

**The ‘whole-club capacity’ approach to athlete
wellbeing & education: Analysing competing logics
within elite sporting organisations**

by
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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



Sam Lane
November 2022

Declaration

Dr Stephen McLaren provided professional copyediting and formatting services, according to the university-endorsed national *Guidelines for Editing Research Theses* (Institute of Professional Editors 2019).

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AFL	Australian Football League
AIS	Australian Institute of Sport
ARL	Australian Rugby League
ATDE	Athletic Talent Development Environment
AW&E	Athlete Wellbeing & Education
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSV	Creating Shared Value
HP	High Performance
JFC	Jersey Flegg Cup
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid
NRL	National Rugby League
NSWRL	New South Wales Rugby League
PDM	Player Development Manager
PDMS	Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing
S&C	Strength & Conditioning
WCC	Whole-Club Capacity

Abstract

With the aim of better understanding and supporting athlete's experiences of wellbeing, this research project established two key research goals: 1) *inquiry*: to investigate and understand athlete-specific risk and protective factors, and 2) *impact*: to support the development of effective wellbeing supports in response to those factors. This research project, investigating a professional Australian rugby league football club, used one-on-one interviews, workshop-based interventions, and surveys, to evaluate athlete's experiences of the Athlete Wellbeing & Education (AW&E) Framework employed by the Australian Rugby League (ARL). Guided by organisational logic theory, it explores the relationship between structure and agency at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis, and measures patterns of compatibility and centrality between wellbeing, performance, and commercial logics. The analysis demonstrates the need to embed a more transdisciplinary approach to holistic wellbeing within high performance (HP) systems and recognise the important protective role that HP members have within the athlete's psychosocial support network. This thesis, informed by the 'Whole-Club Capacity' (WCC) Approach to AW&E, presents a philosophy of care that connects the full ecology of elite sporting organisations to the athlete's experience of wellbeing, and articulates the reciprocal gains that effective wellbeing support systems can have on athletes' performance, elite sporting organisations' commercial interests, and on their duty of care/social responsibilities. It presents a number of pragmatic recommendations which could be implemented under the WCC Approach to AW&E, and includes two interventions (mental health literacy training and connection workshops) developed and evaluated within this project's action research methodology. At its conclusion, this thesis presents a rationale for the need to de-stigmatise help-seeking within HP environments and strengthen athletes' psychosocial supportive resources, and provides a range of subsequent strategies that elite sporting organisations can use to do so.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In July 2014, one of the National Rugby League's (NRL) most accomplished stars, Darius Boyd, took leave from the sport to check himself into a psychiatric hospital for mental health rehabilitation. The reaction was mixed. While wellbeing advocates applauded Boyd's courage and bravery in speaking out about the pressures of elite sport, others, encouraged by the 'harden up' culture common to rugby league, labelled his admission 'weak' and accused him of lacking the mental fortitude to compete at the elite level. Boyd was not the first elite athlete to struggle psychologically with the pressures of elite sport, and regrettably, certainly wasn't the last. Since 2014, other high-profile athletes such as Lance Franklin, the Australian Football League's (AFL) leading goal-scorer and highest paid player, similarly took leave over mental health concerns; while internationally, Michael Phelps, the most successful Olympian of all time, recently shared his experience with depression while at the apex of his sporting success. The impact of these stories has led to an evolving public discourse surrounding athletes' wellbeing and growing recognition of the unique stressors and pressures on athletes pursuing a career at the elite level.

Academic researchers from multiple disciplines have explored the athlete's experience of wellbeing, including contributions from social work (Lane et al. 2020; Ravulo 2022); psychology: applied (Wylleman 2019), social (Rees et al. 2015), and organisational (Fletcher & Wagstaff 2009); business (Besharov & Smith 2014; Babiak & Wolfe 2009); exercise science (Gucciardi et al. 2017); and medicine (Reardon et al. 2019; Gouttebauge et al. 2015); and have provided insight into athletes' over-representation in relation to certain mental health disorders (Rice et al. 2016; Du Preez et al. 2017); the low rates of help-seeking common to athlete cohorts

(Kola-Palmer et al. 2020; Gorczynski et al. 2020; Gulliver et al. 2012); the complexities of balancing athlete-specific risk and protective factors (Sebbens et al. 2016; Bauman 2016; Kuettel & Larson 2020); the vulnerabilities of athletes through retirement (Park, Lavallee & Todd 2013; Stambulova 2017); and the systemic issues preventing wellbeing support from being integrated into high performance (HP) systems (Breslin et al. 2017). While these research efforts have helped to create a more complete picture of the athlete experience, and the duty of care responsibilities that elite sporting organisations must respond to, progress will undoubtedly come from further developing evidence-based wellbeing supports that are reflective of athletes' unique needs and the complex institutional environment of elite sport. This doctoral research is motivated by, and aims to address, possible improvements in supporting athlete wellbeing in both research and practice. This introductory chapter provides context for the research, which aims to identify and respond to gaps in the literature.

The National Rugby League (NRL)

The NRL is the highest division of professional rugby league in Australia and New Zealand, and consists of sixteen teams: nine from the Greater Sydney area, one from regional New South Wales, three from Queensland, and one each from Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, and New Zealand. The league's annual competition consists of 25 rounds and a finals series, with no relegation or promotion. Second only to the Australian Football League (AFL) in terms of viewership and revenue in Australia, the NRL reported approximations of 100 million viewers and \$400 million (AUD) of revenue in 2021 (NRL 2022). The NRL is responsible for the Australian Kangaroos (male) and Jillaroos (female) national representative teams, the annual three-match State of Origin series between New South Wales and Queensland, the NRL Nines, and the NRL Touch Football affiliation. At the state level, the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL), the constituent within which this research project is placed, sits beneath the NRL and is responsible for the NSW Cup (men's open aged competition), the Jersey Flegg Cup (under 21's elite development competition), and the New South Wales Women's Premiership (the women's open aged competition), in addition to the under 16's and 18's top-division amateur competitions. The NRL is governed by the Australian Rugby League (ARL) Commission and is the single controlling body of rugby league in Australia, responsible for the overall strategic direction and administrative responsibilities of the sport, from junior to elite levels. In addition to managing the game from a competitive and commercial standpoint, the

ARL (in collaboration with the Rugby League Players' Association) is responsible for developing and overseeing the implementation of the Athlete Wellbeing & Education (AW&E) Framework.

Defining Athlete Wellbeing

According to the AW&E Framework, wellbeing is understood within a eudaemonic approach, which is defined by Neimiec (2014, p. 2004) as a 'complex, multi-faceted construct that can be defined as optimal human experience and psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci 2001) and that involves subjective experiences and objective conditions indicative of physical, psychological, and social wellness' (Neimiec 2014, p. 2004). In its own words, the AW&E Framework defines wellbeing as:

Living a good life by living in a manner consistent with one's 'true self' or to one's personal integrity through identifying one's potential strengths/limitations and choosing those goals that provide meaning and purpose in life. Happiness is a by-product of activities that reflect one's true self.

(National Rugby League 2018)

The AW&E Framework is a combination of mandatory social responsibility, personal development, and education workshops, and is split into three core programs:

- The 'Career Wise' program: designed to support athletes' transitions out of sport and into retirement (primarily dual-career planning and education support in the form of administrative, financial and study assistance, as well as budgeting seminars, industry networking events, and careers counselling)¹.

¹ 'Career transition programs' are designed to respond to athletes' increased vulnerability to distress at the time of retirement from sport, due to personal (e.g. loss of sporting performance skills), material (e.g. loss of occupation), and symbolic (e.g. loss of identity) (Lavalley 2018; Cosh et al. 2013; Park, Lavalley & Todd 2013). These programs typically involve efforts of 'pre-retirement planning', in the form of career and education support during sporting careers, in preparation for retirement (for further discussion, see page 54).

- The ‘Character Wise’ program: designed to develop the integrity and character of athletes in and out of sport (focused on participation in community programs, cultural awareness seminars, and education workshops on matters such as gambling, respectful relationships, and social media use).
- The ‘Health Wise’ program: designed to support a holistic approach to athlete wellbeing (includes access to professional mental health clinicians and a range of education workshops addressing concerns such as alcohol and illicit drug use, doping, diet and supplement use).

Additional duties of the ARL in developing the AW&E Framework include determining the minimum training and qualifications required by AW&E roles within clubs, distributing grants to athletes (e.g. education scholarships) and clubs (e.g. wellbeing budget), stipulating mandatory programs (facilitated externally and/or manually prescribed), implementing routine psychological surveying (wellbeing evaluations, referred to as ‘heat-maps’), and supervising AW&E staffs’ compliance to, and reporting of, their engagement with the AW&E Framework. To assist in delivering these programs at club level, all sixteen competing NRL clubs are funded by the ARL to employ a full-time ‘Player Development Manager’ (PDM)² who, in addition to delivering the Career Wise, Character Wise, and Health Wise programs, is engaged in athlete issues (personal support, family relocation, facilitating life balance, etc.), support processes (referrals to mental health professionals, financial guidance, etc.), advocacy (internally and externally on behalf of athletes’ needs and wishes), and stages of support (enrolling in education and vocational training programs, pre-retirement planning, career transition guidance, etc.; Stansen & Chambers 2019). Together, these supports make up the AW&E Framework within the NRL which, as discussed below, is a central focus of this research project.

² ‘Player Development Manager’ appears to be the term most commonly used across the literature in reference to these roles, though within the National Rugby League they are titled ‘Wellbeing and Education Manager’. To remain consistent with the literature, ‘player development manager’, or ‘PDM’, will be used throughout this thesis.

Impetus for the Study

The de-identified site of this research project, referred to as ‘The Club’, is a professional NRL club that approached the School of Social Sciences at Western Sydney University to fund a joint stipend for PhD research into the wellbeing experiences of their athletes and to evaluate the supports provided to them. Following a selection process, the chosen candidate was selected and formally commenced the project in May of 2018. Without outlining a specific research goal, the partner organisation stated their intent to be pioneers of innovative practice and knowledge within the AW&E space, highlighting their motivation to develop holistic welfare and education programs and continue their commitment to player development, on and off the field. Given this brief, followed by a six-month consultation period with The Club’s AW&E Team, the ARL’s AW&E Team, athletes and members of staff from within The Club, the researcher initiated a collaborative arrangement with participants that produced the following two research goals:

1. Inquiry: to investigate and understand athlete-specific risk and protective factors, and;
2. Impact: to support the development of effective wellbeing supports in response to those factors.

Wellbeing & Elite Sport

In the high-pressured environment of elite sports, athletes’ experience of wellbeing occurs in an arena which exposes them to a range of unique risk factors and athlete-specific vulnerabilities. Unlike the physical impact of sport, which is visible and common (e.g. injury), factors relating to elite athletes’ mental and social health are comparatively less well-known. Contemporary research has helped to fill this gap and has shown athletes to be over-represented in rates of certain mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Rice et al. 2016; Du Preez et al. 2017), and having increased vulnerabilities to distress during transitions out of sport (Park, Tod & Lavalley 2012). Conversely, the list of evidence-based supports continues to grow, such as the value of dual-careers and pre-retirement planning, the value of sports psychology, and the need for positive wellbeing cultures within HP environments (Kohe & Purdy 2020).

More recent approaches to wellbeing support however, have focused on the humanistic qualities of care and the value of psychosocial support at the relational level (Rees et al. 2015; Jowett & Lavalley 2007). The relational level, defined as the ‘connectivity’ and ‘influence that members have on each other’ (O’Connor & Cavanagh 2013, p. 3), and psychosocial support, defined as the ‘exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or recipient to be intended to enhance the wellbeing of the recipient’ (Sheridan, Coffee & Lavalley 2014, p. 198), are recognised by O’Connor and Cavanagh (2013) as the most critical predictor of athletes’ wellbeing experiences during and following their sporting careers. In the pluralistic context of elite sport however, embedding relational approaches within HP systems is often made complex by the structures and processes which enable and/or contain wellbeing supports at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels (Campbell, Brady & Tincknell-Smith 2022). In particular, that relates to the dominant performance discourse of HP systems and the dominant commercial discourse of elite sports’ governing bodies.

As an emerging space of inquiry highlighted by both the Duty of Care in Sport (2017) and the AIS’ AW&E (2020) reviews, understanding athletes’ experience of wellbeing and the supports provided to them, from an ecological perspective, is necessary in order to fully appreciate the systemic influences that such a diverse set of interests and stakeholders have on elite sporting organisations’ ability to achieve a ‘fully realised wellbeing culture’ (Campbell, Brady & Tincknell-Smith 2022, p. 6). This is because wellbeing is a transdisciplinary concept that requires effective collaboration through structures that recognise wellbeing as a collective responsibility, rather than individual responsibility, not least because elite sporting organisations have legal and ethical obligations to respond to their duty of care for athletes in the most effective way possible, but because wellbeing shares an inextricably linked relationship to athletes’ performance (Lavalley 2019; Pink, Saunders & Stynes 2015). Therefore, if we are able to understand the ‘big picture’ of wellbeing in elite sport, we may be able not only to improve wellbeing outcomes for athletes but also to tap into a range of hybrid gains by making wellbeing synonymous with its diverse applications. Organisational logic theory is one such way of pursuing this task, as a lens to view the multiplicity of organisational interests and their impact on the relationship between structure and agency.

Organisational Logic Theory

For this project, both the *inquiry* and *impact* research goals are employed to take a critical gaze to the relationship of structure and agency within The Club. To study structure (defined as any domain that arranges interaction, particularly with respect to social, cultural, and historical discourse), involved an examination of the cultural elements of structure in relation to wellbeing (e.g. the presence of stigma within HP environments), as well as an analysis of the systemic elements of structure that determine the provision of support within those environments (e.g. the AW&E Framework). Likewise to study agency, defined by the autonomy of individual action and the freedoms held in response to the power of structure, involved an exploration into athletes' awareness of the structural conditions in which they work, the influence of those structures on their experience of wellbeing, and their ability to seek support from within the HP environment. As alluded to in the previous section however, given the diverse set of interests and agendas operating through elite sporting organisations, this research project needed to consider how wellbeing, and in particular the AW&E Framework, influences and is influenced by the complex institutional environment in which it exists.

Organisational logic theory (Besharov & Smith 2014) is used to navigate these complexities and to examine the interconnected elements that make up an organisation's structure. Referred to as 'logics', these elements are defined as the 'socially constructed sets of material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape cognition and behaviour' (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, cited in Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 364) and are used to categorise the diversity of goals and objectives within organisations. In an elite sporting context, *performance* logics (defined by competition) and *commercial* logics (defined by the business of sport) typically occupy an organisation's core, with *wellbeing* logics (defined by biological, psychological, and social health factors) and *community* logics (defined by social impact) typically operating at the periphery of organisational functioning. As a tool for analysis, organisational logic theory examines the relationship between logics, through measures of logic centrality (the extent to which these logics are central to organisational functioning; the hierarchy of values) and logic compatibility (the extent to which multiple logics offer compatible/incompatible qualities and prescriptions for action). In its application to this project, organisational logic theory was used to analyse how the arrangement of logics across three levels – the individual, organisational, and institutional – impacts upon the accessibility and quality of support provided to athletes.

The individual level (discussed in Chapters 4-5), akin to the micro-level in social studies, focused on the wellbeing experiences of athletes and their help-seeking behaviours; the organisational level (discussed in Chapters 6-7), akin to the meso-level of social studies, focused on the cultural conditions of wellbeing within HP environments; and the institutional level (discussed in Chapters 8-9), akin to the macro-level in social studies, focused on the AW&E Framework and the systems of support implemented across the league. A brief overview of the data collection methods used to complete this analysis and meet the project's research goals is presented below.

Overview of the Research Process

In respect to the *inquiry* element of this research project, semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection as they provided the means for exploring and evaluating factors relating to structure and agency across all 3 levels of analysis (individual, organisational, and institutional). Over the 24-month data collection period, 17 participants were interviewed from a sample of current athletes, retired athletes, head coaches, PDMs, AW&E Managers (ARL), strength and conditioning (S&C) coaches, career coaches, house parents, academics, and program facilitators³. Each interview ran for between 60-90 minutes in duration and explored a wide range of factors relating to athlete wellbeing, including athletes' understanding of wellbeing, the unique risk and protective factors relevant to their experience, key supports within the HP network, the roles and responsibilities of those supports, the strengths and limitations of the AW&E Framework, etc. Applying an organisational logic analysis to this data, the researcher investigated factors relating to agency and structure, focused on opinions, attitudes, beliefs and actions, as well as ideas, ideologies, and constructs attached to various 'logics', and how this culminates in the structures that influence organisational behaviour. Important to the action research methodology used to facilitate the project's *impact* goals, interviews were used to initiate a cyclical process of data gathering, analysis, and reflection, that compared inductive data with deductive literature. Through this process, two interventions were developed in response to participants' feedback. A brief overview of these are as follows:

³ These roles are defined later, as they are discussed throughout analysis chapters.

‘Connection workshops’, operating at the organisational level of analysis, were designed to improve the structural conditions of support within the HP environment by strengthening interpersonal relationships and increasing help-seeking opportunities between athletes. Facilitated by an experienced social work group work practitioner and in-group athlete leader, connection workshops provided a space for athletes to reflect and share their lived experiences, from both inside and outside of football, to deepen their mutual understanding of one another. Recruitment was carried out in consultation with the researched organisations AW&E Team and General Manager, where together, it was decided that four two-hour workshops would be delivered to the Jersey Flegg Cup (JFC) team. In total, between 30-35 athletes and 1-5 members of coaching staff were present at each of the four workshops. Following each workshop, debrief groups were facilitated by the researcher to evaluate the impact of the program and as an opportunity to discuss the planning for future workshops. At its conclusion, connection workshops were further evaluated by use of surveys and interviews.

‘Mental health literacy training’, designed to improve group members’ capacity to identify and respond to mental health concerns, was delivered organisationally wide to athletes and staff by the researcher during the final 6-month data collection period⁴. The program, aligned with industry best-practice standards⁵, involved three two-hour workshops that were adapted and tailored to a rugby league-specific context. Informed by participant feedback, the program’s content was developed in collaboration with The Club’s AW&E Team, who outlined the following learning objectives: recognise the signs and symptoms of mental illness, understand protective and risk factors unique to elite athletes, know the common mental health disorders among athletes and the evidence-based (medical, psychological, and social) treatments used to address them, develop conversational support skills, and appreciate appropriate crisis response actions. Following all three workshops, the program was qualitatively evaluated through participant interviews.

⁴ In keeping with the collaborative action research process, the decision for the researcher to develop and deliver the mental health literacy training program was made by The Club’s AW&E Team, due to the researcher’s practice experience in the mental health field and social work qualifications.

⁵ Program design aligned with the evidence-based Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) program, widely regarded as the industry leader for mental health literacy training within Australia.

Research Significance

This research project makes an original contribution to the literature, as the first of its kind to partner organisational logic theory and an action research methodology within an elite sporting context. In its application to this research project, exercising organisational logic theory was the central mechanism for addressing this project's *insight* goals, while the action research methodology facilitated its *impact* goals. The research connects theory to practice by interpreting the athlete experience using an organisational logic analysis that recognises the diverse set of interests and agendas within elite sporting organisations. It considers how these 'logics' interact to generate a complex array of intra-organisational practices, identities, overlapping roles, and a set of compatible and/or incompatible functions, and uses that knowledge to inform interventions that address those elements of structure that systematically foreclose player agency. The research presents these findings within an organisational logic framework, and follows Besharov and Smith's (2014) practice of targeting key criticisms in the context of where analysis takes place. In the context of this research, critique addresses individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis. The following section explains the value of approaching and presenting research in this way, and provides an overview of the thesis structure.

Structure of the Thesis

Guided by organisational logic theory, this thesis was organised into the individual (discussed in Chapters 4-5), organisational (discussed in Chapters 6-7), and institutional (discussed in Chapters 8-9) levels. To arrive at this point, data were first analysed using a thematic approach to qualitative analysis. Through the act of reflexive coding, information was collated into a wide range of lower-order themes, then refined into a set of high-order themes, and finally, grouped into the relevant levels in the respective analysis chapters (a description of this process is outlined in Chapter 3). As the application of organisational logic theory will show, each level of analysis addresses a specific research question, views the research site from different perspectives, and speaks to stakeholders positioned at different levels of the organisation. Moreover, for the same reasons, a review of literature has been embedded in each analysis chapter (in lieu of a stand-alone literature chapter) to ensure that the literature discussed is most relevant and applicable to the specific organisational level/logic under discussion. In

structuring the thesis in this way, the researcher was able to synthesise research findings with literature, over multiple levels of analysis, to build a more complete and comprehensive account of the relationship between structure and agency within the research site. Given that research into the wellbeing of NRL athletes is sparse, it was necessary to synthesise the literature and research data to generate new insights. The literature then, while contextualised at the beginning of each chapter, provides the opportunity to identify continuities with the existing literature as well as the unique insights generated by this research project. An overview of each chapter and the flow of the thesis is provided below:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 outlines the background and emergence of this study. It explains how the research project used an inductive approach, in collaboration with its participants, to form the project's *inquiry* and *impact* research goals. It articulates how organisational logic theory was used to analyse the relationship between structure and agency over the individual (e.g. relational experiences), organisational (e.g. cultural factors), and institutional (e.g. governance systems) levels of analysis, and provides an overview of the research practices as they relate to organisational logic theory. Lastly, an overview and rationale for the structure of the thesis is presented.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2 lays out the theoretical lens through which this research project is viewed. Beginning with the ontological foundations set by a critical realist perspective, it explains how structure and agency are defined within the context of this research project and why it is necessary to view the research site in this way. It outlines the organisational logic framework used to analyse the research site, through measures of logic centrality (the extent to which these logics are central to organisational functioning) and logic compatibility (the extent to which multiple logics offer compatible or incompatible qualities and prescriptions for action). It outlines the

four types of logic multiplicity⁶ – contested, aligned, estranged, and dominant – and how these categorisations can be used to predict organisational performance in terms of stability and/or conflict. Within the context of this research project, Chapter 2 explains the relevance of the theory in analysing the instantiation of wellbeing logics within elite sporting organisations. Moreover, it describes how organisational logic theory can be used pragmatically to identify and address spaces of conflict, by examining the drivers of variation affecting measures of centrality and compatibility across the three levels of analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Following this theoretical framework is an overview and explanation of the research methodology. It begins with an outline of the phenomenological foundations that underpin the approach to data collection and highlights how, as an approach to research that values participants' lived experience as a window into factual knowledge, semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to study athletes' wellbeing experiences in a flexible and exploratory manner. Linked back to the theoretical framework, it explains how the qualitative data can be used to reveal factors relating to structure and agency, which can then be placed into an organisational logic framework for further critical examination. Furthermore, Chapter 3 documents the full chronology of research practices undertaken throughout the project and describes why an action research methodology was implemented during the latter stages to address the *impact* research goal, and how interview data informed the development of the two interventions: 'connection workshops' and 'mental health literacy training'. Lastly, Chapter 3 concludes with a description of the thematic analysis procedure used to code and organise the findings into their levels of analysis, on the basis of organisational logic theory.

Chapter 4: Contextualising Athlete Wellbeing

As the first of the analysis chapters, the role of Chapter 4 is to set the context of the research site and provide an insight into athletes' individual experiences of wellbeing. First and

⁶ Multiplicity is a term used to describe the presence of two or more logics within any one organisational setting.

foremost, the chapter establishes a definition of wellbeing, as it is understood by this research project's participants, before framing wellbeing as an essential responsibility within the duty of care of elite sporting organisations. It outlines the risk factors that are unique to the athletic arena but common among athletes, and explores what supports they perceive to be most valuable in managing them. In this discussion, athlete-specific protective factors and help-seeking behaviours are described, with trustworthy psychosocial ties within the HP environment identified as most significant. Chapter 4 sets the foundations for the more applied organisational logic analysis of the athlete experience presented within Chapter 5 by providing the necessary contextual information needed to understand the research site, and factors relevant to the individual level of analysis.

