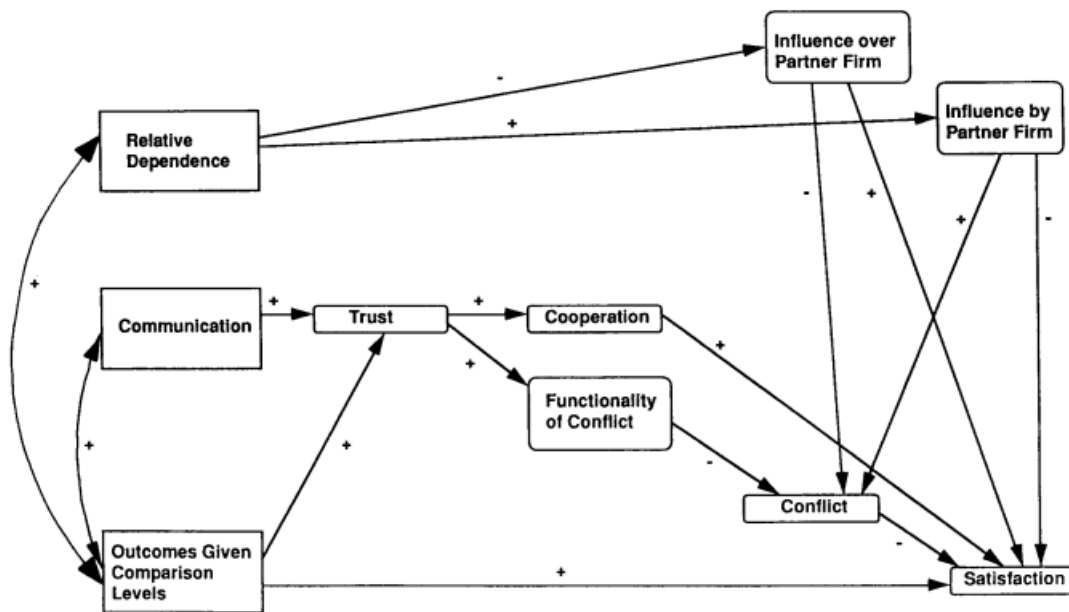


Figure 13: Model of working dyadic relationships (Anderson and Narus, 1990: 44).

Within the current thesis, this would involve the negotiation of the temporary transfer through the parent club placing a player in a new environment with the hopes of development as intended, and the loan club receiving the player with the need to meet the agreed terms of the deal, as well as having an additional player to contribute to their squad. Thus, demonstrating the need for a strong level of trust and reliable relationships between clubs to facilitate the loan transfer process.

Existing research in management and marketing has also identified the need for trust in organisational relationships (e.g. Barney and Hansen, 1994; Blois, 1999; Solomon and Flores, 2003), however, it has been noted that trust is more facilitative to inter-personal relationships that exist between individuals within different organisations, rather than being generally beneficial to inter-organisational relationships (Mouzas et al., 2007). This may also be true of building strong relationships between parent and loan clubs, namely through the LM or wider loan staff and whichever personnel they have contact with at the loan club, which would then allow for strong inter-personal relationships to establish and potentially high levels of trust, which could progress to long-term relationships and multiple loan transfers across several seasons. Application of the social structure and personality (see figure 12) framework is relevant here, whereby different organisations (and communities, smaller groups or even

dyadic relationships within them) can exist and operate more effectively within the same social context by identifying opportunities for successful partnerships, such as mutually beneficial collaboration within the loan system for both parent and loan clubs. Although, this is likely to vary depending on the standard of competition and the quantity and quality of resources available to initiate and maintain those relationships, another participant explained some of the differences he had identified:

[Premier League club], they have the resources, they have a loan coach, a loan analyst, they have a loan manager, so when you have all of those resources, it's much easier to have a much more definitive process, but I still think even with our resources, clubs need to build relationships and choose clubs carefully to do what's best for the player. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

Therefore, through having the necessary staff in place, the process of planning loan transfers is likely to be more thorough, with more people specifically placed to give insight on the decision-making process. Although, even where staffing resources are scarce, there appears to remain an importance to act in a way that is best suited to the player and their individual needs. However, there was also recognition of the occurrence of loan clubs approaching another club with particular interest in a specific player or certain type of player, whereby they wanted to explore the opportunity of a loan transfer. One participant expressed preference for organising loans in this way:

I prefer clubs to identify the player, want to commit some money, so there's a commitment on their part, I want to give the player every possible chance to succeed and I think when they identify them, they know what they're getting and there's a better chance that the player will get the best of the opportunity. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

This shows the importance of ensuring the player is gaining as much as possible from the temporary transfer to optimise his development as appropriate and provide playing experience in a new environment. Additionally, many participants emphasised the need for the player to have an input in his loan placement, often having a strong influence on the final decision, stating that "the player always has a big say as well to be fair, erm and the player's agent as well, so I then negotiate with the club that want the player, sort of financially, to a level" (LM6, Premier League Club 5). Similarly,

another participant acknowledged that the players and those closest to him are likely to have a strong input:

We wouldn't wanna send a player somewhere that he doesn't wanna go. We might encourage something... Sometimes, the player doesn't wanna go abroad, so he chooses to stay in England for example and that is down to the player, but the player and his family and his agent usually have quite a lot of input. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

Thus, indicating the importance of what the player sees fit for his progression, however, a member of player care staff shared insight to how the players are likely to get some level of input, but the extent of that will often vary:

I think it depends on the player, again how important they are, how important for the future they are, their standing in the club, yeah it definitely depends player to player. I think maybe the younger players would get told that this is the best place and will be fine for you but at the end of the day this is in the UK or Europe we have a system where the players have to agree to move... so the player has to have some level of buy in, sometimes he is told well look if you stay here you will not even walk in the first team building so you are better off going to play championship football or whatever it is rather than sitting on the reserves team and not even playing U23s football for a year. (PCL1, Premier League Club 7)

The above therefore indicates not only giving players greater input depending on the stage of their career and standing at the club, but also ensuring that the players see value in the loan transfer. Even in circumstances whereby the player may not feel that the loan club is what they would have chosen, if they can work collaboratively with staff at the parent club, then they can use the advice and insight provided by the LM and MDT to ensure they are progressing their development and career in the most effective way possible. However, a sport psychologist shared some of the challenges that may arise when players do not see value in a particular loan move:

I think at the younger ages they will be told about the option then if they feel particularly strongly they can certainly turn it down and players have done that about an option that has been put to them. Some of the older players have agents who will be involved in that space and might advise them in certain ways, indifferently. I think and again speak through experience, we have had players from abroad

come to the UK and get offered a conference loan or a lower league loan and they don't quite realise the quality of the football pyramid in England so they, and again agents don't either and they might turn down what is perceived as a good loan because playing in the conference for a player whose never heard of these teams is not necessarily an attractive thing. (SP2, Championship Club 3)

Thus, demonstrating the complexities involved in the decision making process, particularly if there are differences in opinion as to what is best for the player. This leads on to an alternative argument raised by one of the LMs in the current thesis, insisting that the parent club need to ensure they maintain control over the process, and final decision:

The typical traditional football way is that players would decide where they go on loan, erm and I guess that my view is that whilst a player obviously has to have you know an input, and it's very important that they're onboard and they understand, the club also has to ultimately have a lot of control of that situation as well...just in the same way that erm any employee, as you're employed by a big multi-national and you fancy a secondment over to a different department, ultimately that would never happen in an organisation, without them deciding that that's what they wanted for you to do. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

This reiterates the significance of ensuring players understand the value in gaining experience in other environments, particularly when loans are in place to provide exposure to senior environments and encourage specific development, with clubs having the final say in the agreement of a loan transfer, providing they have deeply considered the player's best interests. As mentioned by LM4, in other professional environments, a decision for a secondment or branch transfer, would not be made without the approval and overruling decision from the employer, a process which can ensure the transfer benefits the employee and employer equally, which can then be adopted within the football environment to benefit all parties involved with the loan transfer. A secondment is a temporary transfer within or between organisations, be it private, public or voluntary. Tuffrey (1997) stated that these take place for a specific time period and specific role, whereby the organisation seconding the employee remain responsible for their salary and all wider employee benefits (Barkworth, 2004).

Thus, as outlined above, loan transfers can be viewed as an example of a professional secondment, whereby there are clear aims and developmental purposes outlined for each player, based on their individual needs and progression, as well as ensuring that both the parent club and loan club are benefitting from this transfer. However, as addressed by Barkworth, typically the organisation seconding the employee (in football, the parent club) would maintain the responsibility of paying the wages of the employee, yet in football, as identified in the current thesis, the financial contribution to a player's wages was recognised as an influential factor in the loan planning process. It would be a negotiation of which club would cover the player's salary during the transfer, or how it would be shared, therefore, if a loan club is likely to cover all, or the majority of, a player's earnings, then the transfer was more likely to be confirmed. One of the loan staff explained:

A lot of the time, money kind of makes the decision. So, a big thing for the club, whether that's right or wrong, is that for almost all the players we want full financial contribution on the wages and not all clubs can afford that erm so sometimes you're limited a bit on choice of club there. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

Therefore, showing the wider considerations that often interfere with ensuring that a loan clubs meets all the needs of the specific player and the intended purpose of the loan, the reality is that in such a results-oriented, business environment such as professional football, financial considerations also play a crucial role in any decision making process, including loan transfers. This also exposes the difficulty for several loan clubs in their ability to secure loan players, particularly where they would value the temporary use of a player, but cannot afford to cover the expected salary, meaning they are likely to miss out on opportunities and approach lower ability players, or lower level clubs. Similarly, another participant recognised the need to consider economic factors:

The ideal scenario is that the loan clubs identify a player at your club that they really like and the see him playing in their first team, so they phone you up and say "we've seen [name of player] play lots of times, we can really see him fitting into our team, would you let us have him on loan?" Cause obviously then [name of loan club] mightn't be able to cover all of his salary, so those conversations start too, so it's not

just about a football position, there's an economic side to it. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

Again, portraying the challenge of often conflicting priorities whereby there is a need to ensure there is a loan option available where the player can be utilised, and his development facilitated, as well as meeting the financial expectations of the parent club in terms of the full cost of the player's pay being covered by the loan club. This further supports references to the football environment as results driven and short term oriented (e.g. Gammelsæter and Jakobsen, 2008; Nesti, 2010), whilst also providing novel insight into the complexities of the loan planning and decision making process, showing the fundamental role of the LM or equivalent in balancing different perspectives within the process. Also, extending existing literature within the area of Human Resources, the current findings reiterate the importance of the role that line managers (LM or equivalent) have in guiding employees (players) in their career progression through secondment (loan transfer) planning (Crawshaw and Game, 2015). Crawshaw and Game (2015) also found that effective line managers had stronger awareness of employees' needs and aims, were more understanding with greater interpersonal development, were approachable and supportive, as well as more able to work collaboratively for the developmental needs of their employees.

5.3 Club Strategy and Support for Loan Development

The final sub-theme to emerge within this overarching theme was 'Club Strategy and Support for Loan Development', with three key points forming this sub-theme: 'Prioritising First Team' (5.3.1), 'Support and Communication with First Team Staff/Long Term Club Strategy' (5.3.2), and 'Loan Philosophy and Culture' (5.3.3). Here participants shared insight surrounding general club strategy when considering loan transfers, as well as discussing the importance, and varying level of, support received by loan staff, in a range of clubs. Although, it was acknowledged by CD1 (Championship Club 5) that "a lot of clubs aren't very good at strategising this process" when it comes to club-wide management and consideration of loan transfers.

5.3.1 Prioritising the First Team

The way in which many football clubs are run, centres around the first team, as many would expect, due to this being the primary team representing the club and competing at the highest level, as summarised by one of the LMs “at the end of the day, the priority is the first team” (LM3, Premier League Club 2). As suggested by Relvas et al. (2010), this could either be based on influence of football culture and organisational structures across clubs, or the preferences and needs of the first team manager employed at the time. Again, referring to the social structure and personality framework (see figure 12), regardless of the individual at the centre, whilst focusing on the football industry as the relevant ‘social system’, all other layers of the framework will be heavily influenced by the performance-oriented and fast paced culture at the professional level, for any communities, groups and relationships within professional organisations. Therefore, when making strategic decisions regarding loans and identifying which players are available to go out on a loan transfer, there was clear focus on the need to initially review the current structure and requirements of the first team in the current study. One LM explained how this would be considered within the planning process at his club:

So, we plan that maybe, in January this year we identified the ones we want to go out in August and also in the coming January as well, obviously things can change cause people get involved with the first team and that but we try to sort of plan the pathway, so I’m involved in that. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This shows that long term planning can take place in terms of loans, but there needs to be consideration and versatility within these plans to adapt to any changes that may arise in terms of the first team’s situation, whereby players, specifically those in the PDP, intended to go on loan may be required in the senior department. Similarly, another LM also provided insight into the prioritisation of the first team:

If we’re looking at 23s players the 23’s coach will kind of recommend and we’ll discuss, that has to be clarified by the first team manager as well and the first team coaches in case they want to keep certain players around to help with training and may be just on the fringes of the first team in case we get injuries and things like that so it’s quite detailed structure within that and that discussion and making sure we

got you know can't come to the end of the transfer window and have 30 players out on loan and then the first team get injuries and they got no one to cover. (LM1, Premier League Club 1)

LM1's comments portray the level of difficulty and instability that exists in the loan planning process and that it must be fluid to respond to the needs of the first team as each new season approaches. This is not only likely to add complexity to the planning of loans, but also adds stress to the players and staff in what is already a fast-paced, results oriented environment where many employees within football clubs are likely to lack certainty and stability in their roles and decision-making processes.

Therefore, this process is fundamental in terms of recognising players that definitely would not be considered for first team purposes, or as a first team squad player, as well as those that would benefit from a loan, but would also be called upon if there was an issue with a certain positional player in the first team. The time of year would also be important in terms of considering transfer windows and the opportunity to purchase new players for the first team. With so many considerations and possibilities that are ongoing in terms of squad availability and identifying loan opportunities, it is crucial that members of staff from both the academy and senior departments of the organisation maintain constant and effective communication in order to inform and review the process in a way that allows as much time as possible to prepare as necessary. Research from the area of succession planning can be referred to here, whereby organisations can improve their readiness for change and challenge that may be faced by ensuring that employees are equipped and qualified to progress and adapt within their existing positions, as well as new vacancies that become available (Atwood, 2020).

Succession planning can maintain focus on senior positions within an organisation, or can be extended more broadly company-wide, where it may look specifically to certain departments (e.g. the loan department) whereby strategic planning can take place as necessary for that specific area of the organisation (Atwood, 2020). This enhances the employee's knowledge of the developmental opportunities that they have access to, providing motivation and commitment to progress within that organisation (Atwood, 2020). There's a fundamental need for a trusted successor as opposed to planning only with the focus on protecting the organisation (Sharma et al., 2003). The

incumbent therefore needs to show commitment to succession through their own motivation and desire to be effective in a new role, rather than feeling obliged to take on the responsibilities as deemed necessary (e.g. Hofer and Charan, 2004; Sharma et al., 2001; Sonnefeld and Spence, 1989). This can apply to both the planning and resourcing of staff to loans departments within clubs, to effectively employ and select staff to dedicate the time and commitment to develop a successful loans process, as well as the specific strategy of identifying and planning loan transfers for players with the intention of developing individuals to achieve senior team status and success at that club.