Chapter 5: The 'Whole-Club Capacity' Approach

Continuing at the individual level of analysis, Chapter 5 explores the amalgamation of athletes' personal sphere (relating to what is private, such as relationships, emotions, and social interests) and professional sphere (expectations relating to occupation). It argues that, due to the many sacrifices required of athletes in the pursuit of a professional sporting career (e.g. relocation, lifestyle adjustments, etc.), athletes often see their footballing identity occupying large portions of their self-concept: With this comes a certain degree of risk (particularly during periods of injury, team de-selection, and transitions into retirement). Additionally, Chapter 5 looks at the influence of athletes' blending of the 'personal' and 'professional' spheres on the formation of their psychosocial networks and patterns of help-seeking behaviour. The analysis reveals that athletes are heavily dependent on the informal supports available to them within the sporting domain, particularly from athlete peers and HP staff, but that a lack of process leaves those in supporting roles without the confidence to navigate the blurred boundaries that separate these spaces. To demonstrate these concerns, Chapter 5 investigates two key supportive roles, 'strength and conditioning coach' and 'house parent' to show that, while wellbeing logics are relevant to both roles, they are not matched with 'compatible prescriptions for action' (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 371), and consequently, this limits the quality of support that they provide. Addressing these tensions, Chapter 5 presents the 'Whole-Club Capacity' (WCC) Approach to AW&E as a strategy for improving the strength of protective factors within the HP environment, by equipping all members with the requisite knowledge and skills to productively facilitate athletes' help-seeking.

Chapter 6: Performance Versus Wellbeing

Chapter 6 engages with the organisational level of analysis by exploring the nature of social ties and discourses of wellbeing within the researched organisation's HP environment. With particular interest given to the influence of head coaches, this chapter reports on the significant role that leaders *in* (direct leader-follower interactions) elite sporting organisations have in either stigmatising, or de-stigmatising, athletes' help-seeking attitudes and behaviours. Two teams, The Club's NRL (first-grade) and Jersey Flegg Cup (under 21's elite development) teams are analysed, then compared and contrasted, to illustrate how the blending of performance and wellbeing logics can be done to either positive and/or negative effect. Moreover, Chapter 6 explores the role that leaders *of* elite sporting organisations (hierarchical and strategically oriented) may have at the organisational level and what roles they might have in implementing systems and structures that more effectively embed wellbeing logics into HP systems with greater levels of compatibility and centrality.

Chapter 7: Developing Socially-Supportive Environments

The WCC Approach to AW&E seeks to strengthen the presence, access to, and quality of psychosocial supports within the HP environment. Chapter 7 presents a rationale as to why a relational approach to wellbeing can be the most effective way of providing wellbeing support to athletes, and draws on research participants' insights to highlight experiences that reinforce this view. Moreover, it articulates the 'connection workshops' and 'mental health literacy training' program delivered as part of this project's action research methodology and emphasises the positive impact that psychosocial approaches to care can have on improving the environmental conditions in which athletes experience wellbeing.

Chapter 8: Centering the Athlete

The first chapter located at the institutional level of analysis, Chapter 8 examines the AW&E Framework set by the ARL to highlight its strengths and limitations, and in doing so, speaks primarily to the leaders *of* elite sporting organisations who are best positioned to address the

structures of wellbeing governance. The chapter begins by further detailing the AW&E Framework and exploring this research project's participants' experience of those programs. Using organisational logic theory to analyse the massification of wellbeing governance (relating to bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation) at the institutional level, Chapter 8 discusses the organisational stress that is produced through the ineffective hybridity of wellbeing and commercial logics, and highlights how the WCC Approach to AW&E addresses these concerns and adds value to the existing AW&E Framework with increased compatibility and centrality of wellbeing logics.

Chapter 9: The Value of Wellbeing

Continuing to analyse the influence of commercial logics on the AW&E Framework, Chapter 9 examines elite sports' hierarchy of values in closer detail by applying organisational logic theory to analyse the centrality of wellbeing logics. Using the insight of research participants, it examples how elite sporting organisations often practise their duty of care responsibilities as an act of 'good governance' and as a proxy for risk and reputational management under the pretence of public relations, and how this keeps them from engaging in genuine forms of care that are responsive to athletes', rather than organisations' needs. Investigating strategies to correct the ineffective hybridity of wellbeing and commercial logics, Chapter 9 discusses how wellbeing support can be exercised as an internal act of corporate social responsibility (CSR), but can only be done effectively when communicated through a recognised set of shared values that can be 'articulated, understood, and respected in a meaningful way' by all organisational members (Kohe & Purdy 2020, p. 38). In order to do so however, leaders of elite sporting organisations must believe in a multi-dimensional concept of success and appreciate the important role that wellbeing logics have within it.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The concluding chapter of this thesis discusses the value of its unique theoretical framework in producing a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the relationship between structure and agency, and the impact that the action research methodology had on the research site. Reviewing key findings over the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of

analysis, Chapter 10 emphasises the need for greater alignment across levels and between logics in order to improve the quality of wellbeing support within HP environments. The implications of the thesis are refined into six action points and summarised into a set of practice-based recommendations for elite sporting organisations to consider, before the project's limitations are outlined, along with how future research might address them.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework used to inform observations of, and analyse data collected in, the research site. Beginning with the ontological foundations of critical realism, it explains how this lens is used to frame an understanding of athletes' experience of agency, and the cultural and systemic elements of structure that influence it. It articulates organisational logic theory, as an approach aligned with critical realism, and defines the key terminology used throughout this thesis. Focusing on the measurements of 'centrality' and 'compatibility', it discusses how these tools are used by researchers to identify and interpret patterns of conflict within organisations and explains how these are used to navigate the relationship between structure and agency, across the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis. The following section opens this discussion by framing what constitutes structure and human agency, as they relate to this research project.

Critical Realism

Critical realism is a philosophy of social science that aims to reconcile the ontological dichotomy of positivism and constructivism, and in turn to re-conceptualise the necessity of a new ontology. It was a concept first put forward by Bhaskar in 1975 and was designed to contest the binding beliefs of empirical realism (positivism) and transcendental idealism (constructivism), which had historically dominated and contained ontological thought within these two key compositions (Collier 1994). Critical realism challenges mainstream sociological thought, which as Archer (2003) explicitly claims, had narrowed the possibilities of exploring structure and agency as a unified and integrated concept. In this way, critical realism does not discredit positivism or constructivism, but rather, allows them to co-exist. It is this interplay

between the two concepts that makes critical realism a holistic philosophy of social science (Sayer 2004).

Through the lens of critical realism, 'structure' does not directly correlate to physical structure, but represents any domain that arranges agent interaction, particularly with respect to social, cultural and historical discourse (Steinmetz 1998). 'Agency' refers to the autonomy of individual action and their response to the power of structure. Critical realism believes that structure precedes agency and therefore enables or constrains the causes of human action, but that human action reproduces or transforms structure. This is an idea that borrows from a Weberian (1949) approach suggesting that structures of society operate through human agency and social activity in a cyclical manner, and therefore, implies that social structure appears as static but is transformative and temporal under the influence of human agency (Zeuner 1999). In its application to this project, 'structure' is made up of two elements: the cultural elements of structure determine the discursive spheres that permeate the parameters which shape attitudes and behaviours relating to wellbeing (such as the influence of stigma on help-seeking behaviour), while systemic elements of structure shape support practices (such as mandatory education programs and the processes which facilitate access to psychological support); while 'agency' relates to the individual's awareness and experience of those structures and the level of autonomy held within them. This conception of agency follows the belief of Zeuner (1999) that structure and agent share an organic and omnipresent relationship that is in perpetual oscillation, where experience is formed at the centre of this interaction.

Archer has become a prominent figure representing the realist perspective of social change. Their theory, first published in 'Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach' (1995), is fundamentally concerned with the evolution of structure and agency formed through interaction, where they advocate in favour of a living relationship between the two concepts. What primarily separates Archer's work from others is her significant contribution towards the evolving understanding of social change, where they provide a unique application of critical realism as a guide to action. Archer believes that existing structures compel and enable agents, who then produce actions of consequence, leading to a cyclical process where the resulting structure then adjusts or adapts to the influence of agents, resulting in a further reaction from agents – and so the pattern continues (Porpora 2013). Archer's (1995) use of critical realism as a philosophy of action research, referred to as the morphogenetic sequence, is premised upon the view that by analysing the relationship of structure and agency, we can more effectively

intervene and influence the morphogenetic sequence. This is an important consideration for this research project, which seeks to evaluate the AW&E Framework (systemic structures), the HP environment (cultural structures), and the athletes' experience of them (agency), to accurately identify necessary structural adaptations and develop strategies for improved wellbeing outcomes. As this research project was committed to informing positive change, organisational logic theory provides the pragmatic tools to apply a conceptual understanding of structure and agency to a comprehensive analysis of athletes' experience and the research site more broadly.

Organisational Logic Theory

Competition is considered the 'true spirit' of sport, and its values are intrinsic to sport at all levels of play. However, under the influence of commercialisation and the growing globalisation of sport at the elite level, a definition and understanding of what sport represents becomes increasingly diversified. Organisational logic theory guides researchers in their efforts to investigate complex and pluralistic institutional environments such as elite sports, to isolate an understanding of their many elements, the relationships that they share, and the influence that these structures have on individual experiences of agency. These elements, referred to as 'logics', are defined as 'socially constructed sets of material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape cognition and behaviour' (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, cited in Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 364). Using that language, a *performance* logic (defined by competition) and a *commercial* logic (defined by the business of sport) are two of the most easily recognisable interests of elite sporting organisations. Beyond these 'core' logics however, exist a number of 'peripheral' logics, such as *wellbeing* and *community* logics. *Wellbeing* logics, concerning the holistic health experiences of athletes, and *community* logics, relating to the influence of sport on society and its capacity to be used as a vehicle for social change, make up what Besharov and Smith (2014) refer to as 'multiplicity', or the presence of two or more logics within any one organisational setting.

With such disparate logics to consider, it is difficult to define exactly what elite sporting organisations represent: their values, and what motivates their goals. Besharov and Smith's (2014, p. 366) organisational logic theory provides researchers with a theoretical lens to analyse these considerations, based upon four foundational assumptions: first, societal-level institutional logics develop under an assembly of geographic, historical, and cultural factors

that combine to construct an organisational context (Greenwood et al. 2010); second, most organisations possess multiple logics and these logics are reflected in nuanced ways that implicate the structural conditions that permeate agency (Greenwood et al. 2011); third, while structure shapes agency, at the same time, agency shapes structures given individuals' capacity to reflect, reinforce, or resist assumptions based on structure; and fourth, that the logic structures of organisations are also implicated by a range of contextual factors and the unpredictable 'cultural entrepreneurship of individual agents', 'the dynamics of intra-organisational practices and identities', and 'exogenous events that create overlap of roles, structures, and functions within organisations'. Taken together, the four assumptions of organisational logic theory suggest that while structure shapes the rational, mindful behaviour of agents (the influence of structure on agency), organisational members concurrently have some hand in shaping and changing the exercise of logics through their individualised set of assumptions, values, beliefs and rules, which either support or challenge the normalcy of social and ideological standards (Thornton & Ocasio 2008). In its application to this research project, Besharov and Smith's (2014) four assumptions regarding organisational logic theory imply that because athletes are embedded within a complex organisational network that is influenced by both cultural and systemic elements of structure, an understanding of their experience requires a critical understanding of the relationship between the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis. Besharov and Smith's (2014) tools for analysis allow researchers to navigate this task.

Analysing Organisational Logics: Compatibility & Centrality

The practice for analysing organisational logics is premised on the view that multiplicity (multiple organisation logics) presents a theoretical puzzle that if organised correctly, can produce efficient outcomes across a myriad of interests. Hybridity, a term used by Besharov and Smith (2014) to describe the footings of differentiation and integration of multiple logic streams, provides a conceptual framework for understanding the impact of multiplicity on organisational outcomes. Besharov and Smith (2014) ask researchers to investigate logics under the premise that they each carry their own assigned set of principles that are layered across an organisation's broader sense of identity, structure, and strategy. With this understanding, researchers are tasked with identifying how various logics interact, under what hierarchy, and whether they create compatible and/or incompatible systems of practice

(Greenwood et al. 2011). Through an analysis of organisational logics, researchers hope to better support the organisations studied to more accurately isolate spaces in which their logic structures create conflict, and to subsequently strategise for their effective re-structuring (Battilana & Dorado 2010). In its application to this project, that means understanding the relationship between wellbeing logics and the more dominant performance and commercial logics in elite sports across the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis. To do so, Besharov and Smith (2014) provide researchers with a framework for measuring the status of an organisation's hybrid practices, through the following criteria:

- 1) *Logic compatibility*: the extent to which multiple logics offer compatible/incompatible qualities and prescriptions for action.
- 2) *Logic centrality*: the extent to which these logics are central to organisational functioning (hierarchy of values).

Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 265) describe compatibility as 'the extent to which the instantiations of logics imply consistent and reinforcing organisational actions', while incompatibility refers to the contradiction of logics and the conflict generated both in values and practice (Thornton & Ocasio 2008). Greenwood et al. (2011) insist that compatibility is most easily accessed when organisational structures reinforce consistent and substantiated messages that prescribe goals at the interactional level. This is because, as Jones and Massa (2013) explain, goals shape action, where the more relatable goals become, the more likely they are to be self-governed with greater rigour, clarity and accountability by organisational members. In instances of higher rates of multiplicity however, and where greater diversity in professional membership is present, organisational goals often are less consistent. This is because while the structural parameters of organisations and their governance systems have a significant influence over functionality, it is its members who selectively draw on, interpret, and enact logics as an exercise of their agency (McPherson & Saunderson 2013). Individuals, given their perception of the shared value of hybridity hold a large stake in the validation and 'legitimation' of logics (Dunn & Jones 2010). What is also clear from a wide gamut of organisational assessments however, is that whether organisations are homogeneous or heterogeneous in their logic structures, the degree of compatibility between logics hinges largely on whether they carry mutually beneficial qualities. Advocating for the value of multiplicity, Besharov and Smith (2014) argue that a diverse logic structure and professional membership need not result in competition for power, but rather, with effective collaborative systems, more efficient organisational actions and output are likely to occur. Therefore, logic

compatibility is not fixed but is malleable, contextual, and vitally dependent on effective links between structure and agency.

The second core component of organisational logic theory, ‘centrality’, is concerned with the ‘degree to which multiple logics are each treated as equally valid and relevant to organisational functioning’ (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 12). It relates to the prioritisation of logics across both organisational values and practices which, as Jones and Massa (2013) postulate, share an inextricably linked relationship. This idea, first brought forward by early institutional theorists such as Meyer and Rowan (1977), made conceptual models for assessing how different sets of organisational goals and practices were upheld as ‘core’ work tasks, while others sat at the ‘periphery’. More recent developments of this theory have taken a less linear approach by acknowledging the often dynamic ways in which multiplicity manoeuvres itself throughout organisations, creating pluralistic institutional environments with layered logic structures, as relating to the three tiers of analysis (individual, organisational, and institutional; Pache & Santos 2013). Analysing centrality, Besharov and Smith (2014) explain that logics can be measured over a high to low spectrum, suggesting that in cases of high centrality, organisations instantiate multiple logics within their core values and practices⁷, while in cases of low centrality, values and practices are governed by a clearly defined hierarchy of logics⁸. Besharov and Smith (2014) suggest that while dysfunction can occur in organisations containing either high or low levels of centrality, the risk of conflict is typically dependent on the degree of compatibility between logics. For example, in instances of high centrality, if logics are not held with equal value, they may become fractured and be forced to diverge from an organisation’s goals, in what Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 367) refer to as ‘fragmented centralisation’. This is defined by uncoordinated demands and competition for power, high levels of centrality and low levels of compatibility, often resulting in the clustering of logic groups. In such cases, incompatible practices are likely to follow, as organisational values and practices become increasingly convoluted. Conversely, high levels of centrality and compatibility allow

⁷ Besharov & Smith (2014) use the example of social enterprises as an illustration of high centrality, embodying both social responsibility and economic logics as core features of their values and practices.

⁸ Conversely, corporate institutions that are primarily motivated by economic logics can be seen as an example of low centrality, because while they may support community programs, logics containing social responsibilities sit at the periphery of their organisational activity.

organisations to benefit from a diversity of resources. Using a multi-disciplinary team within a healthcare setting as an example, Besharov and Smith (2014) discuss how diversity in professional expertise can provide patients with more expansive and holistic care plans. In this way, high or low levels of centrality are not at fault for ineffective organisational functioning. Rather, poorly designed systems and structures that do not facilitate their compatible components are typically what produce organisational conflict. Therefore, as is the case with compatibility, centrality is not fixed – it too is malleable, contextual, and vitally dependent on effective links between structure and agency.

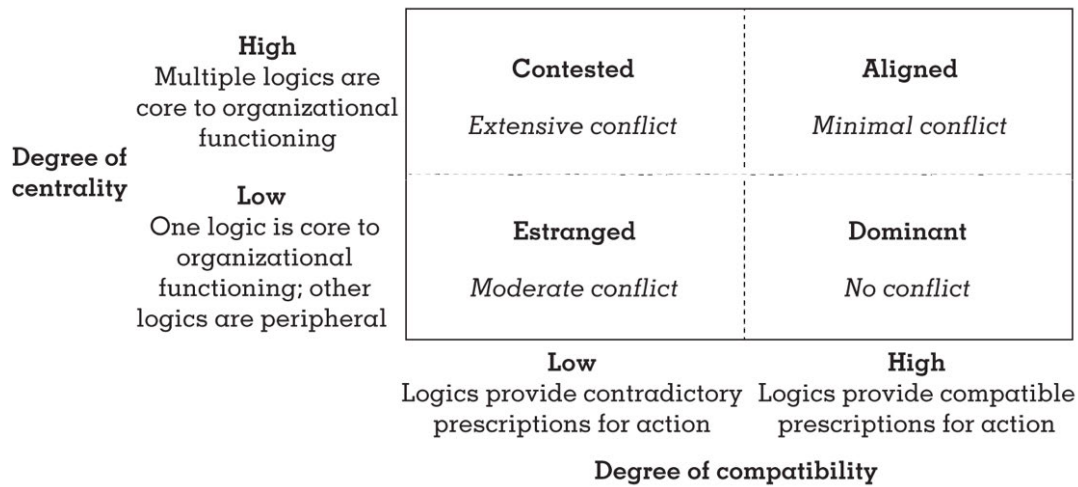
Thus, understanding the implications of multiplicity on organisational action requires an investigation into hybridity and the status of logic compatibility and centrality. To ‘specify precisely how logics instantiated within organisations relate to one another’ (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 375), this research project implements these tools to navigate the issues generated by the multiple goals, values, and identities that operate through elite sporting organisations, and the influence that these have on wellbeing logics in particular. The first project of its scale to apply organisational logic theory to the elite sports setting, this research project provides a novel exploration into athlete wellbeing from a systems perspective. The only previous study using organisational logic theory within an elite sports setting, Lane et al. (2022) investigated elite athletes’ experience in tertiary education programs and discussed the need for more effective hybrid practices through a model that conceptualises wellbeing within the multi-dimensional needs of elite athletes and sporting organisations. Using organisational logic theory, Lane et al.’s (2020) critique of the structural factors that limit the agency of athletes and disadvantages their participation in tertiary education programs, provides a useful example of how measures of compatibility and centrality can be used to link structure and agency to an analysis of athlete wellbeing. Moreover, understanding the blueprint for change that organisational logic theory provides, Lane et al. (2020) explain how amalgamating wellbeing logics with elite sports’ varied interests in a way that makes them compatible, rather than in conflict, can produce shared multi-dimensional gains between logics and produce improved wellbeing outcomes for athletes. By way of summary they provide the following table to explain their application of organisational theory:

Table 1: Education in sport – hybridity (Lane et al. 2020, p. 13)

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Application</i>
<i>Compatibility</i>	Concerning the relationship between varying interests of organisations and the extent to which they are consistent with/in complement to one another.	Preretirement planning is positively correlated with performance indicators for professional athletes; flow-on impacts into social and commercial gain may also occur.
<i>Centrality</i>	The degree in which varying interests are treated with equal validity.	Empowering athletes to engage in education and vocation training, without compromise to their performance, around sporting responsibilities.

Lane et al.'s (2020) application of organisational logic theory demonstrates how the dimensions of logic compatibility and centrality provide a pragmatic lens for analysing the nature of multiplicity, and how organisations can strategise for improved hybridity. As a tool to predict levels of internal conflict and/or stability, this theory allows researchers to assess the 'types of logic multiplicity within organisations' and the many outcomes that they will likely produce. Whether the presence of multiple logics threatens organisational performance and leads to dysfunction (Battilana & Dorado 2010; Pache & Santos 2010; Tracey, Phillips & Jarvis 2011), or whether logic multiplicity has the potential to make organisations more enduring, sustainable, and innovative (Jay 2012; Kraatz & Block 2008; Sgourev 2011), largely depends on the structure of logics and an organisation's ability to understand them. Besharov and Smith (2014) outline four common types of logic multiplicity within organisations, measured across high and low levels of centrality and compatibility, as represented in the following table:

Figure 1: Types of logic multiplicity within organisations (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 371)



Besharov and Smith’s (2014, p. 370) ‘types of logic multiplicity within organisations’ is designed for researchers seeking ‘an integrative framework for understanding heterogeneity in how multiple logics manifest in organisations’. The four types – contested, aligned, estranged, and dominant – theorise the likely outcomes of hybridity and how they might predict organisational performance in terms of stability and/or conflict.

Types of Logic Multiplicity Within Organisations

Contested organisations are defined by low levels of compatibility and high levels of centrality. In these organisations, multiple logics are present but in conflict, largely as a consequence of low levels of compatibility; this generates significant tensions surrounding the negotiation of goals, values, and identities, as well as strategies and practices for achieving those goals (Besharov & Smith, p. 371). Without high levels of compatibility, a high level of centrality means that multiple logics compete for dominance, with no clear structure to facilitate their collaboration. Moreover, lacking a clear hierarchy of order among multiple contradictory logics, contested organisations are vulnerable to uncoordinated and inconsistent prescriptions for action in the absence of well substantiated processes. Therefore, Besharov and Smith (2014) predict that contested organisations will likely experience extensive and intractable instability, as in the case provided by Battilana and Dorado (2010), who documented the struggle of BancoSol’s (financial institution) dysfunctional logic structure. In that case-study, Battilana and Dorado (2010) explain how integrating banking and social impact logics forced the

organisation to diverge into two clear sub-groups, creating a fragmented centralisation of social workers, who were advocating for unique hardships experienced by their clients, and bankers, who were driven to maximise profits and overlook the needs of those clients. In this instance, Battilana and Dorado (2010) attribute ill-informed hiring and operational practices as leading the organisation towards an inevitable mass employee turnover and forced resignation of their CEO, suggesting that the combination of low compatibility and high centrality led to a number of core operational issues that fuelled ongoing internal conflicts. Improved strategic efforts to integrate structures that help to mitigate conflict, through systems that more effectively facilitate the collaboration of logics, would have better served the efforts of the organisation. For elite sport's leading performance and commercial logics, high levels of compatibility and centrality allow these logics to operate coherently at its core, in that greater financial resources leads to stronger recruitment power, and with better-quality recruitment typically comes improved performance and revenue. However, taking a wider lens to the multiplicity of elite sport by considering the blending of wellbeing with performance and commercial logics, these measures of centrality decrease. This is because wellbeing logics are not seen to contribute equal value as the organisation's dominant logics. This in turn promotes a division between core and periphery. This type of logic structure, made up of low levels of both compatibility and centrality, is what defines an 'estranged organisation'.