5.3.2. Support and Communication with First Team Staff/Long Term Club Strategy

Due to the nature of the football environment, as previously mentioned, there is often a lack of interest in the academy from the first team manager and coaching staff due to their career being solely based on first team performance, with often a short term focus, even where long-term contracts are in place. Thus, it is difficult to integrate loan strategy into long term planning of football clubs, one of the participants shared the challenges that come with this:

I doubt whether the loan players are that high up on a football manager's priority list... before the coming season starts, we've put into place that we're gonna have a loan manager, or loan players or a reserve team or we're gonna do this, and then as soon as the season starts the managers are just preoccupied with 'who've we got Saturday?' or 'who's available? Who's playing well?' that kinda stuff, and the loans tend to go out the window, which I can understand cause their priority is getting points on the Saturday cause of the nature of the beast, 'if you don't get 3 points, it don't matter cause I won't be here', and that in itself is a problem. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

This further highlights how such a high-pressured environment infiltrates all areas of a football club, therefore affecting wider areas of operation and long-term planning, through the need for the first team manager to remain short-term oriented at any given time. Therefore, loan departments are having to make initial plans for the future of a player, in a significantly unpredictable and unstable environment, which is likely to prove even more difficult within individual clubs as they undertake various staff and

management changes. Another participant further expressed the significance of the football manager throughout club processes:

That's the thing with football, the manager kind of rules the show depending on what he is like as a person, I have had horrendous managers and I have had great managers it shouldn't really be down to that one person but ultimately, unfortunately in football, it is. That manager comes in with his own ideas and his own rules and regulations and everything changes at the club to fit it to what he wants. (PCL3, Premier League Club 2)

Again, showing the need for all processes in the club to meet the desires of the respective manager, largely affecting the loans processes based on the value placed on it by the manager and senior members of the club. This reinforces the impact of social forces in the football environment whereby structure has a strong influence on the opportunities and value given to individuals within that environment. Ensuring that value is placed on the loans process is now increasingly likely with the majority of professional clubs having a specific team or individual to oversee it, however, the involvement of first team staff, and particularly the manager, is likely to remain unstable and heavily dependent on whether it is viewed as important for the long term development of the club and its players.

It is therefore imperative that football clubs acknowledge the need for greater resources in this area, board members of these organisations should consider investment in effective long-term loan strategies. Although challenging, this is important particularly as managers come and go, whereby the chairperson, owner(s) and manager may not see the immediate benefit in being heavily involved in this strategy, due to the uncertainty of their own role at the club, which can quickly change within only a few games/weeks. However, for the betterment of the club overtime, such investment could be hugely advantageous, one of the LMs explained:

People start to see well actually maybe this whole area of loans and transition is a really useful mechanism that can help players get to where they ultimately want to get to, which is to play for [club name]. So I think that's helped as well, it's helped give them confidence in the club's management of them as well, which is something that certainly

helps them feel a lot more settled when they're on loan and hopefully help them achieve their potential. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

This shows the mutual benefits for parent club and player alike when investing time, effort and resources in the loan process, whereby giving the player the opportunity and support to make the most of their temporary transfer will further motivate them to work hard and achieve their full potential, wanting to prove themselves to all stakeholders, inevitably benefitting the parent club.

The demand for greater consideration and investment into the area of loans is also beneficial to the long term development of the club, from both a financial and competitive perspective. As mentioned in chapter four, in developmental circumstances, loan transfers are an extension of the academy, whereby players that are in the PDP of an academy, experience senior football with a loan club. Therefore, loan players should have the access to support provisions in the same way that all academy players do. Not only would this benefit the players in their wellbeing and development, but this will also benefit the club in terms of facilitating their investment in a player's professional development with hopes to profit from this financially or competitively in the future. One of the LMs in the current thesis summarised the requirement of the LM at his club: "they needed someone to sort of look after them, who is more like protecting an investment really" (LM5, Premier League Club 4).

In identifying why loan players have not been, and often still aren't, supported sufficiently by their parent clubs could be an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach, whereby the player is now seen as the responsibility of the loan club. One of the player care staff elaborated:

It doesn't facilitate, and this is gonna sound really awful, but it's not seen as their problem, and so I think that's why a lot of players on loan don't get the support because clubs go 'there you go, he's your problem now' and they probably expect the loan club to then offer that, but I think that personally, that should be a joint venture...I just think it could be a lot better, from all angles and I think that holistic approach, but I think the reason that clubs don't invest in it is that reason it's sort of wipe your hands, great that player's there. But also, football clubs don't like to put money into things that don't earn them

money, for them, investing in player's wellbeing is like 'well great, but is that gonna make them a better footballer? No.' (PCL2, Championship Club 2).

This shows the need to collaborate and again, develop strong relationships between parent and loan clubs to ensure the most beneficial experience for all parties involved, including the player. As mentioned by PCL2, aligning with the 'shorttermism' of the professional football environment, it may be viewed that loan transfers do not provide immediate gratification and are therefore not seen as a concern of any personnel outside of the academy department, which could further separate youth and senior departments within football clubs (e.g. Relvas et al., 2010).

5.3.3 Loan Philosophy and Culture

Therefore, in line with discussion around the significance of well-established relationships when making decisions surrounding loan transfers and developing trusting, long-term partnerships which can benefit both parent and loan clubs in the temporary transfer of players, it was also noted that building a loans philosophy or strategy would be fundamental for football clubs. One of the sport psychology staff suggested:

I think it would also help with the operational side in terms of developing a loans philosophy, so actually maybe partnering with local clubs or a certain amount of clubs that you know you can send players to on loan, then you can kind of get an idea what experiences might be that players are gonna go to, so we have more sort of control over their development is probably the best way of putting it in terms of what they're gonna go through, the philosophy that the clubs tend to adhere to when they're playing and those sorts of things. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

This provides insight to the ways in which clubs may attempt to develop specific practices regarding loans, to then encourage a greater club-wide appreciation and culture for the loans system. This supports existing research which suggests that a strong, collective philosophy and culture is fundamental within player development environments (e.g. Henriksen et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2013) whereby such philosophy can provide opportunity to establish specific processes for both competitive

performance and holistic development. An Academy Performance Plan (APP) is already in place through the EPPP, which aims to:

“Identify the vision and strategy for the Academy in terms of the club’s Football Philosophy. It will identify the performance targets for the Academy and provide a template for the management of the Academy in the club. The APP will be used to articulate the club’s culture in terms of Youth Development and to this end it should be integrated into and reflect the wider culture of the club. The APP should demonstrate how the Academy will integrate the Education Programme, Games Programme and Sports Science and Medicine services with the core Coaching Programme” (EPPP:18).

Therefore, with such focus on strategy and philosophy, clubs can recognise and incorporate the importance of the loans process, particularly with further reinforcement of the need for holistic development. Similarly, the Club Performance Planning Process (see figure 14) demonstrates the importance of football philosophy in bridging the first team and academy departments, and through embedding the loans process within the football philosophy, clubs will encourage and increase collaboration and appreciation of these two departments to engage effectively for future development of the organisation as a whole. But as demonstrated by the model, there is wider investment needed from the club executive and board, as well as the technical board to establish both the APP and football philosophy and integrate within club culture, an investment that will also take time and commitment to achieve. Thus, the social structure and personality framework (see figure 12) can be applied to evidence the different layers involved in promoting a loans philosophy, not only within departments or communities and organisations, but across the wider social system of the football industry. Through individuals, e.g. LMs, building relationships and groups that promote loans culture, particularly with individuals within their organisation that have power or status and can help mediate group processes to advocate the need for value placed on the loans process, this can encourage wider impact across both the academy and senior departments, subsequently promoting such a philosophy across the wider organisation. Over time, if several clubs can develop such a philosophy, this could encourage a much greater appreciation and utilisation of the loans system to encourage holistic development of homegrown players.

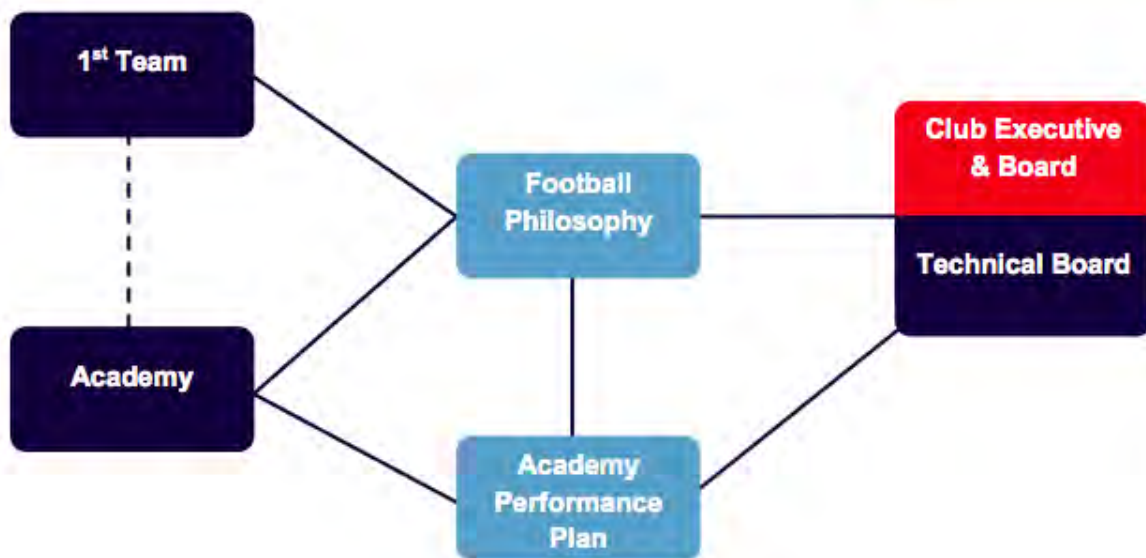


Figure 14: The Club Performance Planning Process (EPPP: 17)

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the reasons as to why players are sent on loan transfers, with a predominant focus on development of youth players to encourage readiness for the first team at the parent club, or to continue development and create further challenge to help decisions regarding their future. There were also loan transfers that were intended to allow players to showcase themselves or run their contracts down if they were to be sold or released by the parent club. Similarly, there was discussion of senior loan players being overlooked in both research and practice whereby there were not viewed as being required for the clubs and therefore not considered in the same, holistic way as players in the PDP of an academy.

The process of identifying possible loan clubs for players was also explored in terms of meeting the needs of the individual, MDT involvement in the decision-making process, as well as financial and tactical influences. There was discussion of difficulties in conflicting desires or preferences when it comes to making these decisions, particularly in terms of how much choice should be given to the player in

this process, with comparison to literature in the areas of HR and secondments in evaluating such processes in a business environment.

Finally, the strategic approaches of clubs were considered particularly in terms of the prioritisation given to first teams and the 'shorttermism' that exists within football culture, which therefore creates separation and lack of collaboration between youth and senior departments at football clubs. There was also discussion of the need to embed a loans philosophy within football clubs to encourage greater value and appreciation of the loans process, particularly to bridge the gap between departments as developmental loan transfers are an extension of the academy in order to prepare young players for senior professional football.

There was also wide application of the social structure and personality framework throughout this chapter as it outlines the different layers that exist within each organisation within the football industry, therefore if referring to clubs, this framework can aid understanding of different groups and relationships, as well as the holistic support both within and away from the football environment, at parent and loan clubs. Similarly, the framework can allow recognition intergroup processes and partnerships established between the loan and parent clubs, where the LM can operate to ensure the individual is being widely supported, whilst their development is also challenged. However, it was also recognised that within the social system of football, the 'win at all costs' culture could have a negative impact on groups and dynamics within clubs, which may limit collaboration between academy and senior departments, particularly with regards to the loan system, which may not be prioritised, unlike the first team. Thus, to promote a stronger loans philosophy, the framework could be considered on a practical basis by individuals such as LMs looking to increase the value placed on loan transfer operation whereby groups and relationships can be established in order to promote provisions for loan players and holistic support through the backing of influential personnel who can incorporate loan philosophy within different communities or departments within the wider club, to utilise the loan system in the most effective way to increase homegrown talent within elite English football clubs.

Chapter Six: Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players

The final overarching theme of the current thesis 'Preparation and experiences for loan players' consists of three key sub-themes: 'Preparing Players for Loan Transfers' (6.1); 'Player Challenges on Loan' (6.2); and 'Key Factors for a Successful Loan' (6.3).

6.1 Preparing for Loan Transfers

Within this sub-theme, participants highlighted preparation specifically for loan players, along with general support provided to academy players that will also facilitate preparation for transition. LM4 explained preparation for players at his club:

First and foremost there's kind of the preparation before they actually get on loan, so as a club, we're trying to invest more in terms of putting on workshops and providing players with the life skills before they go on loan, so whether that's practical things like cooking...there's now far more provision for that internally at the club, which you would hope then reduces the likelihood of that becoming an issue further down the line...I certainly think that equipping them with those skills as part of their education is really important so that they are better able to cope with adversity or to regulate their emotions, or to deal with success and failure. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

This advocates the preparation process within football clubs not only in assisting players in their readiness for the loan transfer, but also with methods of coping across their future within or away from the football context. This supports and develops extant literature which proposed the significance of pre-retirement planning for career termination (e.g. Park et al., 2013) and within career transition, e.g. progression to higher competitive levels (e.g. Pummell et al., 2008). Besides, this provides further recognition of preparation prior to another example of youth to senior transition, with existing literature evidencing how preparation for transition for performers mediates adjustment to and understanding of their new circumstances (Coakley, 1983; Pearson and Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas et al., 1997). Therefore, within this subtheme of 'Preparing for Loan Transfers', three points emerged and will be discussed, which are

‘Academy Life Skills programme’ (6.1.1), ‘Individualised Development and Information’ (6.1.2) and ‘Developing a Well-rounded Individual’ (6.1.3).

6.1.1 Academy Life Skills Programme

The Life Skills programme operates across all categories of academy through League Football Education (LFE) and was introduced to encourage and assist the holistic development of individuals within all stages of an academy:

“LFE’s responsibilities extend to the delivery of life skills to U9-U23 players, parents and club staff. LFE’s Life Skills programme covers emotional well-being, equality & diversity, finance, cardiac and sexual health awareness, social media, talent transfer, resilience, personal development and lifestyle & education on key subjects such as gambling, alcohol and drugs.” (LFE, 2022: online)

It allows clubs to deliver, through both internal and external means, a range of skills and abilities required throughout life within and away from the football environment, including cooking, financial management and language skills, among others. A Player Care and Liaison member of staff provided insight on the programme:

We do a full life skills programme as do most Premier League clubs so that wouldn’t be targeted to just people on loan, that’s targeting players who stay here, that could be cooking, how to pay your bills, languages or whatever so I think that’s a standard anyway. (PCL1, Premier League Club 7)

Therefore, such a programme encourages young people to take responsibility and become more independent as they progress through the academy, not only being important skills for football players in an elite environment, but more importantly, for young people generally, reiterating the holistic focus of the EPPP. These sessions build knowledge and provide understanding of key skills and issues for wider life, therefore they should not be limited to high profile sport settings, but included in the national curriculum, college programmes, apprenticeships and university workshops to equip young people with such essential skills. This supports existing literature which has defined life skills as “transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive” (Jones and Lavalley, 2009: 159), with Gould and Carson (2008: 60) stating more specifically that life skills are “those internal personal assets,

characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and transferred for use in non-sport settings.” Therefore, individuals need to acquire the awareness and preparation to possess such skills regardless of the contexts they are embedded within. Another Player Care and Liaison staff member shared her experience of implementing the Life Skills programme:

I had 22 guest speakers and that was primarily for the 18s and 23s, purely because we have them for a lot more contact time, so they’re more accessible, and also because I feel like those are the ages where you make key decisions moving forward...it’s so vital that the lads know that football doesn’t last forever and that less than 1% of them are actually gonna make it where they’re gonna actually earn a living from playing football, so I jumped straight into life skills. (PCL2, Championship Club 2)

This further supports the need for essential life skills, regardless of whether individuals are successful in progressing to professional senior football, with those skills recognised to be crucial as players reach the PDP of the academy. With loan specific preparation and the Life Skills programme, any topics that establish independence and responsibility will be beneficial for players starting a temporary transfer, with differing demands influenced by whether they can continue to live in the same accommodation or have to move for the purpose of the loan. Independently of the need to move, LM5 indicated that media training and familiarisation is an important skill to be addressed prior to participating in senior football during a loan transfer, he explained:

Then there’s the media, they don’t do an awful lot of media because they are academy players then all of a sudden, a player goes on loan, cameras in front of him, if we don’t prepare him for things like that then it becomes very difficult to handle it. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

This portrays the increased intensity that exists at senior level, particularly with media exposure, which for many loan players, will be a new experience. This therefore adds to pressures of integrating into a new environment and thus should be considered important for any players transitioning to senior level, particularly where they may not

have previous media exposure. Additionally, the EPPP highlights the need for a broad range of skills to encourage holistic development, preparing players for life as individuals, rather than only as performers, stating that:

“The Multidisciplinary Approach is intended to create a fully integrated environment which will service all aspects of a player’s technical, athletic, educational and social development at the Academy...Academies will also need to recognise that players, especially those within their full time programme, must be exposed to the experiences and activities that other young people are involved in outside of the Academy environment. The modernised system will fail if it produces elite world class players who do not possess the life skills to be fully integrated and responsible members of society and who cannot deal with the challenges of working in a high profile vocation. Academies will need to demonstrate how they encourage their players to take an active part in their communities whilst developing an understanding of good citizenship. The proposed approach identifies the key welfare, lifestyle management and safeguarding functions that clubs will be required to demonstrate within the Academy.” (EPPP: 72)

This demonstrates the need for wider consideration of holistic progression, which was supported in the current findings, a LM explained:

I think certainly that preparation and the work that is done with them from a psychosocial and personal development perspective is massive to make sure that you’re developing capable young people, forget that they’re a footballer, they’re capable of coping in society independently on their own cause obviously a lot of them haven’t had to do that much themselves, they’ve just solely been focused on playing football. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Again, this highlights specific psychosocial and personal development to encourage independence and coping skills applicable within and beyond the football context. Like the EPPP, many sport programmes are prioritising holistic development for performers, including a focus on life skills, therefore promoting existing research on programmes supporting Olympic athletes (Hong and Coffee, 2018). Similarly, literature has promoted supporting performers with their transition planning and development prior to the transition (Gilmore, 2008; Park et al., 2012; Wylleman et al.,

2004). However, much of this literature centres on assisting retirement from sport, ensuring that both pre-transition and post-transition provisions are available, providing proactive and effective support during that experience (Park et al., 2012), but attention on wider transition experiences is also needed.