In *estranged organisations*, as is the case for contested organisations, low compatibility implies that organisational goals are varied and, without clear prescriptions for action, generate conflict and disorganisation through a poorly synthesised logic structure. However, unlike contested organisations, estranged organisations are defined by their low centrality, whereby one logic is dominant and exerts primary influence over organisational functioning. Through a clearly defined hierarchy of logics then, estranged organisations are less likely than contested organisations to experience extensive or intractable conflict, although moderate conflict is still likely to occur between members of core and peripheral logics, albeit more easily resolved by referring back to the hierarchy of logics. To example this, Besharov and Smith (2014) profile the Centre For Human Rights, whose mission to provide cultural preservation and education was at odds with its more dominant commercial logic. Pressure from external influencers to re-shape the organisation's goals with a greater focus on profit led to organisational members resisting the incorporation of market-based strategies, as they felt the organisation's long-held identity and trust with consumers was under threat. Illustrating the instability and potential for conflict within estranged organisations, in the end, organisational leaders were required to force

the business logic into the organisation's core practices and adapt the logic structure around those interests. Similar examples can be found in HP systems, particularly among PDMs, who while recognised as integral team-members, are frequently under-resourced and marginalised to the periphery of organisational practices, under low levels of centrality in relation to performance logics (Stansen & Chambers 2019). A third type of multiplicity within organisations, 'aligned organisations', seeks to correct these issues through high levels of compatibility and centrality.

Aligned organisations are characterised by high levels of compatibility and centrality. This is typically considered the ideal logic structure, as these organisations experience greater unity through a cohesive set of goals, values, identities, and practices produced by the alignment of multiple logics. This is because with high levels of compatibility comes consistent prescriptions for organisational action, and with high levels of centrality comes the division of power equally between logics at the core of organisational functioning. Thus, conflict is predicted to be minimal, as the absence of a clear hierarchy of logics implies the potential for competition. Unpacking the implications of 'minimal conflict', Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 373) state that 'while both low compatibility (as found in estranged organisations) and high centrality (as found in aligned organisations) can create conflict, fundamental differences about appropriate goals and values (i.e., low compatibility) can elicit greater contestation than the lack of a clear hierarchy between relatively compatible goals and values (i.e., high centrality)'. Binder's (2007) account of the Discovery Centre, a child care centre run by the social services sector, gives an example of the kind of conflict common to aligned organisations. In this case, while the organisation's multiple logics were cohesive, it was not clear whether the organisation's core practices were led by early childhood education or rather by the state's social services logics. Binder's (2007) description of these events showed that while conflict was dormant, the potential for conflict was always present; this required organisational members to actively work to construct practices that satisfied the demands of both logics. The blending of community and commercial logics provides a useful sporting example, whereby the high degrees of centrality and compatibility between the two are supported through practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR)⁹. The concern however, much like Binder's

⁹ Ullmann (cited in Babiak & Wolfe 2009, p. 718) describes CSR as 'the extent to which an organisation meets the needs, expectations, and demands of certain external constituencies beyond those directly linked to the company's products/markets'. Addressing 'societal

(2007) example, is that under the premise of CSR, it is not clear whether an elite sporting organisation's motivation to engage in community programs is led by a sense of social responsibility or driven by economic interests which, as later chapters of this thesis will show, can create an undercurrent of conflict. The fourth and final type of logic multiplicity within organisations, 'dominant organisations', avoids many of these conflicts and is the only logic structure in which Besharov and Smith (2014) anticipate no conflict being generated through multiplicity.

Dominant organisations, like aligned organisations, benefit from the high levels of compatibility between multiple logics and the clear prescriptions for action that this generates; however, unlike aligned organisations, dominant organisations work towards one clear goal under low levels of centrality. What this means is that while multiple logics may exist, subsidiary logics act in support of a prevailing logic in an organisation's mission, strategy, structure, identity and core work practices. Consequently, multiple logics blend without the potential for conflict, largely due to the compatible qualities that they share. In Besharov and Smith's (p. 374) words, 'if members are influenced by a second logic, the high level of compatibility among logics results in complementary implications for organisational goals and enables multiple logics to coexist peacefully'. Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012) use the example of an architectural firm operating within low socio-economic communities. Blending affordability and functionality into an overarching market logic, the organisation used economically conservative materials such as concrete, steel, and glass to achieve these shared targets. Consequently, despite some contestation surrounding design legitimacy, their clearly defined logic structure mitigated the potential for conflict. And yet, while dominant organisations may seem ideal, they may not be replicable within the pluralistic institutional context of the elite sports sector, as with such high rates of multiplicity it is difficult for one logic to be dominant. Therefore, in organisations containing more than two logics and operating within a complex network of individual, organisational, and institutional variables, the task of measuring levels of compatibility and centrality becomes increasingly more nuanced.

relationships' and the 'expectations that society has of organisations', CSR 'tends to focus on the effects of organisations on external constituencies (e.g., consumers, local communities, charitable organisations)'.

Drivers of Variation in Compatibility and Centrality

Behsarov and Smith’s (2014) organisational logic theory is used as a tool to analyse organisational action, and in turn to classify the type of logic multiplicity that wellbeing practices are embedded within. Pursuing an interest in the relationship of structure and agency, this research project explores the drivers of variation that affect levels of compatibility and centrality between wellbeing, performance, and commercial logics, over three levels of analysis: the institutional, organisational, and individual. As stated by Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 367), ‘variation in an organisation’s level of compatibility and centrality is influenced by nested and intertwined factors at multiple levels of analysis’. With this in mind, the analysis chapters of this thesis are structured according to the three levels (institutional, organisational, and individual), while concurrently exploring the interplay between them. The following table provides a summary of the drivers of variation explored through the analysis of each level:

Table 2: Drivers of variation in compatibility and centrality (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 367)

Level of Analysis	Factors That Influence Compatibility	Factors That Influence Centrality
Institutional field	Number of professional institutions and relationship between them	Power and structure of field actors (i.e., fragmented centralization)
Organization	Hiring and socialization	Mission and strategy Resource dependence
Individual	Ties to field-level referents Interdependence	Adherence to logics Relative power

Beginning with the individual level, Chapters 3-4 of this thesis provide a detailed examination of the athletes’ experience of wellbeing on a relational level (individual and small group interactions). Starting with an overview of literature relating the unique risk and protective factors managed by athletes, the discussion progresses into a study of athletes’ interpersonal supports and the patterns of their help-seeking behaviour. These chapters map the network of interdependence between members of the HP environment to examine the ‘influence that members have on each other, as measured by recurrent patterns of behaviour’ (O’Connor & Cavanagh (2013, p. 3), before analysing the relative logics of each group member and their ‘level of adherence’ to the ‘power’ of their primary logics. Exploring the ambiguity that surrounds wellbeing logics at this level, these chapters are interested in who athletes rely on most for support, why those supports are essential to their experience of wellbeing, and conversely, how they interpret their responsibilities within the athletes’ psychosocial support

network. Focused on two roles in particular, a ‘house parent’ and ‘strength and conditioning (S&C) coach’, these chapters sit in the grey space between athletes’ personal and professional spheres, the boundaries that separate them, and the logic structures that either enable/disable interaction between them.

Chapters 5-6, ascending to the organisational level, expand the scope of analysis to include the entire organisational network. These chapters focus on examining the social ties among group members and the ways that shared attitudes and behaviours reinforce wellbeing discourses to both positive and/or negative effect, as a maintenance function of structure. Informed by the pattern of help-seeking behaviours identified at the individual level, these chapters highlight the need to strengthen athletes’ network of social support within HP environments, as the most significant attribute of ‘resource dependence’ in relation to wellbeing. With particular focus on leaders *in* (direct leader-follower interactions) elite sporting organisations, these chapters consider the influence of key group members (specifically, head coaches) as implementors of ‘mission and strategy’, and in turn, articulate how ‘hiring and socialisation’ becomes an important factor impacting the centrality of wellbeing logics. Moving towards the institutional level, chapters 7-8 look at the wellbeing practice framework managed by the ARL and how these systems prioritise and service a logic structure that values commercial logics with the highest degree of centrality. Speaking primarily to the leaders *of* (hierarchical and strategically oriented) elite sporting organisations and their governing bodies, these chapters identify the spaces of incompatible practices and critique the ‘power and structure of field actors’ (specifically, sports managers) and how the fragmented centralisation (ostracisation of peripheral logics) of wellbeing logics occurs as a consequence of ineffective systems. Investigating the ‘number of professional institutions and the relationship between them’, these chapters finish with a summary of the intertwined factors that connect the institutional, organisational, and individual levels, as an illustration of the relationship between structure and agency.

Chapter Summary

This chapter gives an overview of the theoretical framework used throughout this research project. It explains how structure and agency are understood as independent but unified concepts, and demonstrates the ways in which this framework is used to interpret the athlete

experience of wellbeing and the elite sporting sector more broadly. It provides a pragmatic account of how measuring ‘centrality’ and ‘compatibility’ can be used to assess logic multiplicity within organisations, which researchers can then use to predict patterns of organisational stability and/or conflict. It explains how these tools are applied to this research project and used to structure this thesis. The following chapter provides a similarly systematic overview of the research process. It outlines the epistemological position held throughout the research process and discusses how this relates to the action research methodology used. Lastly, it demonstrates the handling of data during analysis and highlights how this relates to organisational logic theory.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological framework and research activities undertaken as part of this project. Focusing on an action research methodology, the chapter explains how both its *inquiry* (investigating and understanding athlete-specific risk and protective factors) and *impact* (developing effective intervention strategies and wellbeing practice frameworks in support of those factors) address the research goals by using interviews as the primary data collection method and inform two interventions developed as action with impact. It provides a rationale for these interventions, ‘connection workshops’ and ‘mental health literacy training’ programs, that were developed and delivered within the research site. Further, it explains how they resulted from consultation with research participants and the ongoing process of analytic induction. The latter part of this chapter, and in particular the discussion of ‘data analysis’, elaborates the link between the research methodology and the theoretical framework. It demonstrates how thematic analysis was used to condense large amounts of qualitative data into a set of concise themes, before being placed into the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis, as necessitated by the application of organisational logic theory. The chapter begins with an explanation of the epistemological position that informs this research.

Epistemology

Phenomenology is an epistemological position which validates the lived experiences of research participants as the foundations of factual knowledge. It seeks to uncover the universal essence of a studied phenomenon through the legitimisation of participants’ conscious lived

experience and asks researchers to relinquish their position as knowledge bearers in favour of relegating this function to the members of the researched population (O’Leary 2004; Savin-Baden & Major 2013). Aligned with the critical realist perspective, phenomenology observes individuals as intimately connected to the cultural, social, and historical contexts in which they exist, which according to O’Leary (2004), implies that individuals’ lived experience of agency occurs under the influence of their surrounding structures. O’Leary (2004, p. 122), making sense of this relationship, suggests that it comprises two key compositions:

- (1) ‘Constructed’, which outlines the role of the individual in creating an understanding of the world that is solely relative to them; and
- (2) ‘Intersubjective’, which highlights how the experiences of individuals and their interactions with the world contribute to that understanding.

In the context of this research project, understanding the ‘constructed’ and ‘intersubjective’ elements of experience is an important distinction, given the complex interpersonal networks and logic multiplicity within the research site. From a phenomenological perspective, researchers investigate individual experience by exploring opinions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, as well as ideas, ideologies, and constructs that frame an understanding of self and others. What this means is that the ‘constructed’ experience relates primarily to the individual’s experience of agency, while the ‘intersubjective’ experience relates to the consistencies between individuals’ descriptions of their social world, as a reflection of social structure. In this way, phenomenology makes both constructivist and positivist interpretations of data, through the cyclical process of identifying what is common, in an effort to ‘reduce unimportant dissimilarities and integrate the essential nature of various descriptions’ (O’Leary 2014, p. 140).

To bring the ‘essential nature of various descriptions’ to the fore, Van Manen (2007) advises researchers to consistently exchange dialogue with research participants for examination and verification based on participants interpretation of data. This means synthesising the data collection phase with an inductive approach to data analysis, whereby the researcher continually oscillates back and forth between theory development, an examination of literature, and substantiation from research participants. These principles, originally captured in Spiegelberg’s (1960) framework for phenomenological research, detail three core processes (intuiting, analysing, and describing) where through such efforts, researchers work towards the possibility of capturing the reproduction of common experiences, building on their capacity to

articulate the relationship between agency and structure (Giorgi 1997). Phenomenology argues that subjective variations between individual experiences exist, but that simultaneously, objective consistencies can be found – for example, understanding the systemic elements of structure as the supports that are available to athletes within the HP environment, the cultural elements of structure as the discursive forces which either empower or inhibit athletes' engagement with those systems, and the patterns of individual athletes' help-seeking behaviours as exercises of agency. The following section details the action research methodology used for this research project and explains how the voices of research participants were actively involved in developing the research design.

Methodology

Action research is a methodology used in the case of solving a targeted set of issues, by empowering groups, organisations, or communities to evaluate, explore and expand their strategies towards solution (Bryman 2012). Through these efforts, theory and action are combined in the pursuit of change in a 'cyclical process of thinking, acting, data gathering and reflecting' (Savin-Baden & Major 2013, p. 245). Action research then, as an approach to social research which encourages change through intervention, activates the morphogenetic sequence by utilising the creative potential of exploratory and intervention-oriented approaches. The researcher, both observer and collaborator, engages in what Flick (2014, p. 78) describes as 'the constructed processes of social interchange', where by virtue of these interactions, the researcher becomes an active agent operating within, and contributing to, the same structures as their participants. Therefore, action researchers are expected to consistently collaborate with their research participants in an effort to understand their experience more closely and produce actions informed from their insights. As an exploratory and intervention-oriented methodology, action research enabled this project to pursue both its 'inquiry' (to investigate athlete experiences of health and wellbeing) and 'impact' (to inform future intervention strategies and practice frameworks that seek to support these experiences) research goals.

The action research process began with a period of observation and consultation, whereby the researcher, immersed within the research site, took systematic and detailed records of the interactions and events within the studied group. Used to explore the day-to-day experiences of athletes and gain an impression of HP cultures, specific attention was focused on interactions

reflecting attitudes, language, and behaviours relating to discourses of wellbeing. While maintaining a passive and nonobtrusive position within the field, the researcher's observational record was used to cultivate preliminary hypotheses, where draft research aims and methods were formed. Following this, as an act of reflexivity, these ideas were interrogated alongside relevant academic literature, before formal consultation with members of The Club (including athletes, AW&E staff, and general management) and the researcher's academic supervisors. In this way, the research utilised both inductive and deductive elements to hypothesise development, whereby data-driven inductive research interests were balanced by the deductive examination of literature, for the collective intent of generating a theoretical premise for the project. As Punch (1998, p. 201) explains, inductive and deductive approaches are necessary for social research, given that 'in the search for regularities in the social world, induction is central. Concepts are developed inductively from the data and raised to a higher level of abstraction, and the interrelationships are then traced out. While induction is central, deduction is needed also, since theory generation involves theory verification as well. The following section outlines the data collection methods used for this research project and highlights how inductive and deductive approaches both contributed to the research design.

Data Collection Methods

To understand the action research process as it was applied to this research project, it is necessary to provide an overview the three stages of data collection and describe the sequence in which they occurred. Stage 1: 'Interviews', followed the observation and consultation period outlined in the previous section. The semi-structured interviews initiated the cyclical process of data gathering, analysis, and reflection that is essential to the inductive elements of action research and allowed the researcher to investigate themes and explore potential action-oriented strategies. Data collected through interviews during Stage 1 were then deductively compared against the literature at the 6-month point to determine the merit of initial findings and to inform the action research activity of the following stage, in consultation with the AW&E team. Emerging from this period of deductive reflection was the transition into Stage 2, characterised by the delivery of 'connection workshops', and subsequently Stage 3, characterised by the delivery of 'mental health literacy workshops'. Semi-structured interviews, conducted across all 3 stages of data collection, were then used to evaluate the impact of these interventions at the organisational level of analysis and to continue collecting data relating to the individual

and institutional levels of analysis. The sequence of data collection methods is illustrated in the following table (Table 3) and described in detail under the ‘data collection methods’ section.

Table 3: Data collection timeline

Data Collection Period	Stage 1:	Deductive Reflection & Consultation	Stage 2:		Deductive Reflection & Consultation	Stage 3:
	1-6 months		7-12 months	13-18 months		19-24 months
Interviews						
Connection Workshops						
Surveys						
Mental Health Literacy Training						

Interviews

Seventeen participants were recruited from within The Club and the ARL and were interviewed for between 60-90 minutes. These consisted of current athletes, retired athletes, player development managers (PDMs), athlete wellbeing and education managers (AW&E), strength and conditioning (S&C) coaches, career coaches, house parents, program facilitators, and a head coach. Given the organisational context and the potential risk of identifying participants, all interviewees, including their organisational position, are de-identified for privacy and ethical reasons. Considered one of the most common and effective forms of qualitative data collection in the social sciences, semi-structured interviews offer a collaborative process (similar to that of an open-ended conversation) between interviewer and interviewee that produces a co-constructed dialogue set for analysis and theory development. Punch (1998) describes this format of interviewing as having standardised qualities in the form of a general question guide, whilst maintaining a flexible structure that allows the participant to dictate the flow and direction of discussion. As a qualitative data collection method, semi-structured

interviews are a way of identifying and exploring shared and common knowledge within a specific context or cohort (Savin-Baden & Major 2013). As Jones (1985, p. 45) suggests:

In order to understand another person's constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them, and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and a priori by ourselves) and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings.

In the process of understanding the interaction between human agency and social structures, researchers must explore the social, cultural, institutional, and linguistic factors that shape their participants' perception (Harms 2007). Therefore, primarily serving this research project's *inquiry* goal, semi-structured interviews were the central mechanism for studying and interpreting athletes' experiences of agency and their relationship to the structures of elite sport. In connecting *inquiry* to *impact* however, the repetitious act of analytic induction was integral in directing the action research process through the ongoing reflexivity of emerging data and existing literature. Used to focus the researcher's understanding of multiple unique experiences and perspectives, analytic induction improved the insights gained from the interviews by identifying the essential themes emerging from participants' descriptions and reducing the irrelevant dissimilarities between participants. The interventions, in the form of 'connection workshops' and 'mental health literacy training', were developed in response to research participants' concern for the wellbeing culture of The Club's HP system. The following section details the rationale for these interventions and the practices carried out within the research site.

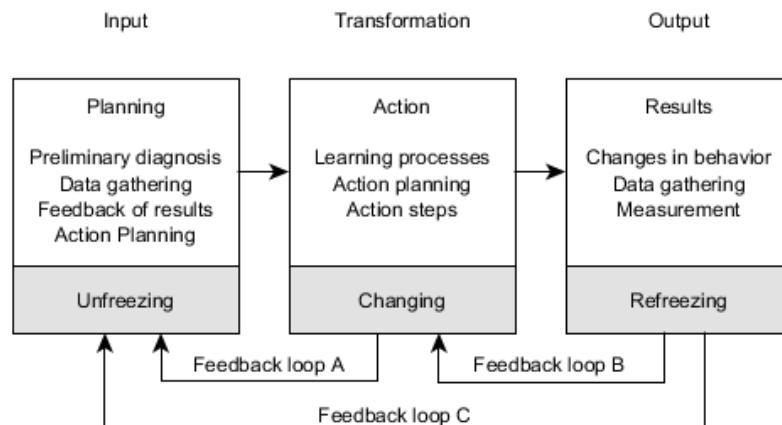
Connection Workshops

For team sports, connection between group members is widely understood as a vital dimension of performance. What is less commonly recognised however, is the psychosocial value of connection for athletes' wellbeing within the high-pressured context of elite sports. As it was raised consistently throughout interviews, the significance of connection between athletes was highlighted as a significant protective wellbeing factor. Such claims are well supported by health literature, particularly within the field of social work, which emphasises the benefits of social and emotional support on mental health (Chapman et al. 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002;

Thoits 1995), physical health (McEwen 1998; Seeman et al. 2002; Uchino 2004), health-related behaviour (Umberson & Montrez 2010), and mortality risk (Brummett et al. 2001; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002; Robles and Kiecolt-Glaser 2003). As explored in Chapter 7, few interventions are currently operating within HP systems to develop team connection as a wellbeing enhancement strategy. Expanding on this emerging field of literature, the development and facilitation of ‘connection workshops’ was guided by the insight of this research project’s participants, with the added value of contemporary group work theory. Operating under the premise of ‘the many’ mentoring ‘the many’ (Huizing 2012), the connection workshops used a strengths-based approach through the exchange of stories, whereby group members were encouraged to conceive, capture, and infer the experience of their peers from their own in a co-constructed dialogue.

In practice, four 90-minute connection workshops were facilitated by an experienced external social work group work practitioner and an in-group athlete leader with 10 years of NRL experience. Using a semi-structured approach, facilitators provided group members with questions to encourage the mutual sharing of personal and professional life experiences (e.g. exploring strengths and challenges, senses of belonging and connection, stories relating to family and culture). As an action research intervention, the workshops were designed to motivate peer support, inform the organisational level of analysis and improve the strength of interpersonal relationships, adaptive cognitions (self-efficacy and satisfaction), and socially-supportive environmental conditions. Recruitment was carried out in consultation with The Club’s AW&E Team and General Manager, where it was decided that the JFC team would participate in the program. This was seen as an early intervention and prevention strategy, and the consultation group believed that involving younger athletes in the program would empower them to act as agents of cultural change over the long term, as they ascend to the NRL level. In total, between 30-35 athletes and 1-5 coaching staff were present at each of the four workshops. For privacy and ethical reasons, the workshops were not audio recorded. In lieu of this however, the researcher engaged in Lewin’s (1958) systems model of action research to support the ongoing planning, action, and evaluation of results. Post-workshop debriefs of 60-minutes in duration, involving workshop facilitators, PDMs, coaching staff, and an athlete participant present at each, served the dual-purpose of critical reflection and program development. Modelling the cyclical process of Lewin’s (1958) systems model of action research, Bond (2018) provides the following prescriptive diagram:

Figure 2: Systems model of action research (Bond 2018)



The systems model of action research provided a semi-structured methodology to workshop *planning*, guided by three critical reflection questions:

- 1) did we learn anything new about the athlete experience?
- 2) what wellbeing needs were raised by group members?
- 3) how might we be able to better support these needs inside and outside of future workshops?

In addition to these group evaluations, the same questions were integrated into one-on-one interviews with athletes and coaches who participated in the connection workshops. Workshop participants were also asked to reflect on their experiences and impressions of its impact. Through this process, *actions* for change were then reported and integrated into the planning of future workshops (feedback loop A), before data collection via interviews and surveys (to be discussed) provided data relating to *results*, subsequently incorporated into future workshops, and more general recommendations for future strategic planning (feedback loops B and C). As an example of general recommendations passed through feedback loop C, the need for improved mental health literacy was highlighted across all data collection avenues as a strategy for de-stigmatising mental illness and supporting the development of socially-supportive environments within HP systems.

Mental Health Literacy Training

Mental health literacy is a term used to describe the knowledge of individuals pertaining to the signs and symptoms of mental illness, positive mental health management and preventative measures, treatment options for mental illness and crisis scenarios, and attitudes and actions towards help-seeking behaviour (Jorm et al. 1997; Jorm 2000; Gorczynski et al. 2020; Breslin et al. 2017; Sebbens et al. 2016). Importantly, as stated by Gorczynski et al. (2020, p. 715), mental health literacy not only involves developing and using knowledge, but also ‘changing attitudes, overcoming stigma, and providing and taking opportunities to get help’. Education in the form of mental health literacy training, which develops individuals and groups’ capacity to recognise the warning signs and symptoms of illness, understand effective management and treatment of illness, and support others who may be developing an illness, is becoming increasingly prevalent (Moll et al. 2018). However, despite the growing evidence supporting the success of mental health literacy training, particularly the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)¹⁰ program, there are increasing calls for the program to be tailored to specific target groups (Moll et al. 2018; Bapat, Jorm & Lawrence 2009; Ravulo 2015). The only study exploring the impact of MHFA within the NRL, Ravulo’s (2015) supports this claim, recommending more context-specific case-studies relevant to a rugby league context. Responding to these calls, the AW&E Team of The Club was consulted to determine what a tailored mental health literacy training program would need to involve. Seven learning outcomes emergent from those discussions identified the need to: recognise the signs and symptoms of mental illness; understand common mental health issues for rugby league athletes; identify protective and risk factors unique to rugby league athletes; establish evidence-based (medical, psychological, and social) treatments; develop and support conversational support skills; and provide appropriate crisis response actions. Based on an amalgamation of athlete wellbeing literature, the MHFA evidence base and resources from the NRL ‘State of Mind’ initiative¹¹, three two-hour training sessions were then developed and delivered by the

¹⁰ MHFA is a standardised two-day module-based education program and industry leader for mental health literacy training within an Australian context.