Therefore, as proposed by Anderson and Morris (2000), it is pivotal that sport organisations encourage development and engagement of individuals beyond the sporting environment, whereby they can explore broader facets of their identity than merely a sports performer. Subsequently, Life Skills programmes are an effective method of such holistic encouragement (Hong and Coffee, 2018), the current findings therefore support and extend this within a new environment, with recognition of a novel transition, encouraging broader life skills and sport-specific transition support to ensure holistic development that will benefit individuals regardless of their future. This also complements existing literature which promotes advantages of information sharing prior to retirement, facilitating their career termination (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert and Wippert, 2008), with the current thesis showing the benefit of informational support in preparing players for youth to senior transitions, including loan transfers. This supports Kent and colleagues' (2022) findings which portrayed that players found it beneficial when they were provided with professional advice and informational support, before their loan transition, with specific influence from those in professional roles such as LMs and agents. This support is not only important in preparation for loan transfers, but broadly across the football environment, extending to wider experiences of inevitable transition whereby Wylleman et al. (2004) stated that changes in self-identity are frequently experienced during transitional periods so strong support is pivotal.

Given the structure of academies whereby individuals attend schooling, develop social relationships and play football within the same environment, with many players living with host families to access the academy, exclusive identity as a football player often develops. Although strong athletic identity can provide advantages to individuals including heightened motivation and positive athletic experiences (Mitchell et al., 2014), this is posing greater risk of identity foreclosure. A term initially introduced by Erikson (1959) in his stages of human development model and later developed by Marcia (1966), identity foreclosure was presented as a premature commitment to

roles, either occupational or ideological, which are socially and parentally acceptable, to avoid identity crises. Such commitment may offer psychological comfort to an individual, however it may compromise opportunity for psychosocial development in other roles or contexts (Brewer and Petitpas, 2017).

In the football context, all facets of identity, which would typically be attached to an individual's separate environments, become enmeshed for many academy players as they lack exposure to such separate environments and thus, do not experience skills and challenges that come with each of them, compromising wider social roles and identities (Mitchell et al., 2014; Rongen et al., 2020). This has been recognised as a common risk factor for athletes, particularly at young ages when individuals may feel that sport participation and achievement provide strong levels of parental and social validation (Brewer and Petitpas, 2017). Thus, the current study further supports prioritisation of holistic development of the individual, with various members of the football environment whom work directly with academy players reiterating the need for individuals to recognise wider interest and identities, which should also be prioritised when supporting such young people (North et al., 2014).

The social structure and personality framework (figure 12) can also be referred to here, whereby the SSP perspective can be applied. With loan players as the individual at the centre of the model, we can understand the many interactions and relationships they are likely to develop, at both their parent and loan clubs, in preparation for and during their loan transfer (see figure 15). There will be various dyadic relationships developed for each loan player, with some standard interactions with coaches and managers, as well as specific support staff that will be provided by football clubs, as well as more specific and personalised relationships with certain teammates or staff personnel. A range of small group interactions will also be inevitable in any professional context, within football, this is likely to include teammate interactions in training, and more formalised settings, as well as more informally in changing rooms or during meals. However, despite certain circumstances being inevitable, players have to adapt to the context and nature of these interactions which are likely to vary from club to club, particularly when transitioning from an academy to a senior environment and the range of challenges mentioned above. Similarly, relationships exist outside of the football environment, particularly with family and friends, that will

be further discussed below, which also form pivotal dyads and small groups within the support system of individual players. Thus, this model can be an important consideration within the MDT support provided by clubs and practitioners to also ensure that all players are building relationships and adapting to different group structures and dynamics within the football context, along with developing as a well-rounded individual and bridging wider identities within other areas of life, to avoid issues of identity foreclosure that are often encountered by young aspiring football players within academies.

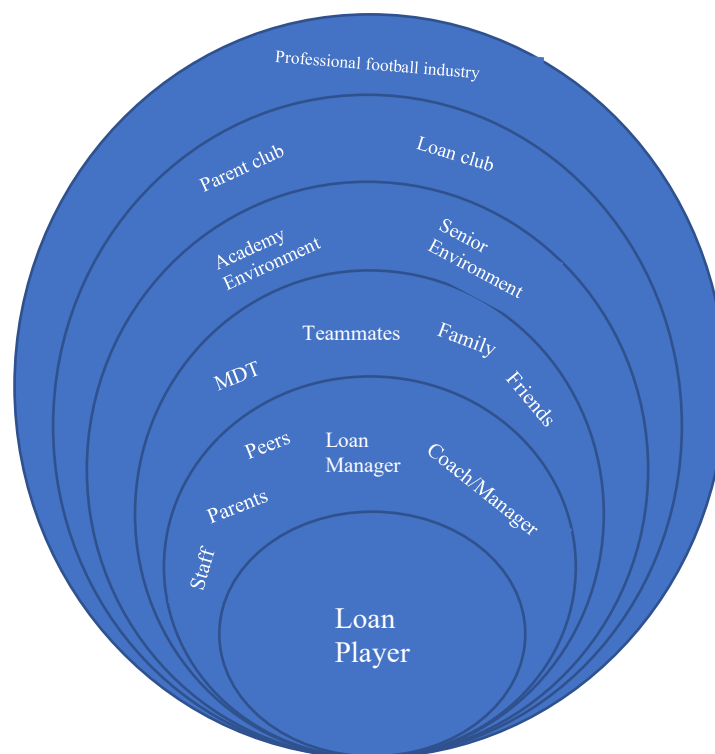


Figure 15: Loan players' social relationships and environment, as emerged from the current thesis.

Similarly, within such holistic development of individuals, there was value placed on recognition of mental health and psychological preparedness generally within the academy and including loan players. LM5 (Premier League Club 4) stated that he and the player must consider their “mental health, prior to, during and afterwards” regarding the loan transfer. Similarly, one of the Player Care and Liaison staff promoted her approach to ensuring players feel mentally resilient during their time within the academy and preparing for any future steps:

Mental health is a big one, so I pushed that this year as well, so how to manage your own mental health, these are strategies you can use if you are struggling...what we've got at the minute, is literally, it's nine questions and is based on the PHQ-4 [Patient Health Questionnaire-4] so there's a general wellbeing screening to start off with...I brought that in because it's quite important and I write down when players have lost family members, or have a funeral coming up, so they're then screenings that I put to one side and make sure that I follow those up.... So, generally it's quick, but it's nice every two weeks to just have a five minute sit down with most of the players. (PCL2, Championship Club 2)

This demonstrates increased consideration of mental health awareness within academies, however, there was a lack of expression of this from wider participants. Therefore, governing bodies such as the FA could look to enhance their advocacy of mental health support and preparation across football academies to encourage not only more attention to the mental health of individuals within the football context, but also the normalisation of it. Additionally, there has been recognition of the negative mental health impacts of exclusive athletic identity as mentioned above, such as identity crises and depression (Douglas and Carless, 2006, 2009), particularly with regards to periods of transition (e.g. Crawley, 2021; Park et al., 2013). Thus, to further assist with preparation for loan transfers it also emerged how exposure to players who have previously experienced loans was beneficial to academy players. SP2 (Championship Club 3) explained that "players speak to first team members who have gone out on loan, maybe even gone to the same team before, to share their own experiences so that's more ad-hoc rather than being structured." This shows that although not being a formal process, if there are players within the club that have had experiences on loan, then the opportunity to hear from those players could be largely beneficial and facilitate the approach of a player preparing to go on loan. Another member of Sport Psychology staff also shared how others' experiences can be used to motivate players:

We've had a number of players that have gone on loan then come back and trained with the first team... So I think it's important to not always go on the success stories but using them as a motivator to go on loan, I think the success stories can be really critical, because probably the people that have been on loan and gone into the first

team, were probably thinking beforehand ‘I don’t wanna go on loan’ because it is a new environment it can be really scary, but probably it is the one thing they need to help their cause to be getting into the first team. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

Thus, this reiterates the advantages of learning from others’ loan experiences and portrays how this could be a beneficial addition to the Life Skills programme, with specific opportunity to learn from senior players about their experiences of club transfer, both on a temporary and permanent basis, to encourage further holistic development and consideration of individuals within the football environment.

However, despite the importance of support and guidance from others when preparing for a loan, the need to encourage players to develop independence as they approach a loan transfer was also recognised. LM1 (Premier League Club 1) shared his contemplation of accompanying players on their first day at the loan club but decided that he “shouldn’t baby them, we need them to step out of comfort zone.” Although it emerged that different players required differing levels of support, LM5 (Premier League Club 4) expressed that “it’s about giving him ownership to ask questions if need be, know what his roles and responsibilities are within the game itself.” So, it appears that a vital aspect of preparation is to encourage the individual going on loan to establish their own independence needed throughout the process, with CD1 (Championship Club 5) contributing that “we want them to just go and as part of their development, experience and gain independence, to help them stand on their own two feet,”

6.1.2 Individualised Development and Information

Another key point within this subtheme was ‘Individualised Development and Information’ which includes the use of individual development plans for players. As mentioned in Chapter Four, these refer to planning for players’ development, providing a ‘road map’ of where the player is currently and their future at the club, which occurs for all academy players. CD1 explained:

It’s a two-way process, between myself and the player, it’s almost like we talk about their aspirations and what they wanna achieve in their career, then we talk about where they are now, kind of the gap that there is and how we can bridge that. So, we look at their strengths

and why he has the ability, or why we think he has the potential to achieve his goals, to be in the Premier League, play for England, play in the Champions League, just play for [current club]. And then we look at some areas that might prevent him from achieving those things, now they're not permanent, but we kind of distil three or four in each category for a period of time and we really just focus on them. That might be technical, it might be tactical, I try to work in all of the areas, it's really about the person, trying to deal with the person and not just the player. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

This demonstrates the importance of the collaboration between the player and members of staff that are supporting them in their journey and development within the club or academy. Again, this highlights the prioritisation of holistic development, rather than solely setting football-based goals, which has been largely influenced by the EPPP. Therefore, further advocating the need for young players to develop multiple identities, in contexts external to football, which could facilitate transition out of sport, whether that be through injury, deselection or retirement (Crawley, 2021). However, recent research has highlighted a lack of resources surrounding identity within football, despite the use of the EPPP and its focus on holistic development, with findings of continued reinforcement of full commitment to, and concentrated ambition within, the professional football environment (Champ et al., 2020). This has been acknowledged to create a complex dual attention (Green et al., 2020) within the development system in English football whereby academies must facilitate holistic development, whilst maintaining the principal goal of producing professional football players (McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006).

Nevertheless, the current thesis has evidenced widespread recognition of holistic development as a fundamental priority across different roles and clubs within the highest levels of English Professional football, which may provide promise that values are adapting to give precedence to holistic support and development to mediate progression through the football environment, particularly when preparing players for loan transfers. This also reiterates wider societal consideration of mental health and the correlation between physical and mental health (e.g. Prince et al., 2007), with a more recent increased need to encourage and support men specifically, in sharing their experiences of mental health, both generally (e.g. Lynch et al., 2018) and within the elite sporting context (e.g. Souter et al., 2018). Similarly, with loan transfers, there

may be greater recognition of change affecting both mental health and identity, as well as future prospects, which encourages supporting staff to have awareness of holistic needs whilst assisting individuals during loan periods. Therefore, emphasising the requirement of broader development to assist the increased independence of a loan transfer, whilst also acquiring skills needed across wider life, regardless of progression to senior professional football. Hence, strong collaboration between parent club staff and players to consider individual development both personally and professionally can mediate multiple identities and improved mental health whilst on loan.

Such collaboration is facilitated by foundations of a good relationship, whereby LA2 (Premier League Club 6) emphasised that “the coach [responsible for loans] will try and make sure there’s a relationship with the player before he goes out [on loan]”. Similarly, one of the LMs explained how he incorporates development plans into his collaboration with loan players, encouraging a more player-centred approach:

Whatever you wanna go and achieve on loan comes from you, as guided by myself. Generally, because we know what we want these boys to go and achieve, if it’s a first loan but again, if it’s a second loan or a third loan, there is different individual learning and development that we need from them. But we try to get them to come up with those things, if you’ve not been out before and you are going from the Premier League to League One, normally you are thinking ‘I’m coming from the Premier League, I should score 20 goals for this team’, but it’s not that easy. So we’ll look from the start of the season and say “what are we aiming for in three months’ time?” and we’ll continuously move the parameters, but it’s guiding them to know that it’s not just an easy six or 12 months away at a different club, and if it doesn’t happen then let’s talk about why it hasn’t happened, that’s the real conversation, so that we prepare for the next one. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

Therefore, this highlights the need to consider shorter term goals, rather than merely outlining the long term aspirations of players, particularly when players from higher competitive levels may assume success during loan transfers within lower leagues. LM5’s comments also indicate the need to continuously communicate and review the development plan, whereby players and support staff can plan for the next step in that player’s pathway, potentially being another loan transfer. This emphasises the

importance of the process of goal setting, applying goal setting theory (GST; Locke and Latham, 1990, 2002, 2019) within the academy setting, which can be effective when preparing for loans, as well as to continually review progress.

Both short and long term goals can be used to provide motivation and focus for individual games or weeks during the loan and aims for the outcome of the temporary transfer period as attaining goals can influence success or failure for sports performers (Williams, 2013). The use of GST can improve task-related performance through focusing and investing effort directed at accomplishing goals (Locke and Latham, 2002). A key principle of goal setting is that individuals with specific goals which are challenging yet attainable, are more successful in performance than those with set goals lacking difficulty (Lunenburg, 2011), although the individual requires capability, acceptance and to be open to performance feedback in order to achieve the goal (Latham, 2003). Therefore, regularly reviewing goals, and setting new ones, could be a useful tool for both players and staff to focus on holistic development and assist players before, during and after their loan transfer. This supports the findings of Kent et al. (2022) who reported that loan players utilise goal setting as a method of coping, whereby individuals can take ownership and autonomy over their own development and subsequently enhance motivation. The presence of self-efficacy and task-specific confidence in one's own ability (Bandura, 1977, 1997) has been positively associated with effort and completion with regards to goal-setting in the workplace, supporting previous literature on the benefits of using such motivational techniques for employee development (Lunnenberg, 2011), also extending to the sporting context (e.g. Jeong et al., 2021).

Similarly, another fundamental aspect identified within this process of individual development plans was discussing and managing player expectations. SP2 explained:

We sit with players, the 18's and get them to reflect on what challenges they're anticipating and what tools they have got in their tool kit which they are going to, or have to, draw on. I think for the younger players it's been good to be able to do that but it's not just challenges, it's what are they looking forward to as well and getting them to really look to make the most out of the experience... I have seen some that are not sure, maybe sceptical and need reassurance

that it's not a move to shuffle them out of the club, others are very excited by the opportunity, some absolutely clueless about what it will mean for them and what it will look like, a bit naïve so yeah absolutely quite varied, some are happy to just get out and play men's football or play regular football if they are not playing. (SP2, Championship Club 3)

Consequently, this shows the importance of active reflection whereby players consider both potential adversity and success they could face on loan, with support from staff. The intention of the loan and communication to the player may also impact their perception of it, inevitably influencing their expectations, thus again, reiterating the importance of ensuring that expectations are clear in preparation for the loan. Reflection has been explained as a process similar to supervision, without the presence of a supervisor, and thus can be conducted independently to augment capability, although also beneficial to practice collectively (Hay, 2007). The importance of reflective practice, specifically knowledge in action, also referred to as craft knowledge (Knowles et al., 2001) or tacit knowledge (Martens, 1987), has been highlighted within a range of literature as crucial in enhancing professional development through reflecting on one's own experience (Knowles et al., 2001). This can be utilised by players and support staff alike, whereby an in-depth process of reflection can be integrated through practice (Ghaye, 2010), facilitating knowledge and decision making within complex sport settings (Cropley and Hanton, 2011).

Additionally, wider informational support was identified within football clubs, whereby players will receive an individualised club profile of their loan club prior to transfer. For some participants, this largely informational level of support was the dominant form of preparation for players, including details about the loan club, along with administrative support and guided contact with the relevant personnel. LA1 elaborated:

So it's putting together a bit of a profile of the club that they're going to so you hope that as a player they'd take a bit of ownership and responsibility and do a bit of research themselves but that's not always the case. So we'll put together a bit of a video profile of the club, what kind of football they play, just a bit of generic information about the club, what the stadium looks like, any players that they might know at the club, but we would have a conversation with the player and the agent where we would present this video and this

information to them so they can have a look through it, see their playing style, these are what we feel the expectations of the club are, are they gonna be looking for promotion. But within that meeting we'd set our own expectations of the players so the reason you're going here is because we want you to develop in these areas because if you get better in these key areas then you're gonna be closer to the first team. (LA1, Premier League Club 2)

Therefore, this offers specific insight about the loan club to provide familiarity before players arrive, along with an abundance of information that will be useful for contextual understanding of the loan club. This supports identification of different support types including emotional support through offering comfort, esteem support by enhancing one's sense of ability and self-belief, informational support through giving advice and tangible support referring to concrete help (Cutrona and Russell, 1990; Rees and Hardy, 2000). Similarly, one of the LMs explained how they carry out physical visits to potential loan clubs, to create a portfolio and generate decisions surrounding positive developmental environments for players in the future:

I do a sort of pre-loan site check, I've got almost all the [region of UK] clubs, not so many further afield, so for instance, even though we've never had anyone at [Championship club], I've done a site check there, so I know about the manager, I know about the training week, and if you take, say [League Two club] you take your own kit home, you don't get food provided, you don't get breakfast provided, you know they train these days, and so we're able to identify, when someone is going to [League Two club], we can sit down before they go and say "well listen, when you go here, don't be shocked because you have to buy your own Lucozade, you have to take sandwiches in for your lunch, you have to get changed here then travel in your car to the training ground." So just that little bit of preparation, so it's not so much of a shock and the other thing that stops happening is going in there and starting to take the mick because they have to take their kit home, they're not saying "you what? I have to take my kit home?" they're already aware of it. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This further highlights the need for effective preparation and communication with players before their loan transition to ensure that they have realistic expectations when they are in the new loan environment. Morris et al. (2016) emphasised the importance of role-specific support for players, along with acknowledging that players need information on the process of transition in which they will experience to successfully

cope with demands. Subsequently, the current thesis supports and develops these findings, showing that specific preparation for players surrounding their loan transfer and specific circumstances are helpful in their preparation for, and adaptation to, the loan club, particularly during initial exposure to senior environments across different competitive levels.

6.2 Player Challenges on Loan

The second subtheme to emerge within the overarching theme ‘Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players’ was ‘Player Challenges on Loan’ whereby participants shared their experiences and insights surrounding challenges that players may face during their temporary transfer. Therefore, within this subtheme three key points emerged and will be discussed, being ‘Lack of Game Time’ (6.2.1), ‘The Challenges of Discovering a New Environment’ (6.2.2.1), ‘Identity Challenges, Mental Health and Perceived Support’ (6.2.2.2).

6.2.1 Lack of Game Time

The predominant issue recognised was a lack of game time. LA2 (Premier League Club 6) stated that the “number one challenge is how do you deal with not playing minutes, cause generally if they’re playing, they’re happy”, with LM3 (Premier League Club 2) adding that “the big challenge is they’re not played, they can’t understand why.” This supports previous literature in recognising a lack of game time as a fundamental challenge during loans (Kent et al., 2022), and wider youth to senior transition (Swainston et al., 2020). However, the current study explores this from additional perspectives than solely players, LM4 stated:

There can be issues with deselection [from the team], what I’ve found in my experience is that when a player is playing regularly, generally, the incidence of problems is often far less, when a player is deselected or out of the team, that’s when there will probably be more issues. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

This suggests not only the initial challenge of not being selected for the team, but also subsequent challenges that loan players may encounter as a result of not playing football, LM6 elaborated:

Most of them haven't experienced team selection, they've always played at [parent club], they're on the team sheet, they've never been substituted, they've never had to play for their place, so some of them struggle with that. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Thus, players may face difficulties that are novel during the loan and within the current thesis it emerged that issues exist surrounding player attitudes if they are not being played. LM1 (Premier League Club 1) emphasised that there is "no god given right for them to actually go and start", with LA1 contributing:

They think they should just be able to walk straight into it [loan club first team]... If the team is flying and everyone is fit, there might not be opportunities for players or they might not have the right attitude and be showing that they deserve their spot. (LA1, Premier League Club 2)

Therefore, with increased competition for place in senior football, loan players may attribute a lack of game time to the loan club or manager. Subsequently, the participants in the current study suggested that players must consider the influence of their own attitude and application at the loan club, LM3 expanded:

We've got a lot of kids at the moment who are getting frustrated with the fact that they're not playing for the loan clubs but it's like trying to get them into a mindset saying 'well it's not just a case of cause I've been here six months I'm due a game', you've gotta try and force your way in...they should be thinking 'I need to be meeting standards every day, in the gym, out the gym, on the training ground, in running', you know not be at the back of the group all the time and running with me mates, all this is coming across to the manager through his sport science because they'll be getting all the data or it might just be that the manager can see that he's not putting it in. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

This demonstrates the requirement for loan players to reflect and develop self-awareness to ensure accountability for their own effort and earn their place in the team. Similarly, another LM shared:

For some of them, they just blame the culture 'oh yeah, I'm not playing because that manager likes that player better than me', but instead it's knuckling down and getting them thinking 'what do I need to do?' and that's where someone like myself or a loans manager comes in to then begin to ask this question, "why do you think this is not happening?" I've spoken to the manager, the manager is telling me you're a very talented player, no doubt about that, you need to work a little bit harder. (LM5, Premier League Club 4)

This reinforces the role of the LM in supporting and guiding loan players through their temporary transfer, especially with initial exposure to such issues, which may negatively impact an individual's confidence, identity and mental health (Blakelock et al., 2016). However, issues with the loan club also emerged, including managerial changes during the loan period, LM6 (Premier League Club 5) stated that "manager changes are a nightmare, because it's easy to drop or push a loan player to the side for a new manager coming in because he didn't bring him in", making it very difficult for the loan player to achieve the success intended. Similarly, PCL1 (Premier League Club 7) added that "managerial changes can impact how much a player plays... a lot depends on the club and giving players opportunities, some things are out of the player's control."

Therefore, despite the importance of attitude, challenges exist outside of the player's control, particularly with changes in management, although player application will remain influential to increase chances of selection. Similarly, the issue of false promise may exist whereby clubs recruit loan players due to uncertainty with player purchases and extensions of existing players' contracts, particularly in the absence of a large budget. However, with focus on player attitude and application, many participants felt that the unpredictability of playing time is inevitable within the professional football environment, providing loan players with a true experience of the industry, therefore indicating that players have the responsibility to prove themselves. Nevertheless, loans provide players and clubs with mutual benefit from the temporary transfer, particularly with developmental purposes for the player and therefore, without game time, it may be perceived as a wasted opportunity, especially if loan clubs do not uphold their part of the agreement. However, as previously recognised, football managers across all clubs, parent and loan, are concerned with achieving three points

in every game and will subsequently utilise players they perceive most likely to do that, whether they are on loan or not, as football managers experience a range of pressures themselves (e.g. Bridgewater, 2010; Morrow and Howieson, 2014).

Additionally, there was recognition of injury limiting loan players' opportunities to play for loan clubs, with LA2 (Premier League Club 6) highlighting that "if they have an injury which would take more than a couple of weeks to heal, they'll come back to [parent club] for their rehab." This may lead to the termination of the loan contract, depending on the stage of the season and the outstanding duration of the loan agreement, although players may return to the loan club post-recovery, or if resources are available, receive treatment at the loan club. However, Abbott and Clifford (2021) reported that players were returned to competition faster within the loan environment after injury in comparison to academies. Therefore, there may be additional pressures to ensure quick recovery from injury and maximise loan player availability, which could cause further complications if returned prematurely (Abbott and Clifford, 2021).

6.2.2.1 The Challenges of Discovering a New Environment

It also emerged that challenges exist for players upon leaving academy environments, particularly during initial loan experiences. LM6 discussed issues faced during initial loan transfers:

Quite a few struggle because it's the first experience of being involved in a different squad, the dynamics of a professional team squad is so different to a 23s squad, where they are still counted as academy and they're still molly coddled, suddenly they've gotta go into a dressing room where the banter can be a bit severe, so there's that side to it. But also, if it's the first time that they've lived away from home, the lad who went to [League One club] was okay because he's from [country in the UK], so he's used to being away from home, generally the ones who have moved to come to [location of parent club] are the ones who are good moving again because they're not moving from home, they're moving from a second home really... We do have lads who are worried, really anxious about going out on loan, because of what we're talking about, the number of changes to their routine. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This demonstrates the different challenges encountered by loan players, both on and off the pitch, needing to adapt to the physical and social circumstances of senior

football, along with independent living. Some players also face geographical culture changes, PCL1 (Premier League Club 7) stated that “the cultural shifts can be quite tricky” particularly with different norms, languages and rules, LA2 shared:

Going to a new country and there’s a new culture, language wise, or just culturally, lack of advice socially and in terms of training culture, so different managers in different leagues, different countries might have different ways of training or playing. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

This shows additional challenges faced in terms of performance at a loan club, with the need to consider the specific culture and processes within the new loan club. Particularly with senior football culture, consisting of increases in competitive standard, resources and privileges, as well as increased physicality and ruthlessness which players are not exposed to in academy environments. This reiterates the need to understand differences in communities within organisations, referring again to the social structure and personality framework, whereby understanding a player’s wider environment, and helping them understand different contexts is pivotal in managing their expectations when transitioning between clubs. Particularly with the temporary transition of a loan whereby a player often moves from one ‘community’ (academy) at a familiar organisation (parent club), to another ‘community’ (senior environment) at a different organisation (loan club), then optimally back to the senior ‘community’ at the parent club, resulting in a minimum of two transition periods. However, this could also result in further transition to other clubs on either a temporary or permanent basis if deemed appropriate and this framework may assist practitioners in their own understanding, and players’ awareness, of differences between clubs and teams, and how the individual may interact with their environments.

Therefore, with variation in culture and expectation across clubs and departments, players need to experience senior football to see the reality of the football world and prove their ability at a certain standard, SP3 (Championship Club 4) shared that “it might be the next step in their development in terms of physicality.” Particularly when comparing the academy and senior environments, LM3 (Premier League Club 2) added that the Under 23 squad is a “stepping stone” to men’s football, elaborating that

the “23s is a good tool but I think there is a shelf life.” Therefore, challenging loan players to an environment that requires increased physicality, aids their progression in professional football. This supports previous research, which reported that training sessions within the loan environment, and senior football teams in general (Finn and McKenna, 2010), demanded increased physicality, namely through speed and intensity compared to academies (Abbott and Clifford, 2021).

Along with notable differences in physicality, the need to adapt to a new social environment, particularly in earlier loan experiences emerged. LM3 (Premier League Club 2) shared that “in academies everybody’s your mate” so players are likely to be familiar with a cohesive, comfortable and stable social environment. However, LA2 elaborated on challenges of uncertainty:

They’ll be going from you know, the [parent club] academy, which is fantastic but it’s quite a protective kind of bubble because you’ve got fantastic training facilities, the same coaches you’re seeing every day for the last 10 years, all your mates you’ve seen for the last 10 years, your family living close to you and all that. Then suddenly being chunked into a new environment, might be a lower league club where you’re essentially training in a park, or the manager wants you to play a completely different style of play that you’re not used to. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

Therefore, this raises questions about the effectiveness of the academy environment in preparing players for challenges faced in senior football, and wider life. LM4 also expressed concerns:

It’s certainly something that I feel in England we can struggle with, in terms of the academy system in this country, it has some amazing aspects, but it also is very elitist in that we have some players that have developed from a very young age that are kind of shut away behind big perimeter fences and fancy academies. And even from the ages of seven or eight, they’re kind of shut off from the rest of society and they’re molly coddled all the way through the system and then they get to the age of 19 and they go on loan somewhere and they just haven’t developed the life skills, to cope in that environment on their own. (LM4, Premier League Club 3)

Again, this highlights the lack of exposure to adversity within the academy system, whereby players will be given various resources and information, preventing the need for individual responsibility for development. Young players experiencing a change in culture from a sheltered academy setting to a cut-throat and results-driven senior environment (Richardson et al., 2013), further distinguishes the football context from other sports, resulting in a different transition experience for football players entering senior level, in comparison to other performers (Morris et al., 2017). However, whilst supporting such research, the current thesis develops findings through demonstrating the additional difficulty of transitioning into a senior environment in which is not familiar to players, as opposed to entering the senior environment of an existing club.