¹¹ The NRL’s State of Mind (n.d.) program involves a range of workshops and resources to help improve the mental health and wellbeing of rugby league communities at all levels of play.

researcher¹² to five cohorts, including the NRL, JFC, Tasha Gale (women's under 18's team), Harold Matthews (under 16's team), footballing and non-footballing staff.

Surveys

Mixed-methods research is used to explore and explain phenomena through a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. As Creswell and Clark (2012) suggest, mixed-methods research should integrate and link the two forms of data concurrently by either combining them in a sequential order or by embedding one within the other. While mixed-methods research must utilise both qualitative and quantitative approaches, it is reasonable to give priority to one form of data, depending on what the research emphasises, and such research may be used in a single study or in multiple phases of the study. Surveys were used in this research project as a method for validating qualitative feedback and for the enhancement of clarification relating to the impact of connection workshops. Twenty-three JFC athletes participated in the survey, which explored themes emerging from one-on-one interviews relating to connection workshops, such as the perceived impact of workshops on individual personal development, team connection, and enhanced team performance, and more general themes relating to wellbeing, such as the types of support accessed by athletes and the value that athletes attribute to them. Survey data did not undergo any significant statistical analysis but rather, were used to provide a broader perspective through a larger sample size. While survey data helped to triangulate the key findings emerging from interviews through the benefits of mixed-methods research, they only provided a subjective view of the athlete experience, rather than providing any explanation of causality or fact. Throughout this thesis, survey data are presented as a secondary support to the discussion of qualitative data.

¹² The decision for the researcher to develop and deliver the mental health literacy training program was made by members of the study, due to the researchers' practice experience in the mental health field and qualifications as a social worker and MHFA facilitator.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of qualitative data analysis. Based on the exercise of synchronised summarising, coding, and conceptualising, it is an ideal approach to analysis in projects containing a significant amount of qualitative data, given its capacity to condense large amounts of information into concise themes (Walter 2013; Punch 1998). In its application to this project, thematic analysis was used to process interview data using Miles and Huberman's (1994) prescription for the three stages of thematic analysis: data reduction, data displays, and data conclusions.

Data reduction is described as the attempt to reduce the quantity of data into its essential properties by identifying key themes and elements without making significant sacrifices to the quality of information through the use of coding. Coding is the process of indexing data into retrievable concepts based on the researcher's interpretation of meaning found within participant responses. First-order coding is conducted by labelling and categorising information with descriptive language, before it is processed through second-cycle coding, which as O'Leary (2004) explains, refines abstracted concepts into theoretical displays. It is what Punch (1998) refers to as a 'meta-code', which is a more inferential progression focusing on patterns between major themes to add consistency and depth to the critical component of analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain its impact as condensing large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units and filling a cognitive map of ideas. The following example uses interview data from this research project to demonstrate the data reduction process:

Quote: *'To be healthy is to be physically and mentally well. So obviously being content with life, not having any physical sicknesses or injuries, but also, just making sure that your state of mind and mind is positive'*

Coded themes (lower-order): Holistic wellbeing, mental health, injury, physical health

Grouped theme (higher-order): Mental health & wellbeing

Following the coding period, *data displays* were used to 'organise, compress and assemble information' into visual displays that support the accessibility of the analysis for the reader (Punch 1998, p. 203). Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that effective visual representations (via graphs, diagrams, frameworks, etc.) are particularly helpful in presenting complex theory into simple, formatted models, and demonstrating an elegant understanding of social research

and the necessity to generate flow between the written word and the reader’s interpretation. Miles and Huberman (1994) encourage the habitual use of data displays throughout the research process, both for the benefit of the researcher as they refine their ideas, and for the reader attempting to understand them. The following table (Table 4) is a visual representation of interview data through the second-cycle higher-order grouping of themes and the number of first-cycle coded themes that inform them:

Table 4: Thematic analysis results

Second-Cycle Higher-Order Grouped Themes	Number of First-Cycle Lower-Order Themes	Number of Coded Items
Mental Health & Wellbeing	22	1018
The Athlete Experience	13	232
Values	11	820
Psychosocial Support	9	591
Communication & Consultation	7	366
Governance Systems	7	112
Leadership Qualities	6	212
Connection Workshops	5	197
Professional Expectations	5	193
Duty of Care	4	199
Domains of Interaction	3	207
HP System	2	236
Economics	3	132
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	1	42

The final stage, *data conclusions*, is the logical product of data reduction and displays and is typically reached when the researcher considers themselves ready to present findings in discussion format (Punch 1998). At this stage, Punch (1998) recommends that data presentation and these in the literature cross-refer, as a blended approach highlighting original findings against the backdrop of what is previously understood about the subject of interest, at which point the researcher is ready to organise themes into their project’s theoretical framework. In

keeping with the guiding structure of organisational logic theory, high-order themes were placed into the relevant individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis, depending on where they were most applicable. Therefore, while thematic analysis was used as a tool for analysis to condense research participants' attitudes, ideologies, and experiences into common themes, organisational logic theory provided a critical lens to interpret the meaning behind themes and give form to the structure of this thesis. As discussed, organising data into the three levels of analysis was critical to meeting the goals of the research, as each level of analysis addresses a specific research question, views the research site from different perspectives, and speaks to stakeholders positioned at different levels. Additionally, compartmentalising data into these three levels of analysis necessitated the integration of a literature review within each analysis chapter (in lieu of a stand-alone chapter), to ensure that the literature discussed was presented in the most relevant and applicable manner. The individual, or micro level (discussed in Chapters 4-5) focuses on the wellbeing experiences of athletes and their help-seeking behaviours. The organisational or meso level (discussed in Chapters 6-7), focuses on the cultural conditions of wellbeing within HP environments. The institutional, or macro level (discussed in Chapters 8-9) focuses on the AW&E Framework and the systems of support implemented across the league. The deliberate structuring of the thesis in this manner informed independent analysis of multiple levels, while also acknowledging the inextricably linked relationship between them. This produced a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the intricate relationship between structure and agency within the research site and broader organisational context. The following table represents the organisation of higher-order themes into the three levels of analysis that make up the structure of this thesis:

Table 5: Themes by level of analysis

Individual Level (Chapters 4-5)	Organisational Level (Chapters 6-7)	Institutional Level (Chapters 8-9)
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Psychosocial Support	Values
The Athlete Experience	Connection Workshops	Communication & Consultation
Professional Expectations	HP System	Governance Systems
Domains of Interaction	Leadership Qualities	Economics
Duty of Care		Corporate Social Responsibility

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the action research methodology used for this research project. It explains how interviews were used to address the goal of *insight*, while the ‘connection workshops’ and ‘mental health literacy training’ programs were used to address the goal of *impact*. In exploring the value of these data collection methods, this chapter provides a rationale for research practices as they link to the over-arching theoretical framework, and in particular, how this research project investigates matters related to structure and agency. It shows how thematic analysis was employed to condense the large amounts of qualitative data into a set of concise themes, before each was placed into one of the individual, organisational or institutional levels of analysis that make up the structure of this thesis. The following chapter focuses on the research site and sets the contextual foundations of the research project. It synthesises the voice of research participants with literature from the field in order to define key terminology relating to athlete wellbeing, to identify the unique risk and protective factors for elite athletes, and to explore the wellbeing supports common to HP systems and the NRL more broadly.

Chapter 4

Contextualising Athlete Wellbeing

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to set the foundations for this thesis and provide relevant contextual information. It adds to the definition of athlete wellbeing outlined in Chapter 1, by elaborating on key terminology relating to athlete wellbeing, providing an overview of research relating to the unique risk factors and vulnerabilities of athletes, details the kinds of support common to HP systems, and gives insight into how athlete wellbeing is understood by research participants. The format of the chapter does not follow a traditional format, in that it synthesises the voice of research participants with prominent literature from the field as a means of introducing and exploring key concepts within the research site. Presenting literature in this way was necessary for two reasons: first and foremost, because the factors relating to athlete wellbeing are heavily contextual, linked to specific sporting codes, as well as the geographic, cultural, and social contexts in which those sports are played, and therefore, to set an accurate backdrop to the research project it was important that the foundational concepts of athlete wellbeing be explored in relation to the research site; and secondly, because research into athlete wellbeing within the NRL remains sparse, and as such, this chapter relies on the voices of its participants to give further insight into the discourses of wellbeing from within an NRL context. With this in mind, this chapter begins by defining what athlete wellbeing means to literature, to the NRL, and to the participants in this research project.

Defining Athlete Wellbeing

Over recent decades, ‘wellbeing’, a term used to capture the many facets and dimensions of health, has attracted great interest from the elite sporting sector and the array of disciplinary

groups working within it (Campbell, Brady & Tincknell-Smith 2022). Its move into the elite sports sector reflects the growing cultural capital of ‘wellbeing’ across a range of sectors in society, including government, education, medicine, and business, and now, sport. Campbell, Brady and Tincknell-Smith (2022) believe that the cultural phenomenon of wellbeing has largely occurred out of the growing recognition that wellbeing is valuable, not only to our health, but in achieving greater productivity and performance across a range of professional contexts. However, as the discourse surrounding wellbeing evolves and expands into new territories, so does the variation of definitions that it carries. Such is the extent of that variation that even within an elite sporting context, the multi-disciplinary presence of professionals means that wellbeing is viewed and applied in different ways; for example, social workers understand wellbeing by the psychosocial needs of athletes and the impact of those factors on their overall health experience (Lane et al. 2020), while for sports psychologists, wellbeing relates to the psychological proponents of an athlete’s health and its relationship to performance (Butler 1996). Yet despite the many variations in focus, a push towards more holistic definitions of wellbeing has helped academics to find greater consistency between disciplines, under a more broadly accepted description of wellbeing as ‘a positive and sustainable state that allows individuals, groups and nations to thrive and flourish. This means at the level of an individual, wellbeing refers to psychological, physical and social states that are distinctively positive’ (Huppert, Baylis & Keverne, 2004, p. 1331). Summarising the essence of contemporary approaches to holistic athlete wellbeing, Huppert, Baylis and Keverne’s (2004) definition connects athletes to the internal and external factors that impact upon their wellbeing. ‘Holistic wellbeing’ then, a term promoted by the peak sporting body in Australia is for Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010) a view underpinned by the ecological understanding of the HP environment, and observes the unique risk and protective factors that influence the multi-dimensional makeup of an athlete’s wellbeing experiences. Concerned with the relationship between individuals and the organisational structures within which they exist, Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010) holistic ecological perspective captures a range of environmental factors, such as the availability of resources (e.g. coaches, finances), situational processes (e.g. training, competition) and organisational culture (e.g. adopted values and norms), and how they combine to create the context in which an athlete experiences their wellbeing. In other words, holistic wellbeing involves the ‘simultaneous focus on and attention to both the person and the person’s environment’ (Sheafor & Horesji, 2012, p. 6).

As outlined in Chapter 1, for the ARL wellbeing is understood as ‘living a good life by living in a manner consistent with one’s ‘true self’ or to one’s personal integrity through identifying one’s potential strengths/limitations and choosing those goals that provide meaning and purpose in life. Happiness is a by-product of activities that reflect one’s true self’ (NRL 2018). This definition, understood within a eudaemonic approach to wellbeing, was developed from what Seligman (2011) refers to as ‘flourishing’ and is related to subjective measures of ‘feeling good’ and ‘functioning effectively’ (Huppert & So 2013, p. 838). An important value in the ARL’s definition of wellbeing, it conveys a sense of optimal wellbeing that is not always dependent on athletic achievement but includes other important social and emotional qualities, such as relationships and belonging (Wissing et al. 2021; Campbell, Brady & Tincknell-Smith 2022). For participants in this research project, wellbeing was defined by a similarly eudaemonic perspective, including a spectrum of biopsychosocial factors relevant to the individual experience. Asked to define wellbeing, an athlete participant in this research project shared the following during an interview:

For me, I'd answer that as having a healthy lifestyle. So in that aspect, I'd like to give as much of myself to the five things I find important in my life. So that would be family and friends, my work, university, footy, and church. So ideally, what that would involve, is obviously eating healthy and making enough time to do all these things, as well as get enough sleep, because I feel like if I don't get enough sleep, I don't have enough energy to take on all these things. Also having positive mental health, and I do have a positive image of myself, but often at times, especially more recently coming off injury, I have had a bit of a confidence issue. But for me, health and wellbeing is meeting my goals for each individual thing. So obviously, for footy it would be playing the best I can and doing my job on the field, and then obviously what comes with that is maintaining a healthy lifestyle, doing well at my university studies, going to church, maintaining strong social connections with my family and friends.

Athlete

In this statement, the athlete identifies a broad spectrum of biological (‘eating healthy’, ‘enough sleep’, ‘injury’), psychological (‘positive mental health’, ‘confidence’, ‘meeting my goals’), and social (‘maintaining a healthy lifestyle’, ‘university, going to church, maintaining strong social connections’) factors related to their wellbeing, and in doing so, reflects an

understanding of wellbeing that is consistent with the definition set by the ARL. For another athlete, their understanding of wellbeing was similarly described by a range of diverse factors:

To be healthy is to be physically and mentally well. I think they relate to each other because I think if you're mentally not well, it can lead to poor performances and physical neglect. Like not eating, not sleeping, those more physical aspects – that can then cause problems and fall back on to your mental side of things. So they tie in together. So what I do is make sure that I get enough sleep, keep a routine, eat the right stuff and get together with friends. Just having them around me and knowing that I can speak to them at any time and know that they'll be there for me.

Athlete

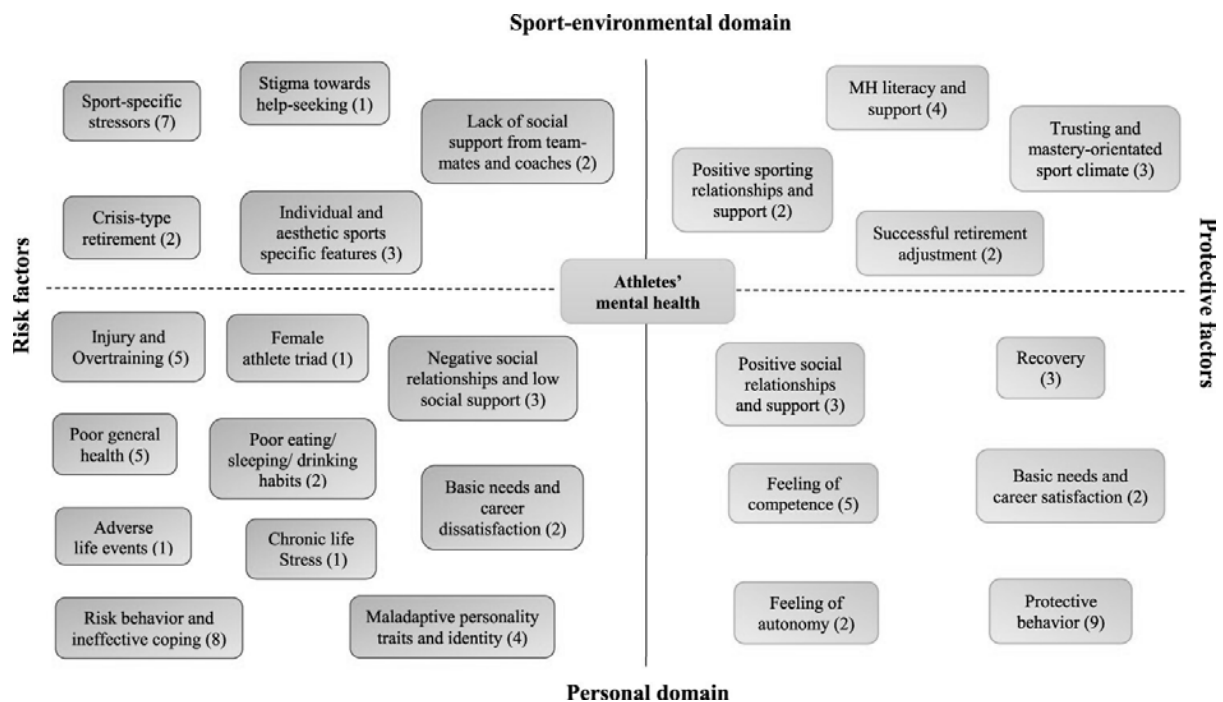
Here the athlete demonstrates a dynamic understanding of wellbeing as a multi-faceted concept containing the 'psychological, physical, and social states that are distinctively positive' (Huppert, Baylist & Keverne 2004, p. 1331), and importantly, the living relationship that exists between each of those factors as separate but closely aligned concepts. Perhaps most significant to both athlete responses however is the ability to reflect upon the wider contextual factors underpinning their health and the significant influence that their sporting commitments have on it. For Dessauvague (2018), this represents the omnipresent relationship between an athlete's personal and professional life and recognises the ways in which an athletic career in elite sport carries significant wellbeing risks. The following section, 'athlete-specific risk and protective factors', presents an overview of literature relating to these pressures and how athlete participants in this research project experienced them. As particular focus is the factors most commonly cited by research participants, over-representation of athletes in regard to certain mental health disorders, and the low rates of help-seeking common among athlete cohorts.

Athlete-Specific Risk & Protective Factors

It is commonly thought that an athletic career in contemporary elite sport comes with many privileges, and while that may be the case in some regards, athletes are also burdened by a complex set of demands and challenges that they are required to navigate as part of their journey through sport. Being able to map these factors is important, as it allows us to get closer to the realities of the athlete experience and better support athletes through it. One way of

conceptualising the wellbeing pressures managed by athletes is to chart the relationship between risk and protective factors. According to O'Connell, Boat and Warner (2009, p. xxvii), protective factors are defined as 'a characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, or community (including peers and culture) level that is associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes or that reduces the negative impact of a risk factor on problem outcomes', while 'risk factors' are defined as 'a characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precedes and is associated with a higher likelihood of problem outcomes'. Understanding the dynamics of risk and protective factors is important to any investigation into athlete wellbeing, given the unique context, pressures, and supports that come with an athletic career in elite sport. Kuettel and Larson's (2020) review of literature relating to the risk and protective factors for elite athletes' mental health, provides a thorough overview of sport-specific factors relevant to this research project and the experiences shared by its participants. While researched specifically in relation to mental health, their paper, divided into 'personal' (e.g. positive relationships) and 'sport-environment' (e.g. culture of trust and access to professional supports) factors, reviews 82 studies relating to athlete experiences of wellbeing. Figure 8 displays the leading risk and protective factors identified by Kuttel and Larson's (2019) scoping review:

Figure 3: Conceptual map of protective and risk factors related to elite athletes' mental health (Kuttel & Larson 2019, p. 250) ¹³



In this visual representation, Kuttel and Larson (2019) map a wide range of athlete-specific risk and protective factors. Examining personal factors, Kuettel and Larson (2020, p. 250-251) organise a number of higher-order themes that relate to an individual athlete's internal and external wellbeing faculties within the non-sporting domain, while for factors relating to sport-environmental factors, higher-order themes relate to the stressors and pressures of a career in sport, as well as the systems that facilitate the accessibility and effectiveness of wellbeing supports within the sporting domain. A major finding emerging from Kuettel and Larson's (2020) review was that the substantial impacts on athletes' wellbeing of injury, over-training, and the constant pressure to perform, are some of the most researched themes in relation to athlete wellbeing. Exemplified below, the athlete discusses how these three factors are hugely consequential risk factors leading to athletes' increased vulnerabilities:

It sucks, so bad. I'll be honest with you man, I cried 3 nights ago to my Mum. I was like, 'it's not working, I don't know what I'm doing wrong but something has got to change'.

¹³ Quantitative figures correspond to the number of papers coded to each theme.

Every year, I'm so tough and hard on myself, I hate it. And every year I don't get to where I want to get to, I feel like I'm wasting my year.

Athlete

The athlete quoted here articulates an experience of ‘athlete burnout’, defined by Raedeke et al. (2002) as a perceived lack of achievement, devaluation/resentment of effort, and symptoms of psychological exhaustion. For Nixdorf, Beckmann and Nixdorf (2020), these are common struggles for athletes pursuing a career at the elite level, that if left unsupported can lead to an increased susceptibility to mental illness (particularly depression). As another athlete participant stated:

I think there's a lot that goes on for football players externally. Like even for me personally, there's a lot that goes on in my life outside of footy as well as in footy. Especially for boys who are on the fringes, or fighting for a position or not getting picked, but want to be in a team – those boys have to be really resilient. Like they have to keep knocking, keep pushing, and that can take a really big toll on your mental health. Like not only those boys but boys who are coming out of injury. And I'm saying this from a personal sort of view because I've been in that position and I currently am.

Athlete

In this statement, the athlete distinguishes both the constant pressure to perform, and injury, as two significant mental health risk factors for athletes, managed by the consistent application and exercise of psychological resilience. ‘Resilience’, as referred to by the above participant, can be understood through qualities of self-discipline and self-determined motivation during high-pressure circumstances, and is widely considered an essential quality for sporting performance (Gucciardi, Hanton & Flemming 2017). Galli & Gonzalez’s (2015) literature review of psychological resilience in sport understand it to involve: 1) the psychosocial factors that predict performance in a task following an initial failure of the same task (Mummery, Schofield & Perry 2004); and 2) the thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviours of athletes who have shown a capacity for successfully adapting to adversity in sport (Galli & Vealey 2008). Important to these definitions, is the manner to which ‘resilience’ acts as an essential quality of both performance and wellbeing. However, while resilience was viewed by participants in this research project as a valuable protective factor, they also held the view that

maintaining a resilient disposition over the long term can lead to athlete burnout and increased pressure on an athlete's mental health.

Key papers such as those of Rice et al. (2016), Gulliver et al. (2012), Du Preez et al. (2017), and Gouttebarga et al. (2017), have collectively brought greater clarity and understanding into the links between the pressures of HP sport and athletes' over-representation of mental illness: for example, Gouttebarga's (2019) systemic review and meta-analysis of anxiety and depression among elite athletes indicates that 34% of athletes present symptoms indicative of a potentially diagnosable mental health disorder; Du Preez et al.'s (2017) cross-sectional epidemiological study of all 404 first-grade NRL players found higher rates of generalised anxiety disorder (10.1-14.6%) and significantly higher rates of alcohol misuse (62.8%-68.6%) than in the general population; and Gulliver et al.'s (2015) survey of 244 athletes from the AIS indicated 46% of athletes self-reported at least one symptom consistent with mental illness at the time of their study. Additionally, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS 2007) National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (considered the most comprehensive estimate on the overall prevalence of mental illness in Australia), athletes would appear to be at greater risk of mental illness, given that approximately just 20% of Australians were living with a mental illness at the time of study.

In fact, so significant are concerns for mental illness among athletes that the International Olympic Committee (Reardon et al. 2019) commissioned a consensus paper in consultation with world-leading experts on the management of mental health disorders for elite athletes. In that report, the authors explore a range of mental health symptoms and disorders with sport-related manifestations, and discuss the need to drastically improve the discourses of wellbeing cultures within HP environments. This is because, despite the high prevalence rates of certain mental illnesses among elite athletes, the literature indicates concerningly low help-seeking rates in comparison to the wider population (Jorm et al. 2017; Gulliver et al. 2012; Castaldelli-Maia et al. 2019; Griffiths & Cristensen 2012; Watson 2005). This remains true for professional rugby league athletes, as reported in Kola-Palmer et al. (2020), who identified a number of significant environmental barriers reinforcing the low help-seeking rates from athletes, such as low levels of mental health literacy, perceived stigma, and negative past experiences associated with help-seeking. Castaldelli-Maia et al.'s (2019) systematic review of the cultural influencers and barriers to athletes' help-seeking, indicates these concerns are consistent across sporting codes, with stigma regarded as the most inhibiting factor preventing athletes from seeking

support for mental health and other wellbeing-related concerns. Addressing the presence of stigma in elite sport, an athlete shared:

The stigma around males having to be tough is a difficult one, especially when you're a footy player. You know, we're thinking that we have to be tough and personally, I think a lot of the boys don't speak up about things because of it.