When experiencing a loan transfer, there is an inevitable short-termism that comes with such transition, with player knowledge that despite being temporary, it could significantly impact their present and future, LM6 highlighted:

You can't even compare it with being a permanent player at the same club because when you're a permanent player, the support structure around you is different, we all know that when things aren't going well, you tend to feel a little bit more lonely than normal, so he's in a strange environment and it's not going right, so his not going right is multiplied a little bit compared to one of their own players' not going right, and I think we have to be aware of that. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This may present specific challenges, including psychological, when attempting to embed themselves in the loan environment, as all members of that environment are aware of the nature of the temporary transfer, leaving the specific context and dynamic to influence the experience. Despite the professional football context itself being characteristically unpredictable and ever-changing, many players on permanent contracts will have a sense of longer term security through contractual agreement, still without guarantee, but more time to plan or consider potential alternatives whilst under contract, as well as embed socially. However, prior to confirming a permanent professional contract, feelings of anxiety are likely to exist for many loan players given various confounding variables and broader influences on their future. SP1 recognised further challenge at senior level:

I think the academy environment as much as it prepares them really well for footballing life in terms of training regime and professionalism of training five-six times a week and what the environment looks like in terms of being an elite footballer, it doesn't always prepare them well for how they might be under pressure from a manager to get results or exposure to fans...It is so different in a men's environment and that's often a big learning curve for the lads that come back from loans, just having to deal with a difference in the changing rooms as well. U18's, where there is obviously banter but it is very subdued, whereas a men's environment is a bit more active whether that's different kind of humour or more conflict, all those issues that don't crop up that much in youth football...they also need more independence, in the academy world a lot of stuff is done for them...I think that going out on loan just means that they have got to take more responsibility for what time training is tonight and how are they getting there and stuff that they have not had to really worry about being at a Premier League academy and being babysat a little bit. (SP1, Premier League Club 8)

This reiterates the distinction between youth and senior culture in professional football environments with increased public exposure, more intense social dynamics and greater need for independence and accountability, in a performance-oriented culture. Therefore, this supports Kent and colleagues' (2022) findings whereby players required the ability to take ownership and responsibility during their loan transition to help manage their development. Similarly, SP3 expressed the need to understand such a culture:

We probably look to send players out on loan for progress and development as a person and as a player. So, we'd look to stretch them in terms of environments that are extremely competitive and results are heavily based...mainly to try and give them experience of what first team football looks like. Especially when there is a kind of, I don't wanna say culture, but the emphasis put on winning and losing is far higher than in academy football, because obviously if you lose a number of games within a first team environment, it's quite likely that the first team manager will get the sack, if they're not winning. So, I think it's important for them to actually understand their performance on a consistent level at a really high level, so taking the skills and experiences they've had within the academy to try and apply that in a first team setting, and meeting new players, new people and looking to build those relationships as well. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

This further establishes the need for loan players, particularly during initial loans, to understand the harsh reality of the need to win and the consequences of losing at senior level. Thus reiterating the benefit of game time whilst on loan, if players understand the manager's need to maximise performance and points collected, then players are likely to accept increased competition for place within senior football. Such findings support Abbott and Clifford's (2021) research, whereby pressures surrounding relegation, promotion and finances were reported. Similarly, North et al. (2014) suggested that these pressures can interfere with developmental aims in football, leading to outcome-orientation dominating decisions, thus resulting in the progression of the most talented players and the dismissal of others, without much support (Blakelock et al., 2016; Wilkinson, 2021). Similarly, factors such as crowds and public reactions through social media have been recognised as detrimental to loan players' confidence at senior level, with such factors being absent in the academy environment (Abbott and Clifford, 2021). Again, understanding players' support networks, group involvement and wider social context is crucial to acknowledge here through application of the social structure and personality framework, whereby having strong support within football environment and beyond, ensures that player experiences of transition are being facilitated regardless of their success in the football context.

6.2.2.2 Identity Challenges, Mental Health and Perceived Support

Additionally, it emerged that players need the capacity to cope with 'club sickness' whilst on loan as some players appear to miss, and show attachment to, their parent club, further supporting the findings of Abbott and Clifford (2021). This relates to 'bursting the academy bubble' but also includes compromising identification and association with the parent club, with the potential fear of being pushed out, LM6 summarised this:

We have some players who have an umbilical cord to [training ground], the first little niggle they get, they're back, the first chance they get, they're back, and they're coming back and they're popping in. And we've got others, funny enough the lad that was at [League Two club] then [another League Two club], when he was at [more local of the two clubs] he didn't come back to [training ground] once,

because his argument was, “well I’ve got everything I need here, I don’t need to come back.” So it’s really odd, it’s funny the way that different players approach it...a lot of them have been with us since they were eight or nine so at that point they would have been with us for 10, 11, 12 years and I’ve no doubt that subconsciously, they may realise that they don’t have a long-term future with us and wanna just keep hold of that link while they’ve got it. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This further represents identity issues that may arise for loan players, particularly if they are not playing, or are underperforming, they may feel vulnerable regarding their return or progression within their parent club. Application of SI, a perspective within SSP, can be used here, namely the notion of how one’s perception of how others perceive them, is important in one’s own self-concept (Cooley, 1972). This supports Kent et al.’s (2022) findings whereby players acknowledged challenges during their loan period as potentially threatening the identity they had developed at their parent club at a higher level of competition or threatening to their career as a professional football player. Therefore, the current thesis adds to existing literature on athletic identity by extending to the context of loan transfers whereby there is suggestion of identity foreclosure not only as a football player, but as the player of a specific football club.

This is likely when there is a strong affiliation with the parent club, players may struggle to cope externally to it, which may also depend on the level of contact and support received from the parent club. Therefore, the possibility of identity crisis or threat exists across the loan period where players may struggle to be away from their parent club and adopt the identity of the loan club, or when planning beyond the loan, may perceive threat to their identity as a parent club player, particularly if they are not successful in returning to, and progressing within, the respective club. This could be understood through self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1982), which proposed that self-stereotyping occurs in groups, also referred to as depersonalisation, whereby the self can be viewed as easily substituted by other members of the ingroup due to each member being able to find meaning in the category of the group and then represent that meaning, encouraging each member to internalise the group category (Rees et al., 2015). Thus, leading players to internalise their status as a member of their parent

club, regardless of spending time at a loan club, reiterating risk of identity foreclosure at the parent club, particularly where that is the only club a player has known. This may be a challenge where players feel a pressure to live up to the reputation of their parent club, especially if they are earning high wages with a significant contribution from the loan club, LA2 elaborated:

Suddenly being chunked into an environment where they're the youngest and playing at a club maybe where you've got senior pros who have been in the game for 10-15 years, who might be earning less money than this loan player just because he's a [parent club] player. But just because the loan player earns quite a lot of money because he's a talent, that puts extra pressure on you when you have the [parent club] brand on you, you're expected to have a certain performance level... So people underestimate that and to me that's where the media and football pundits, you know they'll judge a 20 year old straight away without taking all that into context. (LA2 Premier League Club 6)

This not only indicates the pressure of representing the loan club, as a parent club player, but also the pressure and expectation from the wider football industry, with the need to prove ability. Thus, this suggests that various performance challenges must be considered in terms of the judgement faced not only from the loan club and fans, but also from wider members of the football environment. LA1 (Premier League Club 2) therefore suggested that "players need to be self-sustainable, the various challenges they face are a key reason for the loan process being developmental" and how they adapt to the adversity and additional pressures that they encounter help establish key skills required for their development and continued progression within the game. Therefore, there was recognition of players needing to take responsibility for challenges of not getting selected for the team, exposure to different circumstances, or feelings of club sickness whilst on loan, LA2 proposed the need for problem solving skills:

You wanna try and steer them away from coming running back to [parent club] every time something's not working out well. It's kind of encouraging them to deal with this problem on their own... the right balance between chatting with your manager at the club you're at and saying "look what can I do to improve? I wanna get better" but also

not being one of those people that is constantly in the manager's office and complaining. (LA2 Premier League Club 6)

This emphasises the need to be independent and take responsibility for addressing the challenges faced by players, but also being able to judge and perceive how to do that effectively, and in a way that will not be viewed as immature or time-consuming for staff at the loan club.

However, there may be wider influences on a player's perception and actions, for example homesickness and isolation emerged as challenges frequently faced by loan players with PCL1 (Premier League Club 7) sharing that "circumstances like location are important to adjustment and welfare." Similarly, PCL2 expressed:

Loan players need that support more than other players, especially those that have moved quite far away, going out on their own and not knowing anyone...I think a lot of people struggle socially, you don't walk into a team and become everybody's best mate, if you've moved away from home to become part of a team, then that process is gradual which can feel quite isolating and lonely sometimes because it doesn't just happen overnight. So I think players struggle with that, but unfortunately there's not a lot of support we can give them in terms of that, we can support them with trying to manage their own mental health and giving them ideas to combat loneliness. (PCL2, Championship Club 2)

This highlights the role of support staff in recognising challenges of isolation, but also acknowledging the difficulty in helping players with such challenges, whereby assisting player development of coping skills is necessary. Similarly, there was discussion of psychological impacts whilst on loan, whereby players and their respective clubs cannot ignore the need to consider player psychology and mental health, LM3 emphasised:

The psychology and the mental side is becoming more and more... I mean they can all play otherwise they wouldn't get to a certain point and it's getting to that next point, it's getting to that next level is where the mind takes over... I'd never even thought about how does that affect them though, when they're moving from club to club every six months and getting a bit up and then probably a bit down because things aren't working out. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

This demonstrates heightened awareness of psychology in sport, consistent with the progression of holistic development, particularly regarding mental health, however, further progress is required, particularly in performance-oriented environments where results are commonly prioritised over well-being. It is therefore important to educate staff and improve holistic support by working with sport psychologists to further improve player support. This may include educational workshops for staff, with training and preparation specific to loan experiences so that players can be fully understood and supported during such transitions. Therefore, TDEs have been held accountable for overseeing the effective holistic development and support for young football players, with researchers insisting that TDEs must ensure that players access resources to successfully cope with demands of transitions encountered as they progress through, or exit, the football environment (e.g. Gledhill and Harwood, 2015; Larsen et al., 2013). Similarly, with specific acknowledgement of mental health needs for players, LM6 highlighted the need to manage development and threats to mental wellbeing:

It's a real difficult one, cause it is part of the challenge and it's a very thin line from being unhappy and affecting your mental wellbeing and we have to try and identify that. So I've got two instances where we've lent out to Championship clubs in the past few years, with quite a big financial input from those, so if we just use one of those, by January, he's out of the team, not in a great place mentally, to bring him back is gonna cost us a quarter of a million pounds, and we then have to make a decision, and we're quite good at our club, both of those examples, we actually brought the player back, because we felt that the situation was affecting his mental health, so we took a massive financial hit with those two lads, but if it was just 'I'm unhappy, I'm not in the team and that', it would just be a long discussion with the coaching staff and the psychologist, then they'd have a chat with him and it would just be on a sort of case by case situation, because it is part of the experience. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Therefore, this evidences the difficulty in making judgements when a player is unhappy due to the loan not meeting expectations and identifying circumstances of severe detriment to a player's mental wellbeing during their temporary transfer. Thus, the current thesis suggests that within the professional football environment, there is

greater attention and awareness of mental health issues, with prioritisation of mental wellbeing over financial gain for some LMs, hopefully representing the wider values of the club promoting the same level of importance regarding mental health. LM6 elaborated on his views:

I think it is something that is quite easy to push under the carpet really and just tell them to 'man up' and 'he's in football, that's what football is all about, there's a point when he's gonna have to grow up and deal with it or get on with it', and maybe he's not able to deal with it (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

Again, this reiterates the importance of advocating mental health needs and reviewing individual circumstances, and the level of support available to individuals to ensure they feel comfortable to share mental health challenges, particularly in new, temporary environments. Additionally, it is fundamental to acknowledge wider cultural pressures and stigma attached to the professional football industry in admitting psychological struggle due to fear of consequences and perceived weakness (e.g. Bennett, 2021). Therefore, whilst encouraging players to have independence in their temporary transfer, it was advocated that players must feel that there is support available when they need it, LM6 recognised:

You're still hearing things in the press or on social media that players who complain that they don't have that level of support, and they don't have that contact and they're still saying that they feel as if they were just left to their own devices and there was no contact, so I don't suppose it matters really if there was or wasn't contact if the player feels like there wasn't contact, that's the important thing. So that puts you on your toes a little bit, because that's the one thing that we don't want to happen is for the player to be able to say that, and that's why we probably overdo it a little bit because at the end of the day, they've gotta stand on their own two feet, so not to molly coddle them and to contact them all the time, but there's a fine balance. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This signifies the importance of player perception surrounding support during their loan, even when a plethora of support is available, if a player perceives a lack of support, then it is unlikely that support will be utilised effectively. Abbott and Clifford (2021) also acknowledged the importance of support when dealing with adversity

during loans. They found that players identified a reduced support network at their loan club, contrasting the broad network available within academy settings. Despite this, the current thesis identifies various club personnel promoting effective holistic support for loan players. Similarly, previous literature has recognised the benefits of social support, including enhancing both physical and mental health (e.g. House et al., 1988), as well as stress-buffering effects (Cohen and Wills, 1985).

However, there has been a distinction between perceived support, which refers to the network of support that one feels they have access to, and received support, which refers to the actual support behaviours and provisions displayed by the support network, within the sports context, such a support network may consist of family, friends, teammates and coaches (Freeman et al., 2011). Nevertheless, in line with LM6's comments, perceived support can have a significant impact on an individual regardless of the level of received support (Wetherington and Kessler, 1986). Whilst perceived support is difficult to measure due to the subjective nature of individual perception, strong feelings of perceived support have been linked with increases in self-confidence (Rees and Freeman, 2007; Vealey et al., 1998) and performance outcomes in sport (Freeman and Rees, 2009). Moreover, the absence of social support increases risk of burnout sport (e.g. Raedeke and Smith, 2004) and the workplace (e.g. Brown et al., 2003).

Despite the range of challenges that emerged for loan players, these were viewed as crucial in their development. LM1 (Premier League Club 1) suggested that "players are generally excited to go out and play...whether they play or not, loans are a positive experience and there's something to take from them...we like to put pressure on them as they're going into a pressurised environment." Therefore, challenges encourage effective development of the individual during the loan, similarly, LM2 (Championship Club 1) expressed "we try to create challenges for players to foster development, for example, we may take certain comforts or privileges, or I may not be readily available for them to contact all the time." Again, this reiterates the benefit of balancing support and independence for players, to encourage challenge and subsequently progression, with SP1 (Premier League Club 8) also stating that "every single player I have spoken to in terms of going out on loan has found it beneficial even if they haven't enjoyed it." Similarly, SP2 shared:

I can think of two internationals that went out in their early phase, one of them went abroad and said it was the best thing he ever did, culturally and again helping him deal with different life situations. And another one of our goalkeepers went out on several loans before he made it to the first team and he again refers back to those experiences as being able to shape and give him that grounding, allowing him to step into a first team space... I think loans challenge in a good way, actually having to fend for themselves and that could be anything to do with cooking to washing their own kit, to dealing with fans, actually dealing with criticism from men, coming up against a big strapping striker or defender that is physically knocking them about the pitch, how they would deal with that, again I spoke to one of our keepers who's been out on loan and getting abuse about a metre from your face, from an opposing fan, something that he is not necessarily used to, the standard of pitches are a lot worse at times, the style of football, particularly if you are going into the non-league, it can be quite direct. (SP2, Championship Club 3)

This further enforces the various challenges faced in the senior football environment, and discussed in this chapter, particularly with heightened demands on the pitch. Yet despite such difficulty, many players attribute loan experiences as fundamental to their professional development. There have also been parallels recognised in the transition from school to work, with research suggesting that many young people, upon finishing further education, are not equipped with the capabilities to adapt and show success when transitioning to full time employment (Redecker et al., 2011). In line with the current thesis, and football environment, there appears to be a disconnect between the education setting of young people and the professional work environment whereby qualifications do not prepare young people for the various demands faced in the workplace, and like academies, educational environments could risk being overprotective with a lack of independence developed by young adults soon to approach the working world. Additionally, career transitions have been highlighted as a frequent challenge for staff supporting performers with such adjustments across the sporting context, showing that there are challenges not only faced by those experiencing transition, but also wider members of the environment attempting to facilitate the specific circumstances (Grove et al., 1997; Stambulova et al., 2021; Stephan, 2003) which can add complication to ensuring performers are developing optimally.

6.3 Key Factors for a Successful Loan

The third subtheme that emerged within the overarching theme 'Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players' was 'Key Factors for a Successful Loan' whereby participants established which skills or characteristics they felt were essential for players to demonstrate to be perceived as having a successful loan transfer (see figure 16).

Therefore, the three key points that emerged to form this subtheme of 'Key factors for a successful loan' were 'Perform Well and Tactical Flexibility' (6.3.1), 'Humility, Open Mind and Resilience' (6.3.2) and 'Awareness, Coping Skills and Relationship Building' (6.3.3).

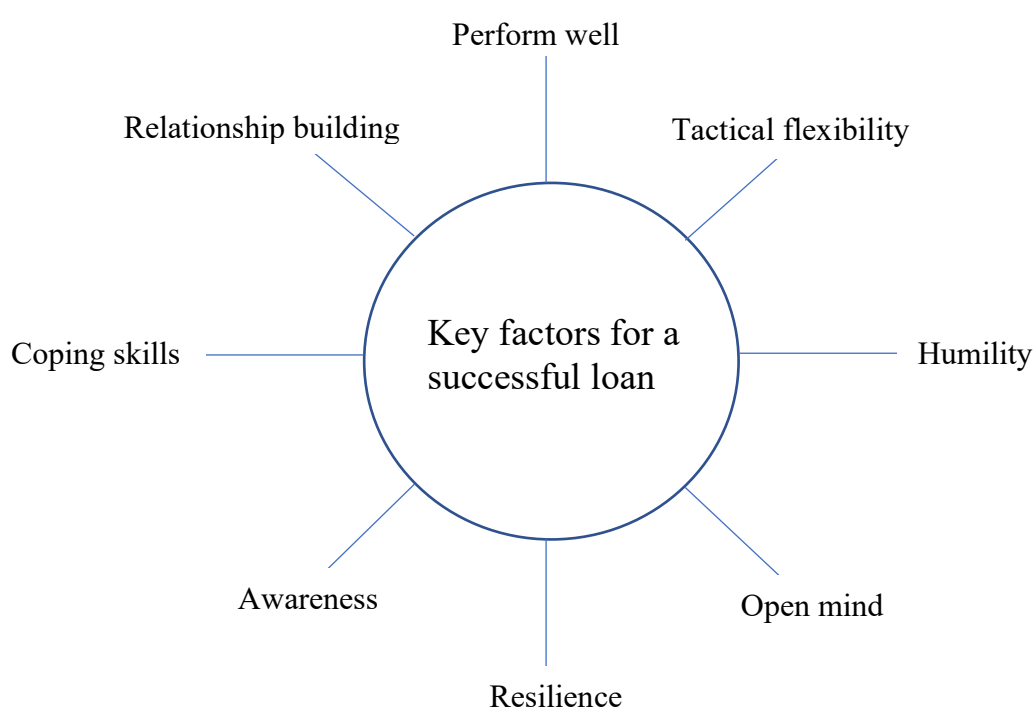


Figure 16: Key factors that contribute to loan success, as emerged from the current thesis.

6.3.1 Perform Well and Tactical Flexibility

The first and perhaps most expected feature of a successful loan was to perform well at the loan club, but with the importance working hard and prove yourself through performance, where players must show application and effort. LM3 (Premier League

Club 2) stated that “performances will dictate where you get to”, being the key aspect to progression within the football environment, whereby players were expected to show strong character as a player. However, playing well alone, will often not be enough to ensure players reach the level they aspire to, there is also a range of personal characteristics that were seen as fundamental for a successful loan. Similarly, PCL1 explained:

Most players are successful in their loans because they have the ability to play at that level and it does make them grow as people and athletes but they have a certain basic level of skills because they wouldn't have got a pro contract if they didn't, that is playing skills and mental or personality skills so I think it depends a lot on the club.
(PCL1, Premier League Club 7)

This demonstrates the view that once reaching the PDP within a football academy, all players have evidenced exceptional footballing ability, therefore if they continue to perform well whilst on loan, it is likely that their loan transfer will be deemed a success. Given the developmental nature of loans for players in the latter stages of the academy and the support of the LM that many clubs are now introducing, LM5 (Premier League Club 4) expressed that “this role is not about looking after the first team guys, it's more about the younger ones who need education, that need to understand what football really is, to make it in the industry.”

Similarly, to perform well, players may have to adapt to different demands therefore requiring flexibility in their application, LA2 shared some insights into taking on the new tactical approach of the loan club:

It's getting them to embrace it and even if you're an attacking midfield who's incredibly attackingly gifted on the ball, getting all the short passes, playing the one-two combinations and suddenly you're chucked into a team where 90% of the match the ball is just flying over your head and most of your job is just running around, picking up second balls and putting in tackles, you're realising that is a skill that you need in senior football... We always tell the player, listen to their current manager first, we would never go against what the loan [club] manager is telling them. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

Thus, this demonstrates the importance of considering differences that players may be faced with in the loan environment, with specific recognition of different styles of play whereby LA2 has also established the expectation that loan players must primarily engage with the loan club in order to be successful during the loan, maximising personal development and gaining accurate exposure to senior football. This supports the tactical challenges that were identified by loan players in research conducted by Abbott and Clifford (2021), including involvement in different playing systems and variation in sharing of tactics from management. However, LM5 (Premier League Club 4) emphasised that “you need to sort of confront that environment, make sure you respect that environment but don’t forget where you’re coming from because you are only there on a temporary basis.” Therefore, unlike LA2’s comments which prioritised the loan environment, LM5 proclaimed that despite needing to embrace the new environment, players must maintain their parent club focus due to the temporary nature of a loan transfer, implying the precedence of parent clubs throughout.

6.3.2 Humility, Open Mind and Resilience

It was also acknowledged that players need to demonstrate humility whilst on loan, with the need to work for a place in the team, regardless of a player’s parent club and their reputation at the parent club, CD1 elaborated:

I think generally they have to show humility, in terms of, you can’t just go there and expect to get in the first team, even if you’re dropping two divisions... I got feedback from [name of player], he had a bit of a sulk, his body language was poor and first team managers just don’t need that really and don’t wanna be dealing with that, especially from loan players, so they just think ‘well, we’ll send him back.’ But I think they just have to, like with anything really, they’ll have some setbacks and they’ll have to show some character, and some humility, to be able to bide the time and wait for their chance, or prove the manager that they deserve their place. (CD1, Championship Club 5)

Therefore, this highlights the high expectations that loan players have whilst at clubs performing at lower competitive levels than their parent club. However, senior team managers at the loan club will not perceive that players deserve a place in the team if they are lacking humility or relying on parent club status to get in the team. Another participant added:

If somebody goes into any club and thinks they're better than the players that are there, then they're in for a rude awakening cause as I say, the squads at lower league clubs are not stupid, a lot of them have had fantastic careers. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This again reiterated the need for loan players to prove themselves through performance and hard work, rather than assuming a starting position or underestimating the level of competition that exists within a lower level club. This may encourage certain challenges, as previously discussed, including a lack of game time, or identity issues, as they may be lacking the humility required to be successful during their temporary transfer.

Similarly, the need to be open-minded was also identified as fundamental to loan success. LM3 (Premier League Club 2) shared that "I think it's just they're a bit more open-minded" when referring to successful loan players, with LM6 (Premier League Club 5) also emphasising that "you need to go with an open mind so someone who is open to new experiences." Additionally, one of the Loan Analysts also recognised the importance of an open mind:

I think it's very important that they keep an open mind, especially for the ones first time going into senior football...being adaptable obviously, embracing challenges and just being prepared for the fact that it will be hard and they have to just be ready to adapt. (LA2, Premier League Club 6)

This highlights the need for adaptability within the loan, to ensure the player is able to face the challenges encountered during the loan, and be open to new and different experiences, particularly in comparison to the academy environment. One of the Sport Psychologists also recognised the benefits of loan players being open:

Probably a high level of openness to a new environment, a new way of playing football, be adaptable to that. I think resilience is a widely banded about word, but will he be able to deal with some of the challenges... and frame them because it is, purely at the younger end of the spectrum, for development so they might have performance that is well below par but in the moment it is disappointment but they have

got to step back from that and be able to frame that in the context of their learning journey and it is part of it and gonna benefit long term from having situations of adversity. (SP2, Championship Club 3)

Therefore, this also suggests the importance of resilience for players within the loan process, which is an important concept previously recognised in transition literature (e.g. Abbott and Clifford, 2021; Sarkar and Fletcher, 2014), with Sport Psychologists reiterating the need for this skill within loan transition, SP3 elaborated:

I think there's a lot more players that want to go out on loan but I think there's a resilience about the [successful] players in that actually, they kind of know that they're potentially losing a couple of games, but knowing what they've gotta do to get back to winning ways, so understanding themselves within a challenging environment, that can really help, especially if there's a team that are either pushing for promotion or battling relegation, so you need to understand that 'listen this is gonna be quite a tough period, but what can you do to make sure that you're giving yourself the best impression or identity?' So I think those kinds of skills around belief in themselves, confidence and knowing that actually 'well I've done a lot in academy football this year but this is the next step for me now, to test myself.' So I suppose a kind of premise around that is a challenge mindset, of the next stage of their development and testing themselves. And that's not saying again that it will always go right but if there's kind of skills there then you'd like to think that they'd do well. (SP3, Championship Club 4)

This not only shows the importance of resilience and openness to challenging experiences, but a willingness to accept that loan transfers are supposed to be challenging to encourage the development of new skills and abilities both within and away from the football environment. Similarly, there is acknowledgement that loans are not expected to go smoothly to emphasise the player's ability to adapt and show resilience in the face of adversity. This supports previous findings that players can more effectively cope with challenge, if they have developed the ability to be resilient and deal with adversity, also facilitating their development (Abbott and Clifford, 2021; Mills et al., 2012; Morris et al. 2015).

6.3.3 Awareness, Coping and Relationship Building

Another key point that emerged to encourage success on loan within the current thesis, was awareness and reflection, LM3 shared his intended method of encouraging loan player reflection:

I've thought about giving them just like three or four questions about objectives, you know what are you trying to get out of it, is the loan a good loan, what's your best position, that kinda thing and who in the first team or a player in general, do you think you play like? And then well do you watch them? Do you try and work out an understanding of why they're doing this? And get them thinking like that. (LM3, Premier League Club 2)

This could encourage a deeper level of awareness through reflection of their development and experience, to ensure they are progressing in their resilience and adaptability to the loan environment, which could be particularly effective if reflecting in a holistic way, rather than solely with a performance focus. Similarly, this could be supported by both the parent and loan clubs, regarding contact with multi-disciplinary teams, which academies and senior departments already have in place, whether formal or informal, but the formal use of this during loan transfers could facilitate the player's all-round development and learning. Crawley (2021) proposed that players were expected to demonstrate resilience and hard work, as well as having awareness and taking responsibility for their own development, however, the same level of significance placed on technical, tactical and physical development, was not given to psychosocial development.

The importance of coping skills also emerged as mediating player resilience. For instance, LM4 suggested:

I think it's just like a lot of kind of coping skills and mechanisms I think are so important, certainly in that kind of psychosocial personal development sort of phase, I think that's so important to players before they go. (LM4, Premier League Club 3).

This shows the importance of developing methods of coping before the loan, so they can be effectively utilised during the loan, aligning with Kent et al.'s (2022) findings

regarding social awareness as a situational coping strategy, whereby through positive psychosocial development, players were able to be aware of others and build strong relationships with players and staff at the loan club. Similarly, this facilitates the need to integrate within the new environment and “buy into the loan club” (LM1, Premier League Club 1), which was also established by participants in the current thesis. Thus, in line with being open, players need to express this through embracing the new environment that they are temporarily embedded within, LM6 expressed how this can make a player successful during a loan:

All the successful ones are the ones who go in and embrace the experience really and go in and are a part of [League Two club], they're not a [Premier League club] person within [League Two club], they are part of the squad, they embrace it, they take ownership of it as opposed to, going in there being a [Premier League club] player who's just been plonked into [League Two club]. (LM6, Premier League Club 5)

This portrays the need to express humility, as previously mentioned, whilst also integrating fully within the new environment to embrace the experience to the fullest extent, with adoption of the role of a loan club player and contributing to the loan club environment, regardless of the status of a player's parent club. This supports previous findings of dispositional coping surrounding personality characteristics of each player, which given the temporary nature of the transfer, loan players may find settling in more or less challenging based on their personal characteristics and ability to involve themselves in the new club (Kent et al., 2022).

Moreover, regardless of a player's prioritisation of the loan club or parent club, the need for communication was also recognised as fundamental to the success of a loan transfer with one LM (LM6, Premier League Club 5) stating that “somebody who doesn't communicate well may struggle a little bit, so someone who communicates well will do better.” Additionally, the need to effectively build relationships was also identified for loan players, SP3 shared:

I think this is where understanding the players becomes really important and again making sure they have skills to go and build the relationships with coaches and players, I think that's a really critical

skill, I think if you can do that then actually, you get buy in a lot quicker.
(SP3, Championship Club 4)

This demonstrates the fundamental nature of forming relationships across the club with staff and teammates to facilitate a loan player's integration within the loan environment, further enhancing the need to be open and embrace the new surroundings. Again, this supports previous literature which has also acknowledged the centrality of relationship building across the new club, with both teammates and staff (e.g. Abbott and Clifford, 2021; Kent et al., 2022). Abbott and Clifford (2021) found that loan players felt that senior teammates would challenge them, with mixed experiences of resentment and support from the senior players, largely affecting the nature of relationships that could then develop. Similarly, Kent et al. (2022) reported that loan players felt their transition to the loan club was more successful when there was support from teammates, providing both emotional and informational support. In terms of contact with management, there was a lower frequency of communication within the loan environment when compared to the previous academy setting (Abbott and Clifford, 2021). Therefore, the current thesis reinforces the findings of such literature as well as extending these conclusions through adding the perspectives of wider members of club staff in recognising the need to embrace and integrate into the loan club through social awareness and relationship building. As suggested by Morris and colleagues (2017) it may be beneficial to provide a buddy system for players experiencing the youth to senior transition. This would be particularly advantageous for first time loan players, who would benefit from closer support and guidance during their initial experience of the senior environment.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the various preparation and experiences for players before and during loan transitions. Initially, in terms of preparation, it was outlined how parent clubs provide holistic support through a range of methods including the Life Skills programme, individual development plans, individualised information about the loan club, as well as supporting the development of a well-rounded individual with particular MDT support. Therefore, the need for different forms of support such as emotional and

informational support prior to the loan transfer were acknowledged, along with recognition of mental health check ins and specific support for players which may then need to be tailored as they experience change, such as loans.

Then looking to the experiences on loan, a range of player challenges were identified and discussed, notably involving both football-specific such as a lack of game time, as well as personal challenges surrounding independent living, and mental health. Again, it was evidenced the importance of ensuring that players have access to the necessary support with clear direction of whether that should be accessed through the loan club and/or the parent club.

Finally, player success during loan transfers was also discussed, again with recognition of needing to perform well and show tactical flexibility from a footballing perspective, given that the individuals on loan are looking to prove and progress their playing ability. However, there was also a variety of personal characteristics established as facilitative to a successful loan transfer including humility, being open-minded, resilience, awareness and developing appropriate coping skills, again with recognition of the importance of support in enhancing such personal characteristics whilst on loan.

Additionally, the social structure and personality framework was also applied to loan player experience through consideration of the various dyadic relationships and small group interactions they are likely to have established at the parent club and outside of the football environment and continue to establish at the loan club, whilst adapting to their new community and organisation. Similarly, the perspective of SI within SSP was also applied with regards to identity issues that players are likely to face on loan and how their self-concept may be impacted, posing threats to their existing identity as a football player, supporting recent literature in this area (Kent et al., 2022). The present findings therefore highlighted risk of identity foreclosure, not only as a football player, but more exclusively as a player of their parent club, whereby, particularly during initial loan experiences for long term academy players, they may find challenge in viewing themselves externally to their parent club, which could lead to identity crises if their loan, and thus progression, is not successful. There was also recognition of the complex nature of loan transfers as temporary transition with a minimum of two

transition periods, firstly to the loan club and secondly either back to the parent club, or an alternative club either on a temporary or permanent basis. Thus, application of the social structure and personality framework could assist support staff and players in maximising their understanding and support network during such experiences of transition.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The present research looked to develop existing literature on career transition in sport, specifically by exploring the novel transition of loan transfers in football using a case study of the English professional football context. The intention was to understand the roles and experiences of a range of individuals operating within the elite football environment and therefore this chapter looks to explicitly provide insight to the contributions and significance of findings from the present research (7.1) through both contributions to literature (7.1.1) and contributions to practice (7.1.2). Similarly, the limitations of the current thesis, both academic and practical (7.2.) will be recognised and discussed, as well as applied implications and suggested areas for future directions within this area (7.3).