Athlete

Reflecting on the impact of stigma on athletes' help-seeking attitudes and behaviours, the athlete alludes to the discourse of 'toughness' within HP environments and how this inhibits athletes from seeking support. Stigma – the overt and covert disapproval of those in conflict with the social and cultural norms of their environment – can be exceedingly damaging to the self-efficacy of athletes who are experiencing mental health difficulties, and their capacity to reach out for help (Livingston & Boyd 2010; Delenardo & Terrion 2014; Green et al. 2012). It operates in two forms: social stigma, where negative attitudes or beliefs are perpetrated by others onto the victim, and self-stigma, which is the acceptance of or adherence to those beliefs (Link & Phelan 2001). For athletes affected by stigma, their feeling pressured to live up to, and perpetuate, falsely negative stereotypes and prejudices about mental health reflects the powerful influence of the cultural qualities of structure (Whitley & Campbell 2014; Eisenberg, Downs & Golderstein 2012; Poucher et al. 2019). Asked about their observations of these pressures, a strength and conditioning (S&C) coach of The Club stated the following:

I think it comes from the whole hard-edge and tough side of it. You know, they tell you from the top down that if these kids want to play first-grade, you've got to fucking do it this way, tell them this or do this. And I'm not saying that it's the right way that rugby league does it, but it's the way that it's always been done and I would think it's the way that it'll continue to be done until there's a little bit more education.

S&C Coach

In this statement, the S&C coach highlights how the structures of HP systems reproduce patterned experiences for athletes across time. The S&C coach comments on an important focus area of the AIS' AW&E Review (2020), issues associated with the cultures of HP sport, and the role that education can have in deconstructing the harmful conditioning that stigmatises athletes' help-seeking behaviours. In respect to issues and solutions that are explored under the

organisational level of analysis carried out in Chapters 6 and 7, the S&C coach alludes to the influence that leaders have on the discourses of wellbeing within HP systems ('they tell you from the top down') and the strategies that elite sporting organisations can adopt to address them. These two chapters, in addition to an evaluation of the AW&E Framework presented over Chapters 8 and 9 under the institutional level of analysis, make the case that elite sporting organisations have a duty of care and responsibility to address the structural faults of HP systems in order to ensure that athletes are protected from, and equipped to manage, the sport-specific stressors and pressures that they encounter during and after their athletic careers. Responding to the question, 'why should sporting organisations have a duty of care for their athletes?', The Club's careers coach stated bluntly:

Because you can't just suck them up and spit them out and expect them to be fully capable, integrated, and healthy people in the community when you've basically removed them from the rest of their lives throughout their professional career.

Careers coach

As emphasised by the careers coach and reiterated throughout this chapter, elite sporting organisations have a duty of care to address the unique risk factors experienced by athletes during, but also following, their athletic careers. The careers coach touches on one of the most critical wellbeing concerns for athletes, relating to athletes' vulnerabilities at the closure of their athletic career ('you can't just suck them up and spit them out'): as highlighted by the influential Duty of Care in Sport Review (Grey-Thompson 2017) and the AIS' AW&E Review (2022), this requires ongoing attention from the elite sporting sector. The following section details why transition into retirement in such a volatile time in the athlete's journey, and the kind of supports provided to assist them through this period.

Transitioning Out of Sport & Pre-Retirement Planning

For the vast majority of athletes, their time at the elite level is shaded by the ongoing threat of job insecurity (Hickey & Kelly 2008). As cited by Lane et al. (2020), such are these circumstances that the average Australian Football League (AFL) career is as short as 2.9 years (24 games), with less than 5% making the 10-game milestone (Hawthorne 2005). In the present research, the fear and anxiety surrounding retirement carries significant weight. This is a

reasonable concern, considering the immense change that occurs during this period and the suggestion that 1 in 5 athletes will experience significant distress in the years following their retirement (Park, Lavallee & Tod's 2013). According to Park, Lavallee and Tod (2013), that distress is strongly linked to an athlete's loss of identity at the conclusion of their athletic careers and the degree of voluntariness of the retirement decision (Lotysz & Short 2004; Lally 2007). Research from a range of sporting codes (Carless & Douglass 2013; Cosh & Tully 2015; Ojala 2014) gives insight into how a dominant athletic identity forms through HP systems, the struggles that athletes face in re-constructing their identity through retirement, and the considerable personal, relational, developmental, situational, environmental, and social adaptations that occur during their transition. Highlighted by an AW&E Manager of the ARL, the risks associated with career termination are significant, and as such, planning for life after sport but prior to retirement is an important protective measure:

I think one of the other lessons I've learned is you've got to have those career transition conversations early because in professional sport, you don't get to pick the end sometimes, the end will get picked for you. And that might be through injury or delisting or poor form or whatever, moving to another club and you don't quite fit within the culture of the club. But you don't always get to choose your own adventure. So I think the sooner you can start having those career transition sort of programs put in front of you, or just having those sort of discussions, it'll service the athlete better in the long run.

AW&E Manager

In this statement, the AW&E Manager discusses the concept of pre-retirement planning as an early intervention and prevention approach to managing the risks associated with athletes' transitions into retirement. The concept of early intervention and prevention approaches, common to the human services sector, focuses on the anticipation of risk and on engaging in effective psychosocial interventions during the early stages of concern. Also relevant to the risks associated with transitions into retirement, Park, Tod and Lavallee (2012, p. 444) suggest that 'a planned retirement helps athletes to head in the right direction during the career transition process and provide feelings of control over the situation'. For the ARL, utilising an early intervention and prevention approach through pre-retirement planning is the primary risk management strategy in this regard. The Career Wise Program (NRL 2022), designed to 'help players engage in work, study, work experience, volunteer work and networking that will help

them make a smooth career transition’, includes the employment of trained career coaches supporting athletes aged 15 to 35+ years through three types of intervention: one-on-one interviews, in-depth career coaching, and career check-ups. An AW&E Manager of the ARL summarised the approach as:

Developing a career plan at an early age, investing in that and continuing with athletes as they go on their journey is an important part of our process because if we’re true to our philosophy of ‘we want people to be better people for having been a part of the game’, then wherever they fall out of the system they should be walking away ready, whether they fall out after 1 year or 15 years.

AW&E Manager

In this statement, the AW&E Manager discusses the early intervention and prevention approach to career transition planning used throughout all divisions of the NRL: A necessary approach, particularly for athletes within the elite development system, where only 4% of athletes will go on to earn an NRL contract¹⁴. As an important risk minimisation strategy the Club requires all JFC (under 21’s) athletes to be engaged in either part-time work or study in order to be eligible to play. Yet despite overwhelming support for the approach by AW&E staff from within The Club, not holding the same expectations for NRL athletes has problematic long-term consequences to their future social and financial wellbeing. As explained by the careers coach of the researched organisation:

What happens is, by the time they retire from the game, say if they're in their 30s and they've come into the game during their late teens and they've given all of their 20s to it, well the world keeps moving outside the footy field and while all of their peers are getting upskilled, qualifications, setting up their family, setting up their house, setting up their careers, probably stepped up from junior to management positions, footballers are on different trajectory – they're coming down. The big salary's gone, the employment is gone, the security is gone, and so they're almost in a man's body but back at an 18 year old's starting point if they haven't put something in place.

Careers Coach

¹⁴ These figures have not been published publicly, but were quoted by a number of AW&E Managers of the ARL during interviews for this research project.

For the careers coach, pre-retirement planning is an essential preventative measure for athletes' future career transitions out of sport. They explain how, without adequate career development, athletes are vulnerable to delayed identity shifts and may struggle to adjust to the psychosocial impacts of limited future career prospects (Park, Lavalley & Tod 2013). It is therefore critical that elite sporting organisations provide both proactive (early intervention and prevention approaches) and reactive (support post-transition) interventions, to ensure that athletes transition out of their professional sporting careers safely, while remaining vigilant to the internal and external factors that contribute to the quality of that transition¹⁵. The following section explores what supports are currently being implemented within elite sporting organisations to manage these wellbeing risks, and provides an overview of the ARL's AW&E Framework.

Overview of Athlete Wellbeing Support Systems

As evidence exploring the high-risk vulnerabilities of elite athletes continues to expand, so does the integration of wellbeing supports within HP environments, and the emerging presence of professionals within these spaces. Kohe and Purdy (2020) provide a useful overview of the forms of support common to HP systems and categorise most approaches as operating either within the spectrum of education workshops and/or as a therapeutic support designed to assist athletes through their sporting journeys and transitions into retirement. Reflecting a holistic model of care, the AIS' Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement Framework (AIS n.d.) provides a general overview of supports provided to athletes across five pillars of wellbeing, including: engagement, opportunities for athletes to engage with their local communities, grass roots sport and national charities; mental health, access to the best practice mental health information and education and individualised psychology services; career and education, access to information, advice and face to face or online learning related to education, career mapping, professional

¹⁵ These include: athletic identity, demographic issues, voluntariness of decision, injuries/health problems, career, personal development, sport career achievement, educational status, financial status, self-perception, control of life, disengagement/drop-out, time passed after retirement, relationship with coach, life changes, and balance of life while competing (see Park, Lavalley & Tod 2013, p. 33).

development and work experience; personal development, face to face or online learning related to wellbeing and personal growth; and conduct and professionalism, advice on managing integrity issues, guidance and support to navigate ethical decision making within the HP environment, and provision of policies and procedures. For the NRL, a similarly holistic approach to AW&E is adopted, made-up of the three programs cited in Chapter 1:

- The ‘Career Wise’ program: designed to support athletes’ transitions out of sport and into retirement (involving support with education, in the form of administrative, financial, and study assistance, as well as budgeting seminars, industry networking events, and careers counselling).
- The ‘Character Wise’ program: designed to develop the integrity and character of athletes in and out of sport (involves participation in community programs, cultural awareness seminars, and education workshops on matters such as gambling, respectful relationships, and social media use).
- The ‘Health Wise’ program: designed to support a holistic approach to athlete wellbeing (involves referral triage to professional mental health clinicians and a range of education workshops addressing concerns such as alcohol and illicit drug misuse, doping, diet and supplement use).

To support the implementation of these programs within each NRL club, the ARL funds the employment of a full-time player development manager (PDM)¹⁶ within each club. Stansen and Chambers (2019), responsible for the most comprehensive evaluation of the PDM role within Australian elite sports, recognise PDMs as the most significant practitioners in regard to AW&E. This role, categorised as both personal and professional support, can be understood in terms of: athlete issues (personalised support, family relocation, facilitating life balance, etc.), support processes (referrals to mental health professionals, financial guidance, etc.), advocacy (internally and externally on behalf of athletes’ needs and wishes), and stages of support (enrolling in education and vocational training programs, pre-retirement planning, career transition guidance, etc.; Stansen & Chambers 2019). Regarding personal qualities of

¹⁶ ‘Player Development Manager’ appears to be the term most commonly used across the literature in reference to these roles, though within the National Rugby League the title used is ‘Wellbeing and Education Manager’. To remain consistent with the literature, ‘player development manager (PDM)’ will be used throughout this thesis.

PDMs, Stansen and Chambers (2019) highlight empathy, approachability, resilience, and counselling skills as some of the most necessary traits required by the role. Described by an interview participant in Stansen and Chambers (2019, p. 157), PDMs were defined as ‘a career counsellor (...) a life coach, they are a friend, they are a listener, a problem-solver’. In addition to Stansen and Chambers’ (2019) review of the PDM role, Lane et al. (2020, p. 11) provide another useful overview of the individual qualities and key responsibilities of PDMs, which they compress into the following table:

Table 6: ‘Impact of role’ (Player Development Manager responses; Lane et al. 2020, p. 11)

Over-arching theme	Coded items
Life after/outside of football	Career transition, personal development, off-field engagement
Impact of role	Wellbeing support, education support, resourcefulness, providing access to opportunities
Interpersonal characteristics	Values person over player, enjoys role and relationship, develops trust, gives guidance, demonstrates respect and commitment
Empowerment	Supports capacity to thrive, fosters independence, and confidence across all contexts

Matching the descriptions provided by Stansen and Chambers (2019) and Lane et al. (2020), participants in this research project similarly highlighted the varied responsibilities of the PDM role and the close relationships that they share with athletes. As stated by a PDM, their day-to-day duties involve the following:

So my main task is to organise and provide programs for the players from a wellbeing standpoint and to be there as an advocate for their wellbeing. So my day to day is getting all the programs organised, whether they're our own or the NRL mandatory programs. We also have mandatory wellbeing check-ins, which each player does a formal check-in with me once a month. So that rotates throughout every day where I see a couple of players. Also we do mindfulness, we do wellbeing blocks which are once a week, where what I've done is, what that really relies on is, using the players’

feedback of what their needs are. What I do is I go through those flourishing scales¹⁷ and I work out, as a group, what the group is not doing great at and then that's what I put in our program. So our program is a mixture of what the players needs are and also the NRL mandatory stuff.

PDM

In this response, the PDM briefly summaries their day-to-day duties, with advocacy, counselling, and program scheduling highlighted as three of their main responsibilities. Importantly to the interests of this research project, the PDM categorises their work duties into those which are ‘mandatory’, in accordance with the overarching AW&E Framework, and ‘internal’ activities, which consist of tailored programs developed in response to the changing needs of the athlete cohort. A key point of interest in future chapters, particularly in the institutional analysis undertaken in Chapters 8 and 9 is the differences between what is ‘mandatory’ and what is ‘internal’: a highly contentious space of conflict for PDMs, who feel that the highly systematic approaches employed by the ARL are often motivated by the legal and ethical obligations associated with social responsibility and duty of care, rather than a genuine investment into the holistic wellbeing of athletes. In short, their concerns are that while the AW&E Framework provides consistency across NRL clubs, mandatory programming can have a dehumanising effect on athletes, inhibit the authenticity of care that PDMs provide to athletes, and prevent wellbeing cultures from becoming fully realised organisation-wide.

These observations appear to be a product of the contemporary climate of elite sports’ ever-increasing commercialisation, and relate to what DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010, p. 13) refer to as the ‘massification of wellbeing governance’ (bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation AW&E programs), which for Campbell, Brady and Tincknell-Smith (2022), relates to how the structures and processes at one level constrain or assist activity at another. While an analysis of these multiple levels is reserved for future chapters, they are raised here to flag how the conflation of wellbeing and economic interests within elite sports presents a number of barriers for PDMs. Another major barrier limiting the impact of PDMs is the

¹⁷ Flourishing Scales are a form of psychological surveying that measure an athlete’s subjective wellbeing across self-reported notions of positive and/or negative thinking in relation to the domains of wellbeing, including: relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism (Diener et al. 2009).

dominant performance discourse common to HP systems, and the ostracising effect that this has on PDMs and in relation to the integration of AW&E programs (Campbell, Brady & Tincknell-Smith 2022). As reported in the AIS's AW&E Review (2020, p. 12) and discussed further in the following chapter, the majority of elite athletes feel that the HP system 'favours performance over people and values physical health over mental wellbeing'. The following section gives some context to these concerns as they are experienced at the individual level, with a particular focus on athletes' and head coaches' attitudes towards wellbeing and its relationship with performance.

Barriers to Athlete Wellbeing & Education Programs

The emergence of PDMs, sports psychologists and career coaches, and the plethora of AW&E programs available to athletes, collectively reflect elite sport's growing awareness of and assumed responsibility for their duty of care for athletes. Yet, despite a wide range of supports intended to increase the effectiveness of athletes' coping strategies and access to support, in the competitive context of HP sport, engaging in AW&E programs is regularly made dispensable against athletes' ambition to pursue and maintain their career at the elite level. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. However, for The Club's career coach, the primary concern is that not all athletes are cognisant of the risks associated with a career in elite sport, and due to that lack of awareness they do not see the value of preparing in advance for life after sport:

Everyone thinks they're the one. No one thinks they're average. So if they think they're the one, they're not going to see the need to have their other plan ticking away in the background, because to them, it's not needed. But to mature eyes and to people who know better, who see the stats, who've been in it, who are educated, and who've studied it, they know better in that they know the possibility of what will happen.

Careers Coach

The careers coach here makes the observation that a disassociation from life after sport, and a low level of psychoeducation relating to the risks of retirement, are major inhibiting factors for athletes' engagement in pre-retirement planning activities. Yet even for athletes who are aware of those risks, another concern raised by The Club's careers coach was that many athletes feel

unable to maintain a long-term commitment to study, in addition to their sporting commitments. Lane et al. (2020) provide some insight into these beliefs by exploring athletes' engagement in tertiary education programs and highlight how adapting to the physical and mental intensity of training and competition while concurrently managing part-time work and/or study, is often perceived by athletes as a near-inconceivable task. Citing the instability of short-term professional contracts, the transient nature of a career in sport, and a perceived 7-hour-per-week maximum capacity study load, Lane et al. (2020) investigate the ways in which the HP system disadvantages athletes and has led to their significant over-representation in short-term education courses. This was true for participants in this research project, particularly JFC athletes, as many athletes who are (or were) engaged in pre-retirement planning reported transferring into less-intensive education courses or reducing their working hours in order to maintain their commitments.

According to the literature, this is a common experience for athletes, with figures published by Cosh and Tully (2015) suggesting that as high as 40% of athletes enrolled in education courses have had to decrease their study load in order to better manage their degrees. Hickey and Kelly (2008) and Stansen and Chambers (2019) sympathise with these challenges but suggest that, in the end, athletes are most motivated to engage in pre-retirement planning activities when retirement is approaching. Moreover, that in situations where retirement occurs abruptly (either through injury or other means), the need for support becomes greatly amplified (Lotysz & Short 2004). In general however, the rigidity of training schedules, the time and energy demands of performance, and a disassociation from life after sport, make up some of the leading barriers inhibiting athletes from engaging in AW&E programs, and pre-retirement planning activities in particular.

Another significant matter of concern for elite athletes is the few sporting opportunities available in the HP system, and the persistent pressure that this creates. As noted by a recently retired athlete, athletes '*think it'll distract them from football and that it's a bad thing to get involved in*'. For to '*make it*' is considered so against the odds that in order to be a competitive chance, many athletes feel that they must give their undivided attention and efforts in pursuit of their career. Given the low rate of athletes who will ascend from the semi-professional to professional level, this is an intuitive concern, albeit misplaced, given the evidence linking engagement in AW&E programs with performance: Namely, the seminal report produced by Lavallee (2019) who, in their longitudinal analysis of all 632 NRL athletes over 3 seasons

(2014, 2015, 2016), demonstrated the positive link between pre-retirement planning and measures of team selection, team tenure, and career tenure. Yet despite this, pre-retirement planning is often passed over in favour of athletes' over-riding commitment to their sporting career. Problematically, this is an attitude that is regularly exploited by head coaches, who as the lead authority figure within HP systems, often use their influence on the sporting schedule to keep athletes from engaging in AW&E programs. Discussing these concerns, a recently retired athlete stated the following:

It's a bit of a myth that coaches create because they feel like they have to control things. [...] I've had coaches say, 'from Thursday you can't do any non-football stuff, you've got to focus, you're two days out from the game and that's got to be locked in for game prep'. The more time I work in the game and am around the game, I understand that it doesn't really matter that much.

Retired Athlete

Contesting the view that athletes should not divide their attention between on- and off-field engagements, the former athlete discussed their experience with a head coach who uses their influence over the HP system to 'focus' athletes on football, and in doing so, actively discourages athletes from participating in AW&E programs. Hickey and Kelly (2008), who tracked the experiences of 36 first-grade AFL athletes and 21 officials (including general managers, PDMs, and recruiting managers) to measure their attitudes towards engagement in AW&E programs, found performance-related activities were regularly prioritised at the expense of wellbeing-related activities, particularly education and pre-retirement planning, and as a consequence, found athletes to manage the challenges of a dual-career and self-motivate independently, despite the supports available to them within their elite sporting organisations (Morgan & Giacobbi 2006). These findings considered, in addition to the consistent experiences of athletes from within this research project, it is clear that the efforts to integrate AW&E programs into HP systems are failing to gain the support of coaching staff, and in many cases, athletes themselves. Issues which relate not only to a lack of education, but have their roots in the systemic qualities of structure that determine the wellbeing roles and responsibilities of HP staff. Put succinctly by an S&C coach, they explained that:

It's not in the job description, in terms of how I'm really there just to prepare them to play football.

In this important statement, the S&C coach points to the performance-centric remit of their role and the perceived irrelevancy that wellbeing logics have in relation to the S&C coaches core responsibilities. Given the crucial role that members of the HP system have within the psychosocial network of athletes, it is imperative to understand how they engage in wellbeing support as part of their roles. For Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010), that takes into account the ecological foundations of ‘holistic wellbeing’ and connects the athletes to the structures that shape their experience, involving environmental factors such as the availability of resources, situational processes, and organisational culture. Holistic wellbeing then requires the ‘simultaneous focus on and attention to both the person and the person’s environment’ (Sheafor & Horesji, 2012, p. 6). It is critical to the efficacy of athletes’ psychosocial support networks that broad acceptance of wellbeing logics be gained, according to Lane et al. (2020) and Lavalley (2019), given that the success of AW&E programs will only occur once they are perceived as relevant to elite sports’ multi-dimensional interests and are valued by all members of the HP system, regardless of their role. Importantly, that does not mean detracting from a focus on competition and achievement, but rather, understanding the crucial role that wellbeing has in relation to elite sport’s more dominant interests and working towards structures which more effectively engineer hybrid gains through higher levels of compatibility and centrality. In essence, navigating a path through the complexities of AW&E within HP systems is the intention of this research project, while articulating the learned strategies for doing so is its primary goal.

Chapter Summary

While discussions regarding the duty of care of elite athletes are becoming increasingly recognised and matched by substantial investment into AW&E programs, there remain significant concerns relating to athletes’ engagement in these programs and the impact of elite sport on athletes’ experiences of wellbeing more broadly. This chapter gives some insight into these concerns and sets the context for the site in which this research takes place, by defining key terminology relating to AW&E, providing an overview of common supports within HP systems, and exploring a range of risk factors unique to the athletic experience (including athletes’ over-representation in mental illness, the stigma attached to help-seeking, and the

vulnerabilities managed by athletes during their transitions into retirement). This chapter discusses how the HP system produces patterned experiences of disruption to athletes' wellbeing and explores the ways in which athletes are required to negotiate and accommodate the diverse, often competing array of expectations surrounding what it means to be an elite athlete in the contemporary era. It reasons that if elite athletes are placed in circumstantial factors that pressure them to make wellbeing sacrifices, it is important that they are provided the appropriate psychosocial supports to manage and overcome those challenges. As Stansen and Chambers (2019, p. 165) state, 'supporting athletes to manage the challenges associated with pursuing a sporting career is essential to best equip these individuals with the requisite knowledge and skills to flourish in their present career and transition into a life after competitive sport'. Problematically however, as this chapter has underlined, this research project is concerned with a range of issues inhibiting the effectiveness of AW&E programs and their meaningful instantiation into HP systems. Notwithstanding the fact that these programs are linked with a range of evidence-based gains in relation to athletes' health, development, and performance, there remain significant barriers keeping these understandings from entering the cultural discourse of elite sport. The following chapter begins the organisational logic analysis into these concerns by exploring the patterns of athletes' help-seeking behaviour at the individual level. It investigates how the amalgamation of athletes' personal and professional spheres impacts upon their experience of wellbeing and the formation of their psychosocial support networks, before introducing the 'Whole-Club Capacity' (WCC) Approach to AW&E, an ecological approach to minimising athletes' risk factors and strengthening the presence of protective factors.

Chapter 5

The ‘Whole-Club Capacity’ Approach

‘We’re all wellbeing managers, in a way’

S&C Coach

Located at the individual level of analysis and focused on the relational help-seeking actions of athletes, this chapter explores the impact that an athlete’s intersecting personal (relating to what is private, such as relationships, emotions, and social interests) and professional spheres (expectations relating to occupation) has on their identity formation and psychosocial support network. It explores these factors within the ‘relational dimension’, defined as the ‘connectivity’ and ‘influence that members have on each other, as measured by recurrent patterns of behaviour’ (O’Connor & Cavanagh (2013, p. 3), using organisational logic theory to analyse the systemic qualities of structure that influence individuals’ motivation for action. Investigating two significant psychosocial supports, the S&C coach and house parent, this chapter pays attention to the ‘real communication and interactions’ that occur in the natural moments of athletes’ daily life (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler 2010, p. 213) by analysing their response to athletes’ help-seeking and the quality of support provided to them. Finally, this chapter introduces the ‘Whole-Club Capacity’ (WCC) Approach to AW&E, as an early intervention and prevention strategy for increasing the protective psychosocial resources available to athletes within HP environments.

Athletic Identities

Football is a very complicated industry that from the outside many don't understand. I think one of the biggest factors for me was the fact that so much of my emotions were tied up in my workplace, but my workplace was a place that I wasn't able to leave because my identity was my job.

Former professional athlete, Marvin Sordell (2020)

Marvin Sordell's (2020) statement makes an important commentary on the amalgamation of the personal and professional spheres, and the common struggle of athletes in delineating their identity between these spheres. What appears abundantly clear in the literature and is matched by the data collected for this research project, is that athletes are undoubtedly required to make significant lifestyle adjustments (commonly relating to residential relocation, loss of personal relationships, deferment of education degrees and/or vocational apprenticeships, changing financial circumstances, etc.) in order to meet the demands of their sporting careers. Lifestyle adjustments, as expressed by Sordell (2020), have a significant impact upon an athlete's self-concept. For participants in this research project, so common were these adjustments and the impact that they have on an athlete's wellbeing that they were considered a normalised and expected part of the athlete experience. In many ways, this emphasises the inextricably linked relationship between an athlete's personal and professional spheres, which as discussed by one athlete makes significant impositions on their day-to-day activities:

It goes hand-in-hand because it's like having this imaginary badge on you wherever you go, all the time. So anything you do off the field you have to do in the best interest of the club, whether that's the way you conduct yourself within the community, the way you present yourself, even at your workplace if you have another job, or just walking down the road to the shops. Then there's the performance side of it too, where everything that you do off the field should be in the direction of preparing for the weekend, so whether that's getting enough sleep, eating the right food, whatever, just ticking all the boxes.

Athlete

Similarly to Sordell (2020), the athlete here discusses the professional responsibilities that they carry into the personal sphere and the discipline that they exercise in order to meet those

expectations. Chelladurai and Reimer (1997, p. 135) understand that these experiences relate to the institutionalisation of athletes within HP systems and the ‘affective state resulting from a complex evaluation of the structures, processes, and outcomes associated with the athletic experience’, which according to Burns et al. (2012), has significant psychological consequences for athletes in relation to identity. Their concern, is that when an athlete’s self-concept is absorbed by their sporting commitments, a dependent athletic identity is likely to follow, leaving them vulnerable to high-risk vulnerabilities during periods of career insecurity. Exploring a number of risk factors relating to the psychological impacts of a dependent athletic identity, Park, Lavalley and Tod (2013, p. 35-38) highlight ‘self-perception’ (referring to perceived body image, self-confidence and self-worth), ‘control of life’ (referring to a sense of autonomy and power over decisions pertaining to retirement), and ‘life changes’ (referring to lifestyle changes and daily routines) as some of the factors linking identity to wellbeing. This was supported by athlete participants in this research project. One athlete emphasised how a dependence on their athletic identity carries significant weight and has potentially harmful consequences if that identity is lost:

I've been playing since I was three. Literally, from the moment I could pick up a footy I never put it down. That's what my Dad reckons anyway. [...] I wouldn't be who I am without footy. [...] Without football bro, I don't know. I don't even want to speak about it. I don't know what I'd do.

Athlete

Expressing concerns for the impact that a lost athletic identity would have on qualities of ‘self-perception’, feelings for ‘control of life’, and the ‘life changes’ that come with transition (Park, Lavalley & Tod 2013, p. 35-38), the athlete articulates some of the risks associated with an amalgamated personal and professional sphere, and alludes to ways in which athletes are institutionalised within HP systems. Unsurprising perhaps, given that prior to competing at the NRL level, professional footballers have already spent much of their adolescence within the elite development pathways system. Another athlete participant in this research project stated that football is ‘*all I've ever known*’ and that their retirement is a ‘*disaster waiting to happen*’. Moreover, that because their footballing career has been the constant, reliable, and steady force in their lives, their career would be a concerning loss:

I was at a point where I didn't really care about myself or about what anyone thought. I was at that point where I just didn't care about anything anymore. But with footy, I had something to care about, you know what I mean? Not to sound cheesy or cliché but it's true, it was the thing that kept me going when it felt like I didn't have anything.

Athlete

Evidence accruing across the literature reinforces the legitimacy of these concerns, with links made between athletes' over-dependence on their athletic identity and increased risk of mental illness, including in certain situations (such as when careers end abruptly), an increased risk of suicide (Appaneal et al. 2009; Gulliver et al. 2015; Baum 2005). For participants in this research project, the increased pressure and anxiety during periods of injury were viscerally felt and vividly recalled. Discussing their experience of injury, its negative impact upon their mental health, and how the experience is common for athletes in similar situations, an athlete shared:

I feel like people don't understand how hard it is mentally. Like from personal experience and in general, just imagine if you're playing for an NRL club one week and dropped the next week, or worse, say you do your ACL, how much that would fuck with your head? And it really does. [...] When I did my shoulder it absolutely killed me. Mentally I was depressed all the time and I was always anxious, like seriously so anxious, and every other player that gets injured is exactly the same as well. I'm not the only one.

Athlete

In this statement, the athlete articulates their experience of injury and how the threat of involuntary retirement places pressure on their mental health. They describe periods of anxiety and depression throughout their rehabilitation period and suggest it is a common experience for athletes managing the physical and mental burdens of injury. Much like the athlete quoted previously, their statement can be taken as an example of the risks associated with athletic identities, and indicates how diversifying athletes' self-concepts through dual-career pathways can strengthen protective factors for athletes against those risks. In their own words, they explained that:

Having something to occupy yourself off the field has a massive positive impact because then you're not always thinking about footy. I think for people that think about footy constantly non-stop are at risk of burning out. If you're always thinking about footy, you're always putting that stress on yourself about footy. So I think that having something else, even if it's a hobby that you just do outside of footy, that has a really positive impact.

Athlete

In this statement, the athlete advocates for the benefits of a diversified identity, which as evidenced by Park, Lavalley and Todd's (2013) systemic review of athletes' career transitions out of sport, can have a significantly positive impact upon the athlete's experience of wellbeing. However, as the careers coach of The Club explains, while athletes may be aware of those risks and the importance of managing them, the few opportunities at the elite level often increase athletes' anxiety relating to their sporting careers, pushing them further into their sporting commitments rather than towards the sort of pre-retirement planning activities that would reduce their anxiety. Observing the long-term impacts of these commonly held beliefs, the careers coach explains that at the time of retirement, athletes often regret ignoring encouragements to diversify their occupational interests:

If you ask them to look back to when they first came in, when they were in the under 21's, you know, the old, 'If you could talk to your younger self what would you say?', they all say the same thing – they say, 'Start early, I left it too late'.

Careers Coach

In this example, and the quotes that precede it, we see the ways in which an athlete's experiences of wellbeing occur in a complex dynamic of personal sacrifice and professional commitment. Moreover, while diversifying an athlete's interests away from sport reduces their wellbeing vulnerabilities, for reasons discussed here and previously highlighted in Chapter 4, athletes often find engaging in dual careers a difficult and onerous task that reflects the patterned ways in which these issues are reproduced through the structures of HP systems. How then, if athletes' identities are consumed by their sporting commitments, and the personal sphere is so significantly disrupted by that pursuit, can we adapt the conditions in which they experience this merging in a safe and supported way? The following section begins to explore

possible solutions to these challenges by first identifying what key psychosocial supports athletes rely on most, particularly within the sporting domain.

Key Psycho-Social Supports

Both adapting to life inside of, and then transitioning to life outside of elite sporting institutions is complex; however, for participants in this research project, one consistent finding emerged as clearly significant – that is, that a strong psychosocial support network was repeatedly cited as the most critical protective factor and coping resource for elite athletes. According to Park, Lavallee and Tod's (2013, p. 39) understanding of psychosocial support, this involves both sporting (coaches, trainers, and teammates) and non-sporting (spouses, family, friends, and significant others) supports who provide this help in various forms: emotional support, consolidating self-esteem, providing information, and tangible forms of support, to strengthen an athlete's wellbeing resources. The importance of these supports, both formal (e.g. mandatory wellbeing check-ins with player development managers) and informal (e.g. conversational help-seeking with peers), was regularly cited by research participants and was particularly relevant for athletes who had, at a young age, been required to relocate independently to pursue their sporting opportunities. As the following two research participants acknowledge, one an S&C coach and another an athlete, the re-structuring of an athlete's psychosocial support network within the sporting domain is a natural and often essential protective measure:

So I think we're lucky in that, and it does happen in a lot of football teams, where you do become family and look after each other and there is a real camaraderie in it, like they're brothers.

S&C Coach

We're tight as, literally like brothers. Honestly, they're close to being brothers to me. It's real close. And I just love being around it. I've gotta be around it, it's so good.

Athlete

In these two statements, the S&C coach and the athlete participant give insight into the deep personal bonds shared between members of the HP environment. Often described by this

research project's participants as '*the brotherhood*', these relationships were defined by the authenticity of their connections and the resolute support shared between them. One athlete participant perceived the environment to be replicating the role of '*family*' and went so far as to map an entire extended family dynamic, where the head coach was seen as a father figure, HP staff (e.g. S&C coaches) as uncles, and team-mates as brothers. According to Keung (2018), these sorts of familial dynamics are commonplace and valuable psychosocial resources for elite athletes. Among their many important findings, their research highlights the role of trust as a critical quality in the development of socially-supportive relationships. Their findings are well supported by O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013), who use a Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) approach to analyse the patterns of interaction throughout athletes' interpersonal networks within the HP environment, as they relate to wellbeing attitudes and behaviour, and emphasise relational-trust as a critical component of effective psychosocial support networks leading to improved wellbeing, health, and life satisfaction. Similarly to this research project, O'Connor and Cavanagh's (2013, p. 2-3) work is concerned with the 'networks of communication and relationships that exist between individuals' and 'the dynamic connections that shape organisational subsystems giving rise to organisational behaviour'. What differentiates the two projects however, is that while O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013) use a CAS approach to assess the discourse of language within HP environments, this research project applies organisational logic theory to assess how actions are produced and experiences are shaped, through the interaction between structure and agency. The following section begins this analysis at the individual level, by analysing two key supports within the athletes' psychosocial support network and examining how the compatibility (degree of mutual benefit) and centrality (hierarchy of values) of logics within both roles inform their responses to athletes' help-seeking behaviours.

Organisational Logic Analysis

This organisational logic analysis investigates two key members within the athletes' psychosocial support network: an S&C coach and a house parent. It is an important space for inquiry, because unlike the relationship between athletes, which appears fairly linear (in the sense that they are relatively uncomplicated by institutional processes), the relationship between athletes and staff is more complex and imbued by blurred boundaries separating the personal and professional spheres. Consistently across multiple interviews, staff members from

within the HP environment were able to identify the crucial role that they hold within athletes' psychosocial support network, acknowledging that *'we're all wellbeing managers, in a way' (S&C coach)*, but that the ambiguity which surrounds their wellbeing responsibilities as an informal component of their professional roles means that they *'don't know where the line is sometimes' (house parent)*. In other words, while members of staff were able to articulate their professional expectations with relative ease, they became uncertain when discussing the personal nature of their supportive relationships, due to a lack of process in the personal sphere. This represents a fundamental flaw in the HP system, given athletes' dependency on psychosocial supports from within the sporting domain and the impact that these issues have on staff members' confidence to provide support. Using organisational logic theory to assess the arrangement of logics that frames each of these roles, this section explores the nature of interactions between athletes and their supports on a relational level, as the 'connectivity' and 'influence that members have on each other, as measured by recurrent patterns of behaviour' (O'Connor & Cavanagh (2013, p. 3). As Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 365) state in relation to organisational logics, 'understanding these issues is critical given the prevalence of multiple logics within organisations and their implications for organisational and field outcomes'. As a tool for analysis, organisational logic theory provides a framework for the analysis of structure, to produce a set of targeted and incisively informed interventions.

Strength and Conditioning (S&C) Coach:

S&C coaches are a permanent fixture within HP environments and regularly present at training, on match day, and during periods of injury rehabilitation. Their role involves any S&C training related to improving performance, managing injury, and increasing fitness and movement skills. While not a wellbeing-specific role, S&C coaches collect information and data on external factors that may influence an athlete's performance, such as sleep, diet, weight, water intake, muscle fatigue and soreness, and a broader range of psychological factors such as stress. Consequently, S&C coaches are encouraged to explore factors related to wellbeing, and will involve themselves in conversations regarding the contextual circumstances that inform an athlete's overall health status. Given their consistent presence within the HP environment and the nature of their interactions, S&C coaches often develop deeply personal, supportive relationships with athletes. Describing this dynamic, a recently retired athlete shared:

Every single player spends time with the S&C's or the physios for at least a week or so of a year, and intensely with them, and they become therapists pretty quickly. I know I've got good relationships with all of my S&C guys and physios because I've felt comfortable enough to sit down with them. They've helped rehab injuries to get me back on the field as best they can and naturally, because it's difficult and what not, it's those times in the physio room or the gym where you share a bit more of what's going on in your life.

Retired Athlete

The retired athlete here discusses the personal and supportive relationships ('they become therapists pretty quickly') shared with S&C coaches throughout their career. According to the literature, while the wellbeing responsibilities of S&C coaches are limited, the diverse undertaking within the role is becoming increasingly recognised (Tod, Bond & Lavalley 2012). For Tod, Bond and Lavalley (2012, pp. 854-855), these responsibilities fall under the 'additional roles' of S&C coaches who, in order to be effective have to: (a) manage relationships with various stakeholders (e.g., coaches, administrators, athletes' family members); (b) occasionally listen to athletes share sensitive and distressing information; (c) consider how their prescribed programs influenced other aspects of athletes' training; and (d) sometimes assume line management and mentoring roles for junior practitioners. Moreover, as Kraemer (2006) suggests, the expanding responsibilities of S&C coaches requires them to draw upon a broader range of knowledge and skills than what is typically recognised within the formal parameters of their roles, and therefore, they are not strictly bound by the technical and clinical aspects related to performance. For S&C coaches participating in this research project, the exercise of wellbeing logics was seen as an informal responsibility with practical implications for their role, where given its relevancy to performance, S&C coaches are permitted to step beyond the boundaries of their role as 'trainers' and to engage in wellbeing-centred conversations of a personal nature. The following quote examples how S&C coaches and athletes engage in the relational dimension:

Out of anyone I probably have the most contact time with the boys. I see them from the second they walk into training and then all through their time in the gym, everything on the field and through to their recovery. So 'wellbeing' is not in the job description but I definitely think that with the questionnaires, as well as the amount of time you spend with them and the down time around that, you know, there is that sort of

opportunity where they can come and talk to me. I think that's developed after spending more time with them, just being a presence and getting their trust.

S&C Coach

In this statement the S&C coach highlights how, through hybrid practices and the perceived relationship between wellbeing and performance logics, their role permits them the opportunity to oscillate in and out of the personal sphere within the scope of their professional remit. This is because, as Smets et al. (cited in Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 368) state, 'when members have close relationships to one another or are more interdependent, they are motivated to develop more compatible ways of enacting multiple logics'. Therefore, while wellbeing is not considered a formal responsibility of S&C coaches, hybrid practices developed as a product of their proximity, as well as the personal nature of their relationships, create the opportunity for the blending of wellbeing and performance logics. Yet despite their understanding of this relationship, S&C coaches are often left in spaces of uncertainty and left to manage complex situations independently, without the adequate training and process to handle athlete disclosures. Organisational logic theory would suggest that this is a consequence of 'the nature of professional socialisation' (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 377), whereby organisational members re-arrange logics to either constrain, or give permission to, engaging in hybrid practices. In this case, the S&C coach ascribes high levels of centrality (core responsibilities) to wellbeing logics than what their position description might suggest, and freely develop compatible practices (degree of mutual benefit) to allow hybrid interactions to take place. In practice however, the blending of wellbeing logics with performance logics becomes complicated when the demands of performance logics supersede that of wellbeing. This, as the S&C coach explains, leaves athletes in the liminal space between the personal and professional spheres:

They can rely on each other and on the staff, but at the end of the day, they're still there to get a job done. I think some of them struggle with that.

S&C Coach

In this statement, the S&C coach identifies the ineffective hybridity of wellbeing and performance logics: That while wellbeing is viewed as a necessary component of their role as a measure of compatibility, performance will always hold the greater degree of centrality. As reported in the AIS's AW&E Review (2020, p. 12), this aligns with the views shared by the

majority of elite athletes, who feel that the HP system ‘favours performance over people and values physical health over mental wellbeing’. Thus, the ineffective hybridity of wellbeing and performance logics occurs largely due to a lack of clear process guiding the support provided by S&C coaches, rather than being premised upon mutual benefit and consistent prescriptions for action. While the solution to these issues may appear to be simple, it is complex in practice, in that it requires structural adjustments that see wellbeing logics becoming more thoughtfully embedded into the S&C role, with higher levels of centrality and compatibility. To do so, elite sporting organisations must first formally recognise the diverse duties of S&C coaches and the important contributions that they make to an athlete’s psychosocial support network, provide adequate training which equips S&C coaches with the requisite skills to effectively facilitate athletes’ help-seeking (explored further in Chapter 7), and establish the processes required to appropriately respond to wellbeing disclosures (e.g. mandatory reporting and clear referral pathways). These are important considerations, for improving the capacity of HP staff to more confidently hold athletes in their help-seeking moments will not only improve the hybrid gains between wellbeing and performance logics, but will create greater cohesion and quality of support provided to athletes within both the personal and professional spheres. The following analysis explores these ideas in relation to the role of ‘house parent’, whose role sits ambiguously between the personal and professional spheres, a role that experiences the challenges of hybridity in similar ways.

House Parent:

For elite athletes, the intensely transient nature of sporting careers occurs for a variety of reasons, though typically this is for the purposes of training camps, interstate or international travel for competition, or more general residential relocation in pursuit of sporting opportunities. However, despite the everyday nature of travel as part of the athlete experience, there is a strong belief that residential relocation makes athletes vulnerable to declines in academic and athletic performance, risks of social isolation and withdrawal, and breakdowns in personal communication and support (Smith et al. 2015). House parents, responsible for managing the host homes of athletes (JFC and/or NRL athletes) who have moved from interstate or overseas, were identified as a critical psychosocial support for athletes adjusting to residential relocation. Their support, while vaguely defined within the literature, often

includes transport to and from training, the preparation of meals, the monitoring of curfews and, importantly, social and emotional support. Explaining their duties, the house parent stated:

I mean my day to day role, 'technically' what the club expects of me, is to just look after the boys in the house. So make sure that the house has got food, that they're home by a certain time, because they actually have a structured contract with the boys and it says you need to abide by x, y and z rules to live in this house. So we have curfews, we have rules and regulations around who can and can't come in the house – things like that.

House Parent

In this statement, the house parent describes the 'technical' expectations of their role by alluding to a fixed and stringent professional remit, but goes on to discuss how the personal, often intimate and unpredictable nature of a simulated family environment makes those professional boundaries unclear:

In my role, I find it's on a level where sometimes I think maybe I'm stepping outside of my scope and boundaries because of where I sit. Like I get to know the boys on a real personal level, and then I get to see them on a professional level, so I know the ins and outs of their lives in a way that others don't.

House Parent

In these two statements, the house parent discusses the personal (relating to what is private, such as relationships, emotions, and social pastimes) and professional (expectations relating to occupation) elements of their role and the ambiguous 'scope and boundaries' that separate these spheres. They experience similar tensions to those experienced by S&C coaches, but highlight how this is further complicated by their position within the liminal space between athletes' personal and professional spheres. House parents then become another example of how, in HP systems, there is a lack of process in place to support staff navigating these spaces, irrespective of whether their role is located within the sporting or non-sporting domain. According to organisational logic theory, these issues reflect unclear prescriptions for action, where without legitimising the personal support that staff provide, they are themselves unsupported in their capacity to carry out their wellbeing responsibilities (Besharov & Smith 2014). Reflecting on these issues, the house parent shared the following considerations:

Some clubs would argue that it's not their business, some would argue that. You've got a contract. That's our responsibility. And that's it, that's where it ends.

[...]

I think [The Club] are obviously invested in their wellbeing, otherwise they wouldn't do what they do. They wouldn't have this set up and the structure that they do, or then they'd be like other clubs and tell them to go rent off someone else and do your best.

House Parent

Across these two statements the house parent touches on a number of important tensions. First, that in 'some clubs', the divide between athletes' personal and professional lives is held by a clear boundary that strictly identifies elite sporting organisations within the professional sphere, and that any activity occurring beyond the boundaries of the sporting domain does not concern them. In the second statement, the house parent argues that their role is, in and of itself, evidence of The Club's movement into the personal sphere and a recognition of their duty of care within this space; and yet, due to poor prescriptions for action, *'it can get very messy and the lines are very blurred'*.

For the house parent and S&C coach, it is important to resolve these concerns, given the significant weight of their roles within athletes' psychosocial support network. As Smith et al. (2015, p. 143) state, 'it would therefore be helpful from an athlete wellbeing and welfare perspective to be able to identify athletes who are vulnerable', 'with the aim of then providing an effective treatment program'. As this chapter has demonstrated, these programs, in whatever form they take, must first prioritise developing processes and skilled practices that allow members of staff to step into the personal sphere with confidence and clarity of action, as not doing so risks reproducing the same precarious support that is currently provided to athletes. This is because, as discussed in Chapter 4, athletes' personal lives are significantly impacted upon by their careers in elite sport, and therefore, engaging in the wellbeing of athletes within the personal sphere cannot be a matter of choice. Moreover, because athletes' help-seeking relies heavily on relationships within the sporting domain, elite sporting organisations would do well to tailor their support reflexively to their needs and strengthen the psychosocial supports available to them within these spaces. The following section, the 'Whole-Club Capacity' (WCC) Approach to AW&E, explores how to do so.

The ‘Whole-Club Capacity’ Approach to Athlete Wellbeing & Education

Findings emerging from this research project support the view that athletes’ wellbeing is heavily disrupted by the pursuit of a professional sporting career and the HP systems in which this takes place. This chapter has explored how athletes manage this disruption, and more specifically, the supports that they rely on to do so. Personal supports, as emphasised by the S&C coach quoted below, are primarily developed within the sporting domain and play a significant role in the athlete’s wellbeing experience:

So when you are living away from home, those key people in your life don’t come with you, so the people around you become those people. And who do they spend the most time with? Well they spend the most time with their football team.

[...]

So not only are we as staff mentors for them, but I think the 20 year olds give guidance to the 17 and 18 year olds, and they look to each other for that. And it's not in a formal regard, but they do ask each other for advice and talk to each other about that kind of stuff.