7.1 Contribution and Significance of Findings

The overarching aim of the research was to explore the transition experiences of professional football players that have been loaned to another professional club on a temporary basis, identify the support offered by the parent club during this process and develop the existing guidelines surrounding loan transfers. Thus, the subsequent objectives were to:

- 1) evaluate how football clubs support players prior to and during their loan through exploring the specific role of LMs that have been employed across various football clubs, with initial research into the responsibilities and operation of LMS, as well as looking to understand how players are supported by wider members of staff for the benefit of players and clubs alike.
- 2) understand the loan process from various perspectives of those involved, to provide insight into a novel youth to senior transition experience of loan transfers, not only from the players' point of view, but also various staff personnel who are actively engaged in the process. This will encourage effective understanding in both research and practice to recognise what is currently happening during loan transfers, but how clubs may improve or extend the involvement of staff and the support being offered to players during such temporary transfers.

3) develop best-practice recommendations relevant to the LM role and loan process for the use of individuals, clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs) and policy-makers to encourage greater attention, investment and support for those involved in the loan transfer process.

7.1.1 Contributions to Literature

The present research provides the first, fully-dedicated academic exploration of the loan transfer as a temporary transition in English professional football, offering a novel case study within this unique and exclusive environment. Thus, it supported existing transition literature within and beyond the sporting context (e.g. Bridges and Bridges, 2009; Dryden and Rice, 2008; Kent et al., 2022; Morris et al., 2017). However, it also extended such knowledge by providing insight to the uncertainty and complexity that come with loan transfers through the need to transition away from the parent club to the loan club, with the possibility of returning back to the parent club, or transitioning again, either on a temporary or permanent basis to another club in the future.

With no previous research attention given to the area of loan transfers, there was also a significant gap in the literature on understanding the LM role, particularly as this role remains in its infancy within practice. Therefore, the fourth chapter offered initial exploration and insight into the LM role in professional football clubs, as well as the inclusion of wider staff perspectives around loan transfers. This included the extensive football experience possessed by those taking the LM role as well as the need for the LM to operate within the wider and existing MDT within their clubs, particularly aligning with the requirements of the EPPP within the academy and attempting to extend this level of support to loan players, where there are resources to do so.

A range of LM specific responsibilities emerged within analysis and were discussed, such as loan specific planning and placement, player transfer, monitoring progress and development, and future planning. Each of these were key demands of the LM role, with varying tasks and challenges depending on the club and its approach to loan transfers. There were also key insights provided surrounding the lack of clarity for LMs, often being in a position of transition themselves, but having little clarity on how they should operate and what the day-to-day responsibilities should include. This further reinforces existing findings that personnel wider than performers (e.g. players and

coaches) need to be understood and their perspectives explored, to gain deeper insight into the sporting context (e.g. Chroni and Dieffenbach, 2020; Kenttä et al., 2016; McDougall et al., 2015). The inclusion of wider perspectives within the current research also allowed more in-depth understanding of MDT involvement, as well as wider support and decision-making processes that take place regarding loan transfers within clubs competing at the highest level of professional football.

Thus, the current findings offered novel insight into the motivations for sending players on loan transfers across a range of professional football clubs within the top two leagues in the English football system, permitting understanding of the various reasons as to why players may experience loan transfers. These included the prioritisation and development of youth players and their preparation for senior football at the parent club, or to continue development and broaden experiences across higher competitive standards. Other motivations to loan may also include opportunities to showcase players or run contracts down elsewhere if a parent club does not see them having a future there. Additionally, the present research provided initial exploration of professional club strategies and identification processes regarding both players and loan clubs within the loan transfer process, with emerging points on the decision-making process, involvement of a range of individuals, including MDT members and differences in opinion regarding the level of player input, as well as both financial and tactical considerations which differ across clubs.

Along with this, initial understanding of how football clubs value and support the loans process was identified and discussed, whereby it was acknowledged that the first team is the priority across football clubs, which can prevent investment of resources and provisions in the loan process, particularly where there is a lack of communication and collaboration between youth and senior departments. Suggestion of embedding a loan philosophy within clubs also emerged to ensure that the loan process gains the value and recognition it deserves within football clubs, strengthening relationships, support and player development.

Therefore, there was also extension of literature recognising gaps between youth and senior departments within professional football clubs (e.g. Relvas et al., 2010), with addition of implications for the loan transfer process and identifying future talent within

clubs. Similarly, there was initial recognition of the lack of processes and support in place from the parent club for senior players that go out on loan transfers, with LMs having little to no involvement with these players.

Additionally, the present research extends existing literature on identity, supporting existing research on athletic identity foreclosure within sport, specifically the football context (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2014; Rongen et al., 2020), but extending this to identity foreclosure within parent club environment for individuals that feel integrated within the respective academy. This could therefore pose problems in the transition process, even where players remain involved in football at the highest level.

Along with this, novel insight surrounding methods of preparation for loan transfers was discussed, including the Life Skills programme, individual development plans, individualised information about the loan club, as well as supporting the development of a well-rounded individual. It emerged that a range of support, including emotional and informational, is beneficial for players embarking on temporary transfers, as well as consideration of mental health, aligning with existing transition literature (e.g. Blakelock et al., 2016; Brissette et al., 2002; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993).

The challenges faced by loan players were also explored, predominantly involving football specific challenges such as not being played and club sickness, supporting and developing existing early research in this area (e.g. Kent et al., 2022). However, a range of personal issues including homesickness and mental health challenges also emerged for players who have experienced loans as well as staff members who have supported individuals on loan. There was also recognition of factors for success during loan transfers whereby it emerged that primarily, the most essential factor was to perform well. However, there were also various personal attributes which mediate loan success for a player, including humility, being open-minded, resilience, awareness and developing appropriate coping skills, again with recognition of the importance of support whilst on loan.

Finally, application of Sociological Social Psychology (SSP) in the sporting context also took place within the current research, combining and extending sociological and psychological concepts that have previously been referred to within sport e.g. identity,

group/team processes, dyads/relationships. However, these were specifically applied to the context of professional football to consider pre- and post-transition environments when experiencing loan transfers. This is advantageous in providing a lens through which to understand and explore various aspects of the loan transfer process as a transition, as well as the experiences of players and staff involved.

Therefore, there was originality and significance in the findings of the current thesis, both conceptually and practically, with initial in-depth exploration of the loan transfer as a temporary transition for players, including the perspectives of LMs and wider support staff, across a range of football clubs. This provides a platform to develop greater research interest and contribution in this area, with the need to continue extending knowledge of the loan transfer process in professional football.

7.1.2 Contributions to Practice

There were also various practical implications recognised to enhance the loan process for all parties involved, with particular focus on the holistic development of young loan players as they prepare for senior level football.

The current research provided initial detailed understanding of how various professional football clubs utilise the loan transfer process, including personnel involved, specific LM or equivalent responsibilities and the motivations for loan transfers. All of which could inform and benefit football clubs looking to develop or understand these aspects within their own club/position. This could be done through specific exploration of the LM role and gaining perspectives from LMs, wider support staff and players regarding the role and how it should be characterised within football organisations. Discussion of the title, skillset and requirement of the LM provided insight to the allocation of the LM role as well as difficulty for wider staff within circumstances where it is not clear that loan responsibilities are held by an individual, particularly when those individuals have a broader coaching role at the club. Thus, the current findings suggest that football clubs should provide clarity in job titles and descriptions to encourage staff and players' understanding about who is involved and supporting players in the loan process.

There was also novel recognition of the need for football clubs and NGBs to establish clearer criteria for required skills and experience of LMs, which will help the recruitment and allocation process for this role, as well as provide a degree of standardisation across loan departments. There was identification of playing experience being beneficial for this role within the current study, however, there was also argument that relevant industry experience, which does not need to be limited to professional participation, is beneficial to LMs. Therefore, this could be an area for policy makers to review and consider establishing a more specific person specification for this role.

Another novel contribution to emerge from this thesis was the admission of the difficulty that LMs faced in their own transition into a new role, particularly with such limited detail of role responsibilities. Therefore, the current research contributes original findings highlighting the continued ambiguity and confusion surrounding loan staff within professional football, often being a position lacking clarity and guidance in terms of the necessary tasks and responsibilities that should be carried out. This caused concern given the pressures involved in frequently being a lone or small department for loan operation, with very little guidance or support in undertaking and introducing a new role within the club. Similarly, with specific understanding of the loan process and personnel involved, parent and loan clubs alike can benefit from developing their processes and relationships, as well as contextual knowledge of who is likely to be involved across different clubs. Such rich understanding can encourage effective operation and subsequently improved support and experiences for loan players. The findings also provided various insight to MDT support, showing the embedded involvement of such support across loan experiences from preparation to conclusion of the loan transfer and planning for following stages.

Therefore, professional football clubs should look to ensure that a clear support structure is in place for LMs, whether this involves mentoring or supervision from senior members within the club, or wider NGBs (e.g. FA, EPL) can organise more formal support networks across clubs and leagues to ensure that mutual support and sharing of best practice is in place for individuals operating the LM role through formal networks with regular contact. Similarly, awareness of the challenges of the LM role and promotion of formal networks may help clubs and wider organisations increase the value and investment placed on the loan transfer process, particularly with its

alignment to the EPPP's intention of holistic development of homegrown talent, along with continued developments implemented by FIFA (2022) regarding loan regulations. Thus, there is recommendation for greater collaboration within and between different clubs, leagues and governing bodies, to ensure opportunities to develop best practice and prioritise individual development and wellbeing of players throughout this process, alongside encouraging the development of performance based skills and experience.

This further supports the need to understand intergroup process within SSP, whereby there is communication and networks developed between groups operating separately, but with mutual benefit from establishing relationships. This is particularly prominent with the opportunity to provide agency from individuals in the LM role to influence best practice and therefore the wider social forces in the football environment to bridge gaps in clubs where there is currently ambiguity around the role and expectations for loan staff – taking steps towards a more standardised process. Subsequently, this would encourage clubs to internally review and build collaborative methods and structures within their organisation, to encourage better communication and operation across youth and senior departments, for the increased long term development of homegrown talent, also benefitting the existing first team prioritisation but with a longer term approach.

Additionally, the current research proposed the mandate of the LM role within professional football clubs and more specifically, their academies, as the EPPP introduced for a range of other support staff. This would again ensure value is placed on the support of loan players, providing an extension of academy support that is compulsory (dependent on academy category) and would therefore be available to players if they were not on loan. Currently, loan departments tend to be under resourced, or in their infancy, for many clubs, meaning that sufficient provisions are not in place to support loan players holistically. Establishing compulsory allocation of a LM or similar within clubs, whether full-time or part-time, would encourage more structured support for players and greater importance placed on the temporary transfer process, which could also help communication between academy and senior departments through having a specific individual that can collaborate with wider staff from both.

Similarly, there was initial identification of issues with the EPPP in terms of loan provision, with the current framework outlining the specific needs and requirements of holistic development and support provision across all academy categories and age groups. However, there is a lack of detail surrounding the extent to which such support should be available to individuals whilst they are out on loan to other clubs. Nevertheless, there was clear evidence that support does exist, and is growing, within football clubs to ensure that loan players are receiving some level of support, even if not detailed and formalised. Therefore, policy makers should look to refine this and consider the need to include loan player provisions within the EPPP. In line with this, there was recognition of the potential issue of senior loan players being overlooked, with lack of support and provision for players leaving the senior environment to embark on temporary transfers elsewhere, whom should also be considered, alongside younger players, when policy makers are addressing policy and regulations surrounding loan transfers.

7.1.3 Applied Recommendations

The findings of the present research have valuable applied recommendations for a range of populations. Primarily, this research is central for individuals working as LMs or equivalent in professional football clubs, providing initial insight to the responsibilities of the role and various features of player experiences, including both success and challenges recognised by a range of individuals within the football environment. Similarly, recommendations are presented for football organisations, NGBs and policy makers regarding the need to place greater value on the loan system, to align with existing priorities of holistic development and producing homegrown talent in England, including the recommendation to consider introducing requirements for loan staff and support within the EPPP. Thus, concerning the EPL, FA and other football stakeholders in reviewing and extending guidance within the EPPP to ensure all loan players that are still within academy age groups are receiving suitable support to aid their development holistically.

7.2 Limitations

7.2.1 Academic Limitations

Within the present research, the use of a single case study limited the generalisability of findings (Bowles, 2015) with the question of little application beyond the English professional football environment studied, along with the specific workings of the loan system in England. However, Stake (2000) argued that criticising a case study for lacking generalisability is abandoning the purpose of initially studying the case.

Given the philosophical standpoint, a single case study was deemed the most suitable methodological choice for an in-depth exploration, interpretation, and understanding of the English football loan system. However, despite use of a single case, comprising involvement from a range of clubs and personnel has represented diverse perspectives and experiences within the English professional football context, encouraging further exploration and understanding of the same context, as well as wider environments. Similarly, the loan regulations followed in England are dictated by international governing bodies, including FIFA and UEFA, therefore meaning that many countries and clubs across the world will have similar rulings surrounding loan transfers, which could encourage similarities between aspects of transfer processes and experiences.

Similarly, the qualitative methodology is limited in that it has not looked to establish causal relationships or correlation regarding loan environments and loan success, however, given the complexity of the professional football environment and lack of standardisation across clubs and NGBs regarding the loan process and staffing, in-depth exploration to provide specific insight was deemed appropriate. Similarly, Luhmann (2000) states that a simple linear model cannot represent the complex world, therefore separate components collaborate to contribute to a whole system, being qualitatively distinct to the sum of its components.

7.2.2 Practical Limitations

Similarly, there were a range of practical limitations that arose within the present research, including access difficulties when looking to research high profile populations. This has been widely noted within the elite sports context (e.g. Ekland, 1993; Eubank et al., 2014; Law, 2019) whereby many organisations and individuals

are hesitant in permitting the involvement of employees and/or performers in partaking in research activities.

A further limitation within this research was that it took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in constraints in methods utilised, with intentions of in-depth exploration through the use of ethnography, which would have allowed the researcher to become embedded within a club environment and gain deeper insight into the loan process. However, given the national restrictions in place, it was not feasible to access football clubs as many had been subsequently closed, with individuals having to work from home, leading to the inability to conduct face to face interviews.

Similarly, the inclusion of loan players within the research and discussion around loan players was predominantly limited to loans with a developmental purpose, focusing on players within the academy, or those whom had successfully graduated from the academy with current involvement in the highest standard of competitive football. Thus, there was novel contribution of the lack of priority and support identified for senior loan players, of whom the LM role does not appear to be responsible for, perhaps as it does not fit into the EPPP plan/strategy. However, this indicates a gap in both research and practice, whereby to prioritise holistic support and mental wellbeing in abundance this must be considered across all loan and transitional experiences, regardless of their purpose.

7.3 Future Directions

Therefore, future research should look to further expand the findings from this thesis to develop knowledge surrounding the loan system in professional football. With initial insight into the English football context, additional research to supplement and further explore this environment would be beneficial. Similarly, there is a need to broaden the research area to wider football contexts and countries, which would allow development of knowledge and sharing of best practice across different leagues, cultures and countries on a larger scale. This would also complement knowledge and literature around talent development environments and understanding the use of holistic support in different football environments.

Additionally, future research could address senior loan transition experiences which despite being less likely to have developmental purposes, would give important insight into wider examples of loan transfers, as well as wider experiences of transition that are not youth to senior, but still have difficult circumstances for adaptation with potential mental health implications. Other than retirement and injury, there is a lack of research attention given to transitions that lead to lessened participation in professional sport, or downward mobility, therefore not being limited to temporary transfers, but also permanent transfer transitions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Example of initial message to potential participant via LinkedIn



Appendix B: Initial email to participants with information sheet and consent form



Appendix C: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet Loan Transfers in Professional Football



1. Invitation to research

I would like to invite you to take part in a study investigating the loan transfer process and experience within English professional football. The study is being conducted by a researcher from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), my name is Luci Smith and I am leading the research on this project. My project is concerned with understanding the individual experience of being on loan at another club.

2. Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as you have been identified as a professional football player who has experience of being loaned to another football club. We are specifically interested in players who are sent on loan to understand the experiences that come with playing football in a different environment to that of their parent club.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which we will give to you. We will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

4. What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview with Luci Smith. You will be asked questions about your experience(s) of being on loan at another club. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

The interview will be recorded using an audio device and the content will later be transcribed. You will remain anonymous throughout the research. Any club or individual names mentioned in the interview will be changed to protect this anonymity. Anonymous quotes from the transcript may be used within this project and within future publications. You may withdraw your data from the project at any time up until it has been transcribed, at which point it will be anonymised, which will prevent withdrawal.

5. Are there any risks if I participate?

There are no potential risks associated with participating.

6. Are there any advantages if I participate?

The findings of the study will be used within a PhD project which will develop knowledge and understanding of the loan process. This will be used to inform current practice and knowledge of loan transfers within football from the perspectives of different individuals who operate within the loan system.

7. What will happen with the data I provide?

When you agree to participate in this research, we will collect from you personally-identifiable information. The Manchester Metropolitan University ('the University') is the Data Controller in respect of this research and any personal data that you provide as a research participant.

The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and manages personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

We collect personal data as part of this research (such as name, telephone numbers or age). As a public authority acting in the public interest we rely upon the 'public task' lawful basis. When we collect special category data (such as medical information or ethnicity) we rely upon the research and archiving purposes in the public interest lawful basis.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained.

We will not share your personal data collected in this form with any third parties.

If your data is shared this will be under the terms of a Research Collaboration Agreement which defines use, and agrees confidentiality and information security provisions. It is the University's policy to only publish anonymised data unless you have given your explicit written consent to be identified in the research. **The University never sells personal data to third parties.**

We will only retain your personal data for as long as is necessary to achieve the research purpose. After transcription, audio recordings will be deleted. Any transcribed information that is used in the project or future publications will be anonymised with use of pseudonyms (false names) to refer to clubs and individuals. All participation will remain confidential, with only the two researchers having knowledge of participants.

For further information about use of your personal data and your data protection rights please see the [University's Data Protection Pages](#).

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used as part of an ongoing PhD project. They may also be submitted for publication in an academic journal and presented at academic conferences.

Who has reviewed this research project?

The project has been reviewed by my PhD supervisor, Paul Brannagan, as well as the ethics committee in the faculty of Business and Law at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact the project lead Luci Smith, at luci.smith@stu.mmu.ac.uk, or Dr. Paul Brannagan, at p.brannagan@mmu.ac.uk, by calling 0161 247 6779 or in writing to: Business School 4.09, All Saints Campus, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH.

You can also contact Dr. Ian Ashman, the head of ethics for the faculty of Business and Law, at I.Ashman@mmu.ac.uk, by calling 0161 247 3893 or in writing to: Business School 5.26, All Saints Campus, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH.

If you have any concerns regarding the personal data collected from you, our Data Protection Officer can be contacted using the legal@mmu.ac.uk e-mail address, by calling 0161 247 3331 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH. You also have a right to lodge a complaint in respect of the processing of your personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office as the supervisory authority. Please see: <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

Version: 1 Date: April 2020
Ethical approval number (EthOS): 10387

Appendix D: Participant consent form

Faculty of Business and Law
Manchester Metropolitan University
All Saints Campus
Oxford Road
Manchester, M15 6BH
United Kingdom



Research Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: **Loan Transfers in Professional Football**

Name of Researcher: **Luci Smith**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet (insert date and version no.) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time without giving any reason. ☐
3. I understand that data collected during this study will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the participant information sheet. ☐
4. I consent for my interview to be audio/video recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the research. The recordings will be stored until transcribed and then destroyed. ☐
5. I understand that the results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings or academic conferences. I give my permission for my anonymous data, which does not identify me, to be disseminated in this way. ☐
6. I agree to allow the use of anonymised verbatim quotes in the reporting of research findings. ☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix E: Loan staff interview guide (based on Morris et al., 2015)

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your experience within the football environment.
 - How did you come to have your current role?
 - How long have you been in this role?
2. What are your specific responsibilities as a loan manager/analyst?
 - Who had these responsibilities before there was a loan manager?
3. For what reasons are players sent out on loan?
 - Who are the decision makers in this process?
 - How are loan clubs selected for players or vice versa?
4. Can you tell me what support your club provides prior to and during loan transfers?
 - Who from, what does it involve?
 - How has support for loan players changed over the last few seasons? And why?
 - Psychological, physical, technical, social preparation?

Challenges

5. What do you feel are some of the challenges players may face when on loan?
 - Psychological, physiological, technical, social demands?
6. How do you support players in overcoming these challenges?

Moving Forward

7. What factors do you think are important for players to make their loan transfers successful?
8. How do you/the club help players with achieving these factors?
9. How are players prepared for or supported for their next steps after their loan transfer?
10. Is there anything else that you think could be done to better support players before, during or after their loan transfer?
11. Do you feel there are any issues with the current loan system or process?

Summary

12. How did you find your transition into the loan manager/analyst role?
 - What challenges did you face during this transition?

- Who supported you?

13. How do you think your role improves the experiences of players on loan?

14. Do you think the loan manager role should be compulsory at clubs that have the resources for it?

15. Is there anything that I haven't asked you, that you think is important to this interview?

Appendix F: Club staff interview guide (based on Morris et al., 2015)

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your experience within the football environment.
 - How did you come to have your current role?
 - How long have you been in this role?
2. What are your specific responsibilities?
 - When do/would you have contact with loan players?
3. For what reasons are players sent out on loan?
 - Is there a loan manager at your club?
 - Who are the decision makers in the loan process?
4. Can you tell me what support your club provides prior to and during loan transfers?
 - Who from, what does it involve?
 - How has support for loan players changed over the last few seasons? And why?
5. What else do the club do to support players before and during their time on loan?
 - Psychological, physical, technical, social preparation?

Challenges

6. What do you feel are some of the challenges that players may face when on loan?
 - What makes the transition difficult?
 - Psychological, physiological, technical, social demands?
7. What strategies have you and your club employed to overcome these challenges?
 - How do you support players in overcoming these challenges?

Moving Forward

8. What factors do you think are important for players to make their loan transfers successful?
9. Does the club support players with the factors that you consider to be important?
 - If so, how?
10. Is there anything else that you think could be done to better support players or before, during or after their loan transfer?
 - Any way that the loan system could improve?

Summary

11. How do you think your role improves the experiences of players on loan?
 - (How would having a loan manager impact support at your club?)
 - Do you think all (premier league) clubs should allocate a loan manager?

12. Is there anything that I haven't asked you, that you think is important or helpful for this interview?

Appendix G: Loan players interview guide (influenced by Morris et al., 2017)

Introduction

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your experience within the football environment.
 - How old are you?
 - How long have you been at parent club? How many loans?

Before the loan transfer

2. How did your loan movement come about?
 - What did that process look like? Who was involved?
 - How did you feel about it?
 - Experiences of loans/transfers?
3. Why do you feel you were sent on loan?
 - How were you prepared for the transfer?
4. What support did your club provide before you went on loan?
 - Who from, what did it involve?

During the loan transfer

5. How have you been supported whilst on loan?
 1. Club and loan club?
 2. Contact with loan manager?
 3. Benefits and challenges?
 4. How could the clubs/LM have better supported you during you loan?
6. What challenges have you faced whilst on loan?
 - Psychological, physiological, technical, social demands?
7. How did you find settling in to a new team environment?
 - Training? Competition? Team mates? Management or coaching team? Support staff? Lifestyle and relationships?
8. Do you feel that there are any key factors that have made your loan experience more successful or beneficial?
9. How have your club or loan club helped you with achieving these factors?
10. Did you enjoy your experience of being on loan? Why (not)?
 - Was that what you expected to happen? If no, what did you expect?
11. What, if anything, could have made the experience better for you?

Future

12. What are the next steps for you when your loan transfer is finished?
 - Have your club prepared and supported you with this?

13. What expectations do you have of your club going forward?
14. Is there anything else regarding your experience on loan that we haven't spoken about, but you think is relevant?

Appendix H: Example of transcript (front page)

Loan Manager 1 (LM1) Transcript

1 Researcher (R): So just to start off then with if you tell me quite generally
2 about yourself and your experience within the football environment

3 LM 1: erm err yeah so err I obviously played for about 16 years I think as a
4 professional and I was lucky enough to play in all divisions and internationally
5 as well so very lucky with that and then I have done a mixture, I've been a
6 manager, u18s coach U23s coach and then now doing loans at [name of
7 premier league club] kinda seen a lot of the spectrums in terms of football
8 and what it has to offer and that

9 R: yeah yeah okay and obviously you have got a really wide range of
10 experience in football like you said so how exactly did you come to have the
11 current role that you have now as loan manager?

12 LM1: yeah so I was I was doing the younger age groups at [current premier
13 league club] the 18s for a year and then the 23s for about 2 years which was
14 great and learnt a lot of stuff erm which was a real benefit and I live in
15 English county] with my family and obviously the job at [premier league
16 club] was in [location of club] and obviously needs must in terms of being
17 able to get home or obviously I have got young kids as well so they were
18 priority and this job came up at [Premier League club] looking for someone
19 to look after the loans and kinda be a loans manager where we started to
20 get more players out on loan and there was kinda no designated person to
21 be able to keep track of them or to sort the loans out or just to do all the
22 things that come up in the loan scenario and yeah it come up and allowed
23 me to work from home as well which would benefit and just worked out
24 perfectly for me and I knew a lot of the players as well especially the
25 younger ones going up and I'd been coaching for long periods so was a real
26 bonus for me, a winning job.

27 R: yeah great and how long have you been in that role now?

28 LM1: I have been in it just over a year.

29 R: yeah so still quite a new role isn't it, generally across the premier league

30 LM1: Yeah, especially where you only have limited transfer windows,
31 because our first team are in the premier league mainly do the loans for our...

Appendix I: Thematic table of findings

Overarching themes	Sub themes	Key points	Key codes
The Loan Manager (LM) Role	The Evolution of the LM Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Introduction and Evolution of the LM Role - Holistic Support and MDT Contact - Role and Responsibilities Still Lack Clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New, developing role, present in most Prem/Champ clubs - Changes in loan support - Still lacks a lot of clarity but having designated person provides structure to players/staff - Increasing need for designated, full time member of staff - Importance of club philosophy/value placed on loan process
	LM Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual contracts and development plans - Monitoring progress and development of academy players - Loan specific planning and placement - Player transfer - Monitoring progress and development of loan players - Future planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All players: Individual contracts/development plans, reviewing progress - Loan players: Specific planning, placement, organising transfer of player, reviewing progress, continued evaluation.
	The Title, Skillset and Requirement of a LM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Title of the LM - Skillset of the LM - Requirement of the LM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not all individuals operate under 'loan manager' title, may be in dual-role or linked with loan players as relevant age group coach e.g. U23s coach. - What makes a good loan manager? Skills needed, benefits of player experience etc.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should this role be mandatory in pro clubs?
Strategic Management of Loans	Motivations for Sending Players on Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued development - Experience senior football - Performance loan - Run contract down - Opportunity to showcase themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued development in various areas to help progression, may have experienced senior football before - Experience senior football as initial experience, or higher level of senior football – usually for physicality or appreciation of more cut-throat culture - Performance loan to demonstrate ability and help parent club make decisions around future - Run contract down if there is no future for player at parent club - Opportunity to showcase themselves if they are unlikely to stay at parent club, but allows player to gain interest from other clubs and helps parent club sell them.
	The Player-Club Matching Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff involvement - Looking for the right fit - Wider influences on the decision making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who's involved? Input from staff, players and agents. - Different involvement of groups across clubs, some participants felt the player should be heavily involved, some did not – comparison to employees. - Finding the 'right fit' – how is this decided? What factors are prioritised? Level and location of club, reason for loan, tactical approach, positional needs. - Contact and communication with loan clubs is vital for

			supporting player and mutual benefit of loan.
	Club Strategy and Support for Loan Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritising the first team - Support and communication with first team staff/long term strategy - Loan philosophy and culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support/Communication from first team staff varies and often lacking - Loans are an extension of development through academy – resources need to be invested to ensure development is successful/effective - Importance of holistic approaches to support and development, particularly to progress academy players.
Preparation and Experiences for Loan Players	Preparing Players for Loan Transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academy Life Skills Programme - Individual development and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academy life skills programme for all players but is beneficial and could be tailored for loans. - Individual development plan to establish ‘road map’ for player, managing expectations and helps monitor progress/future options. - Developing well rounded individuals – encouraging independence - Mental health screening through questionnaires and check ins, but not happening at many clubs - Loan club profiles provided to players with a series of useful info.
	Player Challenges on Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of game time - The challenges of discovering a new environment - Identity challenges, mental health and perceived support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not playing football, lack of game time - Injury - Leaving the ‘academy bubble’, different dynamic and culture - Lack of media exposure - Need to be independent, responsible and accountable, deal with own problems

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased physicality and training schedule - Identity challenges – club sickness, strong parent club association - Perceived support and mental health awareness
	Key Factors for a Successful Loan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perform well and tactical flexibility - Humility, open mind and resilience - Awareness, coping and relationship building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perform well – the most simple and obvious way to loan success - Adapt to new tactics, show flexibility and willingness to change, even if unfamiliar - Humility – doesn't matter what club you've been at in academy - open mindedness, awareness, resilience - Relationship building - Ability to cope and adapt to change

Appendix J: An overview of MDT requirements in a category one academy in professional English football (EPPP: 67).

9.3 SPORTS SCIENCE AND MEDICINE - SUMMARY TABLES

9.3.1 Category 1 Academy: Sports Science and Medicine Summary Table

Development Phase	Strength & Conditioning (S&C)	Physiotherapy	Medical	Sports Science	Match Analysis	Fitness Testing	Psychology	Physical Exertion	Movement & Posture
Foundation U5 to U11	Physical literacy Access to multi sport experience	Available for the games programme and all squad training sessions. Screening Audit of injuries	Available for all games Screening Audit of injuries	Bio banding Predictive testing of size and shape Talent Identification (TID) Research and development Vision	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Integrated delivery through the Coaching Programme Agreed national testing protocols Six week test / re-test
Youth Development U12 to U16	U12 to U14 introduction to basic techniques Squad based U15 to U16 begin preliminary S&C programme Speed, strength, Power Core Flex	Available for the games programme and all squad training sessions. Screening Audit of injuries Pre hab/re hab	Available for all games Screening Audit of injuries	Maturation measurement TID Research and Development Individual Physiological analysis – U15 Individual Biomechanical analysis – U15 Vision – U12 to U16	Selected games – min 8 per Season to U15, 12 per Season to U15 to U16	National Benchmark Testing 3 times per annum Club based test retest process Squad and individual testing	Introduction to stress management U15 to U16 Focussing Lifestyle management	Coach based monitoring U12 to U14 U15 to U16 GPS evaluation	Integrated delivery through the Coaching Programme Agreed National Benchmark testing 2 times each Season U12 to U16 Club based test/re test process determined locally
Professional Development U17 to U21	Individual programme lifting techniques Speed, strength and power. Core Flexibility Plyometrics Aerobic Anaerobic training	Available for the games programme and all squad training sessions. Screening Audit of injuries Pre hab/re hab	Available for all games Screening Audit of injuries	TID Research and Development Vision	All Category 1 league games All professional development League games	Club based test retest process Individual basis No National Benchmark Testing beyond U18	Stress management Focussing Imaging Lifestyle management	GPS and hormonal response analysis underpinning weekly sessions	Periodic as required