S&C Coach

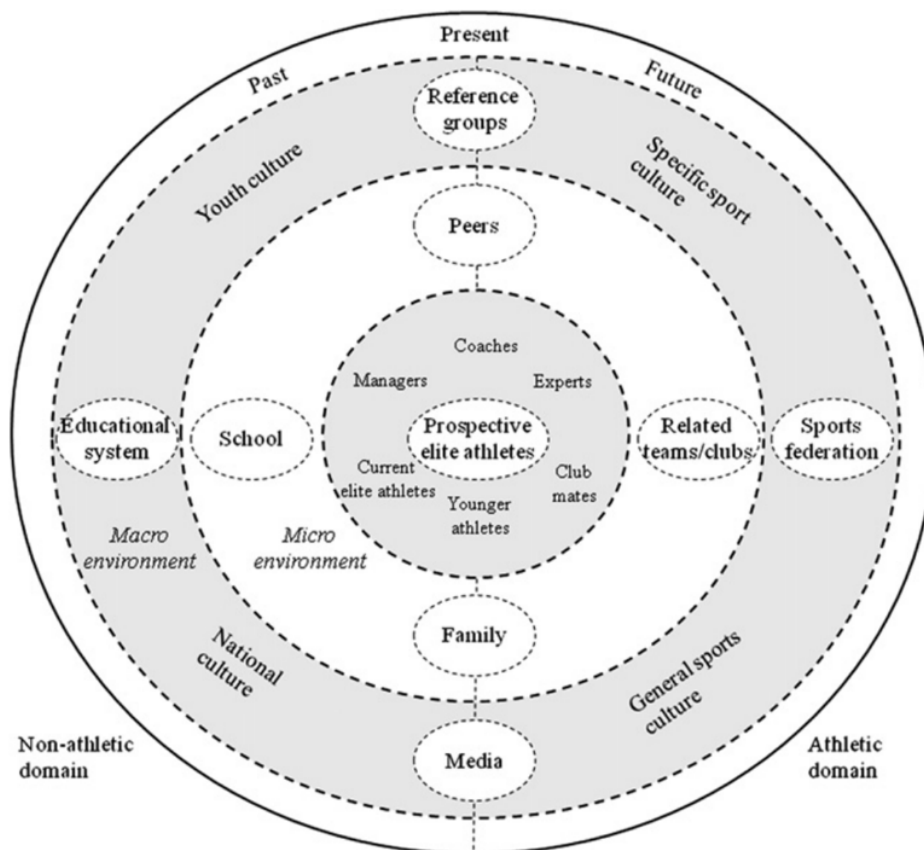
In these two statements, the S&C coach observes the psychosocial support network that athletes develop within the HP environment and the significance of those supports in meeting their unique wellbeing needs. The WCC Approach to AW&E reflects this understanding, as an early intervention and prevention strategy for increasing the protective psychosocial resources available to athletes. As an environmental intervention, the approach assumes that all members of the HP system have an essential role in the wellbeing of athletes and share in the responsibility of elite sporting organisations’ duty of care for them. The following quote from an S&C coach gives some insight into the philosophy of the WCC Approach:

I think for all our roles, anyone that’s interacting with the boys, from the guys that see them a little bit to the guys that see them a lot, if you interact with anyone regularly you're gonna have some input on their wellbeing aren't you? And that might be as little as you might always say ‘hi’ to someone and ask them how their day goes, so they come into training happy, or it may be on a deeper level where they come and chat to you about stuff more serious. But anyone involved in a football club has some sort of interaction with their wellbeing.

Discussing the psychosocial network and interpersonal supports surrounding athletes, the S&C coach demonstrates an understanding of each member's contribution to an athlete's experience of wellbeing within an ecological perspective. Consistently with O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013), who identify trust in a relational context as the most effective predictor of organisational climate, commitment, and collaboration in relation to wellbeing, the S&C coach reiterates the importance of creating a safe space where athletes can 'come and chat to you about stuff more serious'. Sharing values with the WCC Approach to AW&E, Burns, Weissensteiner and Cohen (2019, p. 1) state that 'social health determinants, including human social connections, are critical to sustain health and wellbeing and are central to elite sporting performance. Athletes live in high-pressure environments, and supportive relationships with coaches, support staff and/or others are vital to both athletic performance and wellbeing'.

From an organisational logic perspective, delivering the WCC Approach to AW&E requires a structure which accommodates the factors that influence compatibility (nature of interaction between individuals and groups) and centrality (adherence to diverse logics and the balance of power between them), to achieve what Besharov and Smith (2014) refer to as an 'aligned' organisational model. Defined by the degree of collective agency experienced by organisational members through a unified set of goals, values, and systems accommodating multiple logics, aligned organisations utilise group members' 'professional commitments, personal interests, and interactional, on-the-ground decision making' (Binder 2007, p. 552), through institutional 'vocabularies' and 'motives' which promote a shared value of success. In relation to this chapter, that means recognising the value of wellbeing, given its relationship to performance, and integrating effective psychosocial support alongside AW&E programs within HP systems. Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler's (2010, p. 213) 'Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE)' working model provides a useful example of this, as a coherent visual representation of athletes' interlinking spheres and the collaborative arrangements required throughout their network. The model is presented as follows in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) working model (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler 2010, p. 213)



According to Chambers, Harangozo and Mallett (2019, p. 7), the ATDE working model embeds an ecological model of human development by illustrating the relevant ‘structures and processes associated with athlete development, including those that enable athletes to cultivate a broader set of psychosocial skills and supports’. Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010, p. 213) view these psychosocial supports as operating over the micro-level, referred to as the ‘environment where the prospective elite athletes spend a good deal of their daily life and is thus characterised by real communication and interactions’, and the macro-level, which refers to ‘social settings, which affect but do not contain the athletes, as well as to the values and customs of the cultures to which the athletes belong’, and explain that while each domain (athletic and non-athletic) and level (micro and macro) is contained independently, each operates in synergy with the others. While some of the model’s elements are clearly positioned within one level and one domain (for example, education – micro and non-athletic), others exist across levels and/or domains (for example, family – micro and non-athletic/athletic). The WCC Approach to AW&E operates in a similar way, in that it too focuses on the ecology of the HP

system and involves all members within that system in the safeguarding of athletes, and the elite sporting organisation's duty of care. What separates the WCC Approach to AW&E from the ATDE working model however, is that while Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010) are primarily motivated by the factors influencing talent development as a trajectory of performance, this research is interested in the factors impacting athletes' experiences of wellbeing. While Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010) refer to the athletic and non-athletic domains as 'locations', this project looks at how athletes and staff understand the overlapping personal and professional spheres as they relate to factors of wellbeing and help-seeking. Moreover, while Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler's (2010) model is mapped over two levels of analysis, the WCC Approach to AW&E includes three levels of analysis, the individual (Chapter 4 & 5), organisational (Chapter 6 & 7), *and* institutional (Chapter 8 & 9), to better understand how they combine to create the nuanced structural conditions that shape athletes' experiences. As the first approach developed within an elite sports setting using Besharov and Smith's (2014) organisational logic analysis framework, this doctoral research makes a valuable and pragmatic contribution to the literature, not only by exploring how wellbeing logics can be strengthened, but in articulating how more effective hybrid systems can be developed to increase the mutual gains shared between wellbeing, performance, and commercial logics with increased levels of compatibility and centrality.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the overlapping personal and professional spheres of athletes' lives, the impact that this has upon their experience of wellbeing, and how it shapes their psychosocial support networks. Furthermore, it demonstrates that while wellbeing holds relevancy to all roles within HP systems, wellbeing support as a practice is not matched with 'compatible prescriptions for action', nor valued with equal levels of centrality (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 371). This is problematic, as it limits the effectiveness of support provided to athletes and leaves members of staff without the appropriate training and processes required to integrate wellbeing into their roles and manage their duty of care responsibilities adequately. The WCC Approach to AW&E seeks to correct these shortcomings by encouraging collaborative and supportive relationships within HP systems, and in turn, to enhance the environmental protective factors that athletes rely on most. Late chapters continue to explore what is required from elite sporting organisations, how to operationalise the WCC Approach

to AW&E, and why an aligned logic structure that places wellbeing alongside performance and commercial logics at the core of organisational functioning is a necessary step into progress. Chapter 6, 'Performance Versus Wellbeing', explores some of the practicalities for doing so at the organisational level of analysis by analysing a series of challenges impacting upon the blending of wellbeing and performance logics, with a particular emphasis on the influential role of head coaches in instantiating wellbeing logics within the HP systems that they oversee.

Chapter 6

‘Performance Versus Wellbeing’

‘It’s usually that old thing of performance versus wellbeing, and whenever the clash is there, performance is always going to come first’

Athlete

This chapter explores the role of head coaches as leaders *in* HP environments (direct leader-follower interactions) and that of the management teams, which act as leaders *of* elite sporting organisations (hierarchical and strategically oriented). It follows recommendations by Arthur, Wagstaff and Hardy (2016) to think about the shifting responsibilities of leadership at various levels of organisations, and applies Mehra et al. (2006) mapping of ‘network leadership structures’ to analyse the role of head coaches in relation to athletes’ help-seeking behaviours. Fundamentally, this chapter stands to argue that head coaches have the potential to significantly impact the wellbeing of athletes (both positive and negative consequences), and thus, have a responsibility and duty of care to not cause harm through that influence. From a theoretical perspective, this chapter is presented through an organisational logic analysis which articulates how the logic structures of the head coach’s role, where blending wellbeing with performance logics is a difficult task. Moreover, in respect of the structures of HP systems, this chapter discusses the role that leaders *of* elite sporting organisations, as the group most capable of controlling the factors which determine compatibility (hiring and socialisation) and centrality (mission and strategy; resource dependence) have on the instantiation of wellbeing logics, at the organisational level of analysis. To illustrate these arguments, the National Rugby League (NRL) and Jersey Flegg Cup (JFC) teams are analysed, then compared and contrasted to highlight key recommendations. Starting with an exploration of literature, the following section

details what is known about the influence of head coaches on HP systems and how this research project's participants related to that understanding.

Head Coaches & High Performance Sport

Within the HP environment, no individual has greater authority than the head coach, who is widely recognised as the central figure and primary decision-maker (O'Connor & Cavanagh 2013; Mazzer & Rickwood 2014; Gorczynski et al. 2020). According to Arthur, Wagstaff and Hardy (2016, p. 154), this is a crucial consideration, given that effective leadership has been widely evidenced as an essential quality for efficient wellbeing support systems and organisational functioning. As they state, 'the ability to lead, inspire, and motivate people is an important human characteristic [...] with great or poor organisational, military, or sport performances frequently credited to great leadership or lack thereof'. Links between leadership and wellbeing are growing clearer, with research by Gulliver et al. (2012) and Gorczynski et al. (2019) citing the impact of head coaches as significant contributors to athletes' experiences of wellbeing. Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002) believe that this is due to the broad influence of head coaches on HP systems and their ability to dictate organisational attitudes and beliefs towards wellbeing. Considered together, these research projects reflect the head coach's authority over HP environments and their capacity to control wellbeing discourses within the spaces where they operate. Therefore, given their influence, understanding the role of head coaches and the network of relationships, collaborations, and communication which surrounds them, is an essential point of interest to this chapter's organisational logic analysis. As suggested by O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013, p. 4), that involves 'analysing the impact of coaching on the quality of communication at the organisational level, which may help us to understand the mechanism by which leaders are able to influence the way systems are experienced, organised and interact'.

To understand these systems, it is first important to contextualise the diverse activities of head coaches and the performance-related stressors and pressures that they manage. For Gorczynski et al. (2020, p. 714), that includes responsibilities relating to 'training, competition preparation, competition performance, post-competition, expectation management, and dealing with opponents and officials', and organisational factors such as 'the training environment, competition environment, team finances, team performance stability, youth athlete selection,

travel schedules, safety of youth athletes and staff, administration and organisational issues, athletes, private life, social life, contractual issues, team atmosphere, team roles, and team communication'. For participants in this research project, the broad scope of duties that head coaches undertake justifies their control and influence over HP systems, given their need to constantly evaluate and problem-solve a plethora of performance and non-performance-related matters (Mazzer & Rickwood 2014). In an often uncontrollable and unpredictable environment, head coaches are regularly afforded decision-making authority over HP operations and hold considerable power over the wider organisational culture, in an effort to strengthen their capacity to efficiently manage the complexities of their role (Carson et al. 2018; Thelwell et al. 2008; Olusoga et al. 2009). For The Club, this degree of control often makes head coaches the gatekeepers of HP environments. As discussed by a recently retired athlete, this affords them considerable control over the HP systems and the athletes within it:

I've had coaches who were full on control freaks, they had to control everything and oversee everything, know where everyone was, and what everyone was doing, all the time.

Athlete

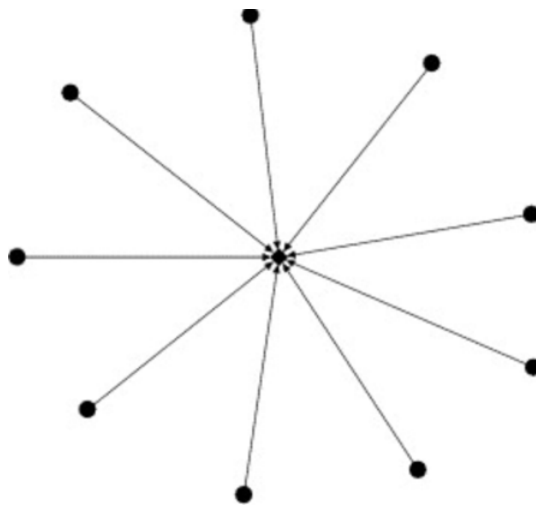
According to organisational logic theory, the degree of control exercised by head coaches is potentially problematic for the integration of wellbeing logics within HP systems. This is because when organisations depend on any one individual or leadership figure, patterns of logic implementation will tend to favour the interests of that individual (Besharov & Smith 2014). In this case, head coaches, whose role it is to improve athletes' performance and orchestrate on-field success, makes wellbeing interests such as education and pre-retirement planning, engagement in community programs, mental health support, etc. appear largely irrelevant to their role. In organisational logic terms, this can be interpreted as the 'degree of centrality' (hierarchy of values), whereby performance logics occupy the core functions of the head coach's role and wellbeing logics operate at the periphery. Ultimately however, as the individual carrying the greatest authority over the HP system, head coaches must be regarded as integral to the functioning of wellbeing support systems and the degree to which wellbeing logics are instantiated into the HP system. The following analysis will investigate the influence of head coaches on the structure of logics within the HP system and how this impacts upon athletes' help-seeking actions within The Club's NRL and JFC teams.

National Rugby League (NRL)

The NRL is a billion dollar industry and the premier division of professional rugby league across Australia and New Zealand. With 16 competing teams managing a salary cap of approximately \$10 million per club annually, the NRL is second only to the Australian Football League (AFL) in memberships, viewership, and revenue. The Club investigated for this research project is one of the nine Sydney-based teams.

Analysis of the NRL team demonstrates that in elite sport, head coaches are, without question, the most influential leaders on HP systems, and as such have a significant impact on the status of wellbeing logics. Mehra et al.'s (2006, p. 234) 'traditional leader-centred team leadership structure' can be used to represent this dynamic and the interpersonal network that surrounds them as the central leader:

Figure 5: Traditional leader-centred team leadership structure (Mehra et al. 2006)



For participants in this research project, the traditional leader-centred team leadership structure operates around the head coach as a central figure, which from an organisational logic perspective biases the arrangement of logics to the interest of that individual. This is potentially problematic, where, as discussed by an NRL athlete, these interests are typically preoccupied exclusively with performance, to the detriment of wellbeing:

The number one focus for coaches and football staff is performance, so when things aren't going well, it's more time on the field doing skill development, more targeted

video review, more time in the gym to hit better physical markers or whatever, and that's it, that's what it ends up becoming.

Athlete

In this statement the athlete participant gives insight into how head coaches are able to dictate HP systems, and alludes to the impact that this has upon the logic structures within them. While literature exploring the authority of head coaches in direct relation to wellbeing is sparse, there exists much research on the archetypes of leadership and its impact on athlete-coach relationships and team dynamics. Kim and Cruz's (2016) meta-analysis of coaching leadership styles provides a link between these factors, and in particular, how autocratic styles of coaching increase athletes' experiences of team disconnection and dissatisfaction. O'Connor and Cavanagh's (2013, p. 7) analysis of HP environments provides a rationale for this impact, which they classify as the impacts of the 'coaching ripple effect', where they argue for the necessity of positive attitudes and actions relating to wellbeing as a way of consistently substantiating positive wellbeing discourses and empowering help-seeking behaviour. Their research concludes that trust, in a relational context¹⁸, is the most effective predictor of organisational climate, commitment, and collaboration in relation to wellbeing. For The Club's NRL team, the traditional leader-centred team leadership structure appears to have a negative effect on wellbeing logics. As explained by an NRL athlete:

Coaches always have the final say. So if he's out the front of the group saying [wellbeing] is really important and we need to prioritise it, then you're going to get buy-in straightaway from the players – but for us, that's not necessarily been the case.

Athlete

This quote connects Mehra et al.'s (2006) traditional leader-centred team leadership structure with important observations on logic centrality (hierarchy of values). Here the athlete identifies performance as the dominant logic and explains how athletes become compliant to the demands set by the head coach, given the passive position that athletes often hold within the coach-athlete relationship (Gucciardi et al. 2009). This occurs for a variety of reasons, though

¹⁸ The 'relational dimension' is defined as the 'connectivity' and 'influence that members have on each other, as measured by recurrent patterns of behaviour' (O'Connor & Cavanagh (2013, p. 3).

typically as a consequence of the head coach's 'legitimate power' and right to authority (Rylander 2015, p. 111); or, as frequently cited by participants in this research project, because head coaches hold control over matters such as team selection and contract negotiations – defined by Rylander (2015, p. 111) as a form of 'coercive' and/or 'reward' power. For the NRL team, while the authority of head coaches was not widely contested by interview participants, many expressed concerns over the potentially damaging influence that a head coach *could* have on an athlete's wellbeing. These arguments primarily focused on the individual qualities of head coaches, where a head coach being supportive or oppositional could determine the status of wellbeing logics within any given HP environment. For interviewed NRL athletes of this research project, their head coach was believed to not only prioritise performance logics, but to actively subordinate wellbeing logics. Referred to as '*an old school coach who still believes in an old school mentality*', the head coach was seen to promote 'traditional' ideals of masculinity that stigmatise help-seeking behaviours, with the attitude '*treat them like men, and men don't cry*' often promulgated. According to O'Connor and Cavanagh's (2013) research, this sort of rhetoric is harmful to the status of wellbeing logics, where in this case, the impact of the head coach's negative views towards wellbeing was seen to inhibit athletes' sense of security, agency, and the trust held with their environment. Shared by a PDM, they recall:

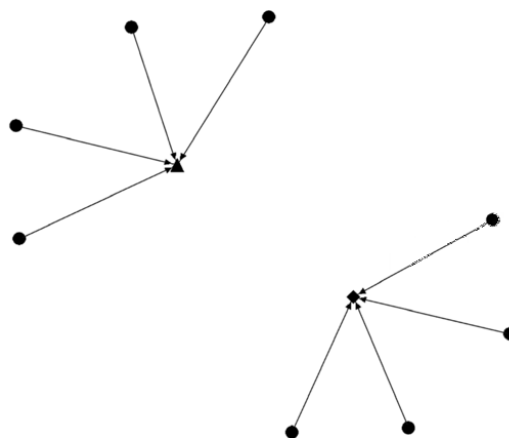
This might sound ridiculous but I have players that come into my office to hide while they meditate. I'll put the blinds down and they meditate because they're not comfortable enough to do it in front of the group. Our players are suffering just like everyone else but our culture isn't strong enough to allow people to say 'yes, I'll buy into this'.

PDM

This quote provides a valuable and concerning insight into the status of wellbeing logics at the relational level of the NRL team's HP environment. It suggests that the stigma surrounding wellbeing perpetuated by the head coach is such an inhibiting force that athletes are seeking alternative pathways into support, out of view from their peers and head coach. Bauman (2016) believes that this is stigma in action, where the historical stereotyping of athletes as 'tough' and 'resilient' makes it difficult to source safe avenues for disclosure and access to personal support. From an organisational logic perspective, it is clear that wellbeing and performance are operating through a perception of incompatibility and low levels of shared centrality, whereby performance occupies the core of organisational functioning and wellbeing is forced

to adapt and operate at the periphery. Besharov and Smith (2014) predict that moderate levels of conflict will emerge from estranged logic structures, as seen in this example, given the fragmentation of wellbeing support from the HP environment. Evaluating this data within Mehra et al.'s (2006, p. 235) framework for analysing team dynamics, the NRL team can then be categorised as a 'distributed-fragmented team leadership structure', whereby athletes diverge away from the 'traditional leader-centered team leadership structure' and into a fragmented structure where their access to wellbeing support can take place safely:

Figure 6: Distributed-fragmented team leadership structure (Mehra et al. 2006, p. 235)



Each fraction of the diagram above can be considered as representing athletes' contact with the head coach, as the primary leader of performance logics, and the PDM, as the leader of wellbeing logics. According to Stansen and Chambers (2019), who conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the PDM role across Australian professional sports, the exclusion of wellbeing professionals experienced by the PDM of The Club is both common and problematic, as in order for their support to be at full effect, there must be collaboration between them and the members of the HP system. However, for the NRL team, the relationship between the PDM and head coach is fractured, forcing them to restructure their role outside of the core network, which as stated by Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 371), is expected from estranged logic structures and the 'sub-groups' that they generate. In this way, the distributed-fragmented team leadership structure seen within this analysis can be viewed as a product of the head coach's stigmatising attitudes towards wellbeing and their use of 'legitimate', 'coercive' and 'reward' power to ostracise wellbeing logics from the HP environment (Rylander 2015). Yet despite these critical perspectives on the head coach's use of power, Rylander (2015, p. 110) makes

the important point that ‘day-to-day interactions between coaches and their athletes are typically complex and vary from one situation to another.

One constant, however, is the need for coaches to get athletes to act in appropriate ways that will result in sporting success. Again, from an organisational logic perspective, Rylander’s (2015) statement suggests that while head coaches may exercise their authority in a variety of ways that are contextual to a number of situational factors, ultimately, *all* coaches are afforded their authority under the remit and expectation of ‘sporting success’ as the logic holding the highest degree of centrality within their role. Therefore, head coaches, who like athletes have their success measured by on-field performance through extreme levels of scrutiny and job insecurity (Mallett 2010), are managing their own set of unique stressors and pressures. The separation of wellbeing logics in favour of a performance-focus, sympathised with by both an NRL athlete and a PDM, is not always a matter of attitude or choice for head coaches, but is conditional to the remit of their role:

Sometimes people blame coaches a lot for not being able to get access to athletes, and I sort of can understand what they're saying, but they have to understand that he's measured separately, he's got different performance measurements – he's got to get a win, he's got to focus on his task first.

Athlete

I think deep down they would love to do more, but it's such a cutthroat win or loss business that they don't have the time. I think until you've made your mark as a coach in the NRL and have had some long-term success, I don't think that you're afforded the time to do that.

PDM

For both participants, their concerns for the status of wellbeing logics has less to do with the individual attitudes and actions of head coaches and more to do with the arrangement of logics underpinning their role which do not allow them the opportunity to explore factors beyond measures of short-term performance. For these reasons, Carson et al.’s (2018) suggestion of further research into the experiences of head coaches is necessary, given the unique conditions and weight of their role. Likewise they call for greater recognition of the unique stressors and pressures that head coaches have to manage, that they also as a group are equally deserving of

wellbeing supports, but receive comparatively very little support. For research participants in this project, this is problematic, as without coaches' involvement in AW&E programs, they are not likely to learn their value; nor can they be expected to be ambassadors for them. As explained by an AW&E Manager from the ARL, it is one of the critical barriers keeping wellbeing logics from becoming embedded into the HP system:

Why aren't we offering coaches education and wellbeing support as well? Coaches can be in more transition than athletes, so they're under a lot of pressure too. If we were to offer them more and they could make that connection with wellbeing, all of a sudden we'd see them buying in. But at the moment, we've drawn a line and they're on the opposite side of that line. We've got to draw a bigger circle and pull them in because I think that's what's going to negate some of our problems.

AW&E Manager

Breslin et al. (2017) advocate for the strategy shared by the AW&E Manager quoted here, arguing that an increase in the involvement of coaches in AW&E programs will benefit the integration of wellbeing logics into the HP system. Their systematic literature review makes a strong case for coaches' participation, particularly in mental health literacy training programs¹⁹, which have been shown to result in reduced levels of negative affect regarding wellbeing attitudes and actions (Longshore & Sachs, 2015), increased knowledge of mental health disorders, resulting in reduced levels of stigma (Bapat, Jorm & Lawrence 2009), increased confidence to help others who experience poor mental health (Breslin et al. 2017; Pierce et al. 2010; Sebbens et al. 2016), and increased confidence to seek support from a mental health professional (Bapat, Jorm & Lawrence 2009). Put simply by Gorczynski et al. (2020, p. 715), the more mental health-literate head coaches are about sports-specific stressors, the more successful they are in proactively addressing and reducing the stigma of poor mental health, and actively encouraging athletes to seek professional support. These findings considered, the AW&E Manager quoted previously may be right in their view that through stronger engagement in AW&E programs, head coaches are more likely to find the impetus to

¹⁹ Gorczynski et al. (2020, p. 715) describe mental health literacy as 'the knowledge individuals have about mental disorders, including their symptoms, causes, and forms of self-administered treatments; their attitudes towards poor mental health and help-seeking behaviours; and their knowledge and intentions to seek help or support'.

bring wellbeing logics into the core functions of the HP systems that they manage. Critically however, as the same AW&E Manager goes on to state, while these strategies may be useful, they still require head coaches to go ‘above and beyond’ the performance terms of their role:

To do wellbeing, they have to go above and beyond the terms of their role. So a coach that cares is almost a maverick in professional sports because they aren't given the time or the resources to properly engage with their athletes' wellbeing.

AW&E Manager

From an organisational logic perspective, correcting these issues requires leaders of elite sporting organisations to address the factors that influence compatibility (hiring and socialisation) and factors that influence centrality (mission and strategy; resource dependence). This means not only recruiting head coaches with the impetus to bring wellbeing logics into the core functions of their role, but having an organisational structure that keeps them accountable for doing so through diversified measures of success. In other words, if head coaches are recruited and evaluated exclusively by performance-centric measures, then performance-centric outcomes are all that can be expected from them. Therefore, if elite sporting organisations want to make athlete wellbeing a core component of HP systems (as they often suggest that they do), then the leaders of elite sporting organisations need leaders in crucial roles who can add to the positive wellbeing cultures that they aspire towards. The following analysis, focused on the JFC team, demonstrates what the influence of a supportive head coach can have on the HP environment.

Jersey Flegg Cup (JFC)

The Jersey Flegg Cup (JFC) is the 12-team NSW statewide, top-tier junior competition. JFC athletes between 18-21 years of age are signed to semi-professional contracts with their parent NRL clubs, where an estimated 4% are expected to progress into the senior first-grade level²⁰.

²⁰ Figures have not been published publicly but were quoted by a number of AW&E Managers of the ARL during interviews for this research project.

The head coach of the JFC team is a unique case. To understand why, it is worth outlining the circumstances and structures of their role. Initially employed in a dual capacity as an assistant to the previous PDM as well as head coach of the JFC team, after a number of years they were promoted to the PDM role following the retirement of their predecessor, while continuing their role as head coach. The duality of their role appears to be an irregularity in the elite sports sector, with no prior case found across the literature, identifying coaches in a similar formally amalgamated role. This is likely because, even at the JFC grade, head coaches are typically considered a full-time role in professional rugby league and/or because very few head coaches have the appropriate training and expertise to adequately qualify for both roles. Discussing the relevancy of their working history and how this underpins their ability to undertake both roles, the head coach of the JFC team stated:

Long before I was working here, I was always a coach. I coached a little under 7's side when I was 17 and I've coached ever since, whether it be footy or my daughter's netball. But for a lot of that time I was working in the PCYCs²¹ as well, at the recreation centres and all that stuff, and I actually reckon it helped me to be a better coach. So I've always had a bit to do with both.

Head Coach

Here the head coach explains how their work history qualifies them to undertake both roles. Yet what appears blatantly concerning about the blending of these two roles is whether or not a conflict of interest may exist. Asked whether they felt that sitting in both positions was complementary or contradictory, they shared the following anecdote:

I remember when I started they asked me, 'What if you've got a bloke with a mental health problem, will you pick him?'. I said, 'If I've got to rest him while he's getting treatment, then that's fine', and that comes from understanding the wellbeing side of things as well as the coaching side, because honestly mate, when you understand the wellbeing side and you understand the coaching side, you quickly realise that you're looking at the same thing because you'll always get a bit of both in this role.

²¹ Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC) are a registered charity working with at-risk young people. They run a number of targeted programs, focused on crime prevention, vocational education, youth capacity building and social responsibility (PCYC 2020).

Here the head coach provides a rationale for how to hold wellbeing and performance as being of equal significance (indicative of high centrality) and as mutually beneficial (indicative of high compatibility), and alludes to how a career in youth work and coaching has resourced them with the requisite knowledges and skills to blend their performance and wellbeing-related duties with an understanding of where the two intersect. This understanding, they explain, is integral to their *'people before players'* philosophy of coaching and their ability to communicate the value of wellbeing as inextricably linked with performance. For athletes within the JFC team, there was clear consistency throughout interviews, evidencing the benefits of their approach, with athletes regularly citing the head coach's high level of mental health literacy, recognition for duty of care, self-awareness in regarding their influence, and ability to communicate the compatible qualities of wellbeing with performance. The following two quotes, one from the head coach, the other from an athlete, demonstrate the hybridity of wellbeing and performance logics in action and provide an example of how the head coach is able to facilitate their synthesis with clear prescriptions for action:

During preseason one of our boys had some anxiety, some other mental health problems, so I said to him, 'It's just like doing your hamstring and if you're out for 3 weeks, well then you're out for 3 weeks and there's nothing we can do about it; but it's an injury and you just go get yourself right and when you're ready to go again, I'll pick you'. I said, 'There's no stigma here, I know everyone goes through it, so away you go'. Since he's came back, he's played nearly every game for me this year.

Head Coach

He's very flexible when it comes to this sort of stuff. So if you have family problems and you need some time off, for example, he'll understand and give you the space or whatever you need to do to fix it.

Athlete

In these examples, the head coach demonstrates how performance and wellbeing logics can be constructively aligned with high levels of compatibility and centrality. They recognise their athletes' wellbeing and performance-based concerns as separate but related, and cater to them in a manner which supports the athletes' disclosure without threat or compromise to their team

selection. Crucially, the head coach provides safety and security while responding to athletes' concerns, and in doing so, actively de-stigmatises the help-seeking process. This generates trust between the head coach and athlete on a relational level, which according to O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013), is the foundational component of successful wellbeing support systems. The following experience, shared by an athlete, gives another insight into JFC athletes' trust in the head coach, and another example of how they are able to facilitate help-seeking behaviour while managing their role as head coach:

The only person I told at the time besides my partner was him. Like I haven't told anyone, besides maybe like the counsellor who I've spoken to since. When I told him, I sent him the biggest fucking text message, like I sent the max amount of letters that you can send.

Athlete

Asked whether they had any concerns that their disclosure could impact their team selection, they replied:

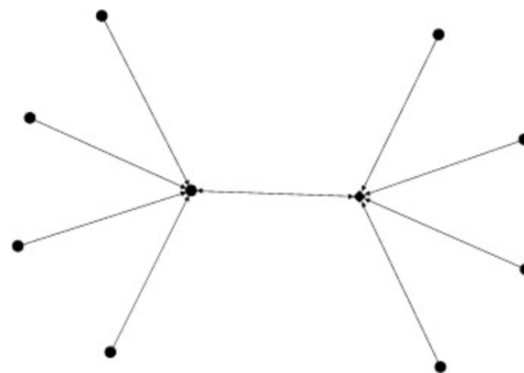
Honestly, I've never even thought about that. I trust him a lot when it comes to this sort of stuff and I reckon having that wellbeing side of what he does as well the coaching side makes a big difference for a lot of the boys.

Athlete

Critical to this analysis is that the athlete exhibits how the head coach is able to use the trust that they share with their athletes to manage the potential conflicts of interest between their two roles. Survey results from the entire JFC team shows the head coaches approach increases the centrality of wellbeing logics, given 74% of JFC athletes believed that, from The Club's perspective, their wellbeing was held to have equal importance to their playing performance. This is particularly striking, given that in general, the majority of athletes feel that the HP system 'favours performance over people and values physical health over mental wellbeing' (AIS 2020, p. 12). Given the disparity between the norms of HP systems and the consistency of interview and survey data supporting the hybridity of wellbeing with performance logics within the JFC team, this analysis presents as a unique site of resistance to the historically performance-dominant discourses of HP sport.

From an organisational logic perspective, the head coach’s ability to blend wellbeing with performance reflects their unique approach to leadership in which, as Besharov & Smith (2014) suggest, responses to hybridity are likely to result either in additional leaders effectively supporting the instantiation of multiplicity, or leaders competing for centrality, separating logics into core and periphery. What appears clear to this chapter’s analysis is that while the NRL team discussed previously aligns more closely to the latter prediction, for the JFC team, with a head coach who actively facilitates a ‘distributed-coordinated network leadership structure’ (Mehra et al. 2006, p. 235) and acts as a bridge between wellbeing and performance logics, the former appears to be true.

Figure 7: Distributed-coordinated leadership structure (Mehra et al. 2006, p. 235)



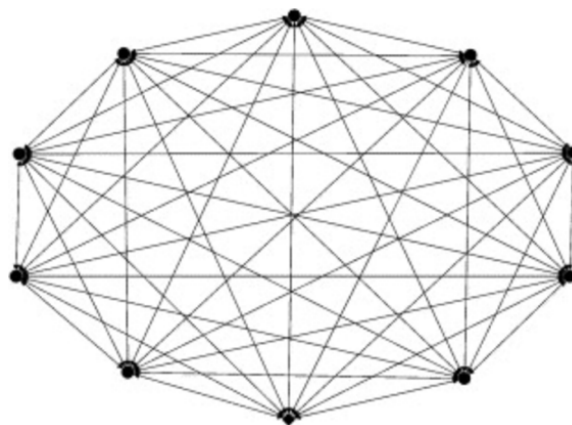
Distributed-coordinated leadership structures in an organisation are those where multiple leaders recognise the validity and contributions of one another, have a greater capacity to collaborate and, in doing so, to more successfully ‘synthesise leadership efforts so that decision-making and action are more effectively channelled within the group’ (Mehra et al. 2006, p. 235). Described by Gronn (2002, p. 431) as ‘conjoint agency’, these forms of leadership structures strengthen a networks capacity for hybridity through shared leadership, which for the JFC team sees a number of key secondary leaders (e.g. S&C coaches and the extended AW&E team) taking an active role in athletes’ psychosocial support network. Exemplified by a JFC athlete, they stated:

Whenever any of us boys need help, it’s not just [the head coach] that we can go to, it’s [an assistant coach], it’s [another assistant coach], it’s [S&C coach] – they all do the same thing and it’s like [the head coach] told them that’s how it needs to be.

Athlete

In this quote, the athlete articulates a network centralised around the head coach but identifies a number of significant secondary leaders extending throughout the HP environment. Secondary leaders who, according to the view of JFC athletes, play a crucial role in their psychosocial support network, defined by participants as a culture of reciprocal support, spanning both on- and off-field contexts. From the view of the head coach, developing a HP system premised upon shared-leadership was described as an intentional approach to coaching. In these discussions, the head coach explained an approach which utilises all of its group members (including athletes, coaches, support staff, etc.) as an essential *'gear in the engine that moves the car forward'*. This understanding, they say, acknowledges that the success of each individual is bound by the team's collective ability to achieve, and is used to manage the individual ambitions of each athlete while serving the group's collective interests. In this way, the head coach manages the team's group dynamics purposefully with an approach intent on aligning members to a set of shared goals and values. This uniquely inclusive dynamic, which recognises athletes as contributing to, and recipients of, the leadership structure, reflects the strength of connection throughout the JFC team and reflects some elements from Mehra et al.'s (2006, p. 3) 'distributed team-leadership structure':

Figure 8: Distributed team-leadership structure



The distributed team-leadership structure stems from a formally appointed leader (as represented by the diamond shaped node at the base of the figure above) but is dispersed widely across team members throughout the network. For Mehra et al. (2006, p. 3), the theoretical rationale behind distributed team-leadership structures is that 'when there are many leaders within a group, this enhances participation and information sharing among team members,

which, in turn, enhances team performance’. However, in the context of HP sport, achieving a distributed team-leadership network structure is not entirely feasible; nor is it desirable. This is because, as emphasised by participants in this research project, head coaches operate under extreme stress, manage diverse challenges, and are constantly responding to the unavoidable unpredictability of elite sport, and thus require high levels of control to manage their responsibilities (Carson et al. 2018). Moreover, as highlighted by Mehra et al. (2006), despite the support for shared-leadership structures across the literature, with more leaders comes more variables relating to the composition of groups (in terms of personality and other individual differences), and therefore, the effectiveness of any given leadership structure is not so much determined by the number of leaders but rather, whether or not those leaders recognise each other’s value as joint leaders. For these reasons, in addition to the unique structural conditions of HP systems, it is reasonable to expect that ‘distributed-coordinated leadership structures’ are most applicable and likely to lead to more effective hybrid outcomes between wellbeing and performance logics. The following section explores how the head coach of the JFC team established a distributed coordinated leadership structure as an intentional strategy for integrating wellbeing logics into the HP system.

Distributed Coordinated Leadership

For the JFC team, developing a distributed coordinated leadership structure begins in the early stages of group development which, according to Tuckman and Jansen (1977), is a time when a group’s vision and purpose is forming. The primary feelings for group members at this stage are typically nervousness and apprehension and thus group members will likely depend on a leader for direction. Aware of these feelings and the significance of setting the course for the group’s development, the head coach of the JFC team explained how they facilitated the inaugural training session away from the field to focus on identifying shared group goals, setting standards, and founding agreements for accountability:

At the start of the year I always give a bit of myself, I think that I owe them that much. [...] So I sit them in the room and say to them, ‘Look, I’m going to ask you to do things that are uncomfortable, I’m going to ask you to trust me on game plans and stuff like that, but I need to share a bit about myself to you guys first’. I’ll tell them a little bit about how I grew up and where I came from, what I believe in, my philosophies – not

just on footy but in life – and then I ask them what our legacy is going to be while we're together. I ask them what we want to be known as outside of football, as well as on the field, and I'll let them come up with words like 'family, resilience, mental toughness, ruthlessness', all of that sort of stuff. Then I ask them, 'Well alright, you want to be ruthless, but in what way? We want to be a family, what kind of family?'. And then they come up with what that means, which become our standards, and I'll say, 'Right, these are your words, not mine, so you should police it. I can only do so much and you'll get sick of me yelling and screaming, so when it comes to repercussions, you're going to set that. If someone steps outside of that, you need to decide how we will respond'. So when I say to the boys 'set your own standards', they're thinking about the legacy they want to leave behind. We came up with this little thing about saying 'I am the caretaker of this jersey; I represent the boys that came before and the boys that come after', and then every time one of the boys make their debut, they sign it in the sheds before they run out onto the field.

Head Coach

Here the JFC team head coach explains how they carefully and intentionally carry the team through the early stages of group formation, which according to Johnson and Johnson (2013), is the most critical period in predicting the nature of a group's future dynamic. Recognising the role of connection in developing psychological safety, the head coach shares personal anecdotes to engage a response of trust through vulnerability and in doing so, actively disrupts the implicit power associated with their role in an effort to re-assemble the network towards a distributed coordinated leadership structure. Moreover, as a practice of modelling, they blend the personal and professional spheres, set patterns of communication, normalise and destigmatise wellbeing disclosures. From there, the head coach pivots into a discussion proposing shared agreements, where rather than dictating their expectations using an autocratic leadership style, they facilitate a collaborative decision-making process using a 'participative leadership approach' (Chan 2019), which allows group members to negotiate values and take ownership of the terms that will govern the HP environment. This approach, shown to improve decision-making performance (Scully, Kirkpatrick & Locke 1995), quality of work-life satisfaction (Somech 2002), and organisational commitment and loyalty (Rok 2009), is an intentional effort by the JFC head coach to defer their power and identify themselves as an integral collaborator and support, rather than authority figure. In turn, this empowers the agency of group members who, according to Johnson and Johnson (2013), are more likely to adhere to a set of agreements

set by themselves and to assume greater accountability for the oversight of those agreements, supporting Gorczynski et al.'s (2019) view that the most effective wellbeing support systems are those that do not depend on any one given individual but are managed by all members of the HP environment.

The JFC team then advances to Tuckman and Jansen's (1977) *norming* stage, where group members solidify patterns of interpersonal communication, find consensus on group roles, and develop a greater sense of purpose and unity. Set-up to enter the *performing* stage (Tuckman & Jansen 1977), the group uses its connection to see improved cohesion, individual and group self-efficacy, help-seeking behaviour, and trust between athlete-athlete and athlete-coach relationships (Kim & Cruz 2016; Mehra et al. 2006). Connection then, as the mechanism relied upon in the JFC team to accelerate group development, uses qualities such as team-work, camaraderie, and communication to develop hybrid gains between wellbeing and performance. A strong body of literature advocates for the development of connection and socially-supportive relationships within HP sport (O'Connor & Cavanagh 2013; Lavallee 2019). Each of these studies (despite wide variations in focus and context) reports on a diverse range of benefits through connection, such as improved performance (Burns, Weissensteiner & Cohen 2019) and improved wellbeing (O'Connor & Cavanagh 2013). According to research participants in this project, this is due to the strength of relationships, which plays a pivotal role in all aspects of an athlete's journey through sport. Stated by a S&C coach, connection, as a necessary quality for both wellbeing and performance, should be nurtured under a holistic approach:

Performance needs a holistic approach and I think the more that we treat it as if all these individual things come together to create a good athlete, the better the boys are going to become. So pairing wellbeing with performance I think is really important. And I think all those things from physical preparation, to wellbeing, to skill-based technical stuff, it all comes together and that's when you create a successful athlete.

S&C Coach

These views considered, in order to benefit from connection under a distributed coordinated leadership structure, appropriate systems are required to 'integrate', 'collaborate', and 'align' the elements of connection that are common to both wellbeing and performance, into HP systems (Burns, Weissensteiner & Cohen's 2019, p. 4). The 'holistic approach', as described

by the S&C coach, becomes a hybrid model for blending wellbeing and performance logics, and in doing so brings all members of the HP system (including AW&E team members) into its core as joint leaders. In effect, this is precisely what the WCC Approach to AW&E hopes to achieve – a HP system where all members, regardless of their role, not only recognise the value, benefits, and relevance of wellbeing logics, but have a clear understanding of how to integrate these logics into their role and responsibilities. The following section explores the role that leaders *of* elite sporting organisations might have in realising that vision.

The Leadership ‘Of’ National Sporting Organisations

While the NRL and JFC teams analysed for this chapter give insight into two opposing accounts of leadership and its impact upon wellbeing logics, it is necessary to place these findings in context, where the circumstances, expectations, and pressures managed by each head coach are distinctive to the grades in which they compete. Clearly, at the top echelons of professional sport in Australia, the financial consequences are far greater, both for the individual and the organisation (Paramio-Salcine, Babiak & Walters 2013); media attention is more intensified (Olusoga et al. 2010); and the window of opportunity to achieve success is considerably shorter (Scantling & Lackey 2005; Fletcher & Scott 2010). These factors are undoubtedly relevant and should not be understated; however, for participants in this research project, regardless of the grade of competition, not only are wellbeing and performance logics of sharing centrality, but this is beneficial to all elite sports’ interests to do so. As the head coach of the JFC team explained:

I think everyone runs the same 1.2kms, does the same weights, most of us play the same footy and tackle the same, but I guess if you’re looking for that 1% edge, I reckon that’s in wellbeing and education. And even if it doesn’t improve their performance, what’s the worst that can happen? We get better adjusted young men at the end of the day. That has to mean something as well.

Head Coach

In this statement, the JFC head coach encourages the integration of wellbeing logics into HP systems for two reasons: the first, as an opportunity for performance gain, which given Lavalley’s (2019) research evidencing the positive correlations between AW&E programs and

performance, is a valid belief; and secondly, that wellbeing logics are deserving of greater levels of centrality as part of elite sporting organisations' duty of care. In the example of the JFC team, the head coach's active efforts to integrate wellbeing into their coaching philosophy reflect the effect that leaders *in* elite sporting organisations can have on the HP systems that they manage, and the wellbeing experiences of athletes within those systems. Yet despite the positive wellbeing culture nurtured by them, there remains the risk that without structures which contain systemic processes that protect the place of wellbeing logics, their 'good work' could easily follow them out of the HP system when they, as all coaches do, inevitably move on from their post. For the AIS, this is a major concern for the culture of wellbeing within HP systems where, as reported in their AW&E Review (2020), over half of AIS athletes agree that a change in culture occurs whenever there is a change of coach or leadership. Asked if they are concerned that the status of wellbeing within the JFC team is vulnerable to change following their own exit, the head coach's response was telling:

Wow... I've never really thought about that. You've thrown me a little bit there ... Yeah, look I'd like to think it doesn't hinge on me at all but I don't know if someone else would do the same.

Head Coach

With these concerns in mind, it is important that elite sporting organisations hold an organisational position that views wellbeing as an essential and valid component of the head coach's role; this is necessary in order to maintain a stable wellbeing culture. As phrased by AIS (2020, p. 12), this requires an 'embedded culture that survives after individuals leave and provides clear cultural standards for their successors'. Connecting the organisational to the individual level, Binder (2007, p. 547) suggests that doing so would utilise leaders' 'professional commitments, personal interests, and interactional, on-the-ground decision making' to increase elite sporting organisations' capacity to integrate wellbeing logics within the core of organisational functioning. If elite sporting organisations are to truly assume the responsibility for their athletes' duty of care, then they must be prepared to actively involve themselves in the decisions which affect their wellbeing most and bring wellbeing logics into the systemic and cultural qualities of structure, to sustain their impact through change and over time.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented two contrasting approaches to leadership and its impact on the instantiation of wellbeing logics within the HP environment. The following table represents the analysis presented throughout this chapter, classified under the ‘types of logic multiplicity’, as articulated by Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 371):

Table 7: Summary of leadership on types of logic multiplicity (NRL & JFC)

	<i>Centrality</i>	<i>Compatibility</i>	<i>Classification</i>
<i>JFC</i>	<p>High: Multiple logics are core to organisational functioning.</p> <p>Description: The head coach understands performance is considered a sporting priority, but ensures that wellbeing is held in equal esteem in effecting decision-making among athletes and staff.</p>	<p>High: Logics provide compatible prescriptions for action.</p> <p>Description: The head coach authenticates wellbeing and performance logics as mutually beneficial, reinforced by consistent messaging and clear prescriptions for action.</p>	<p>Aligned organisation: Multiple logics exert strong influence over group members, who undertake the goals, values, identities, and practices associated with multiple logics.</p> <p>Implications: Athletes discuss their wellbeing regularly and feel uninhibited to seek support from a diverse range of group members. Wellbeing is seen as a component of performance and vice-versa.</p>
<i>NRL</i>	<p>Low: One logic is core to organisational functioning; other logics are peripheral.</p> <p>Description: The head coach focuses exclusively on performance logics; actively devalues wellbeing logics.</p>	<p>Low: Logics provide contradictory prescriptions for action.</p> <p>Description: The head coach perceives wellbeing logics as a threat and distraction to performance logics.</p>	<p>Estranged organisation: Group members will grapple with divergent goals and are likely to seek divergent means of achieving these goals.</p> <p>Implications: Athletes' help-seeking behaviour is stigmatised and subsequently sought via a sub-system outside of the HP environment. Wellbeing is seen as separate from performance.</p>

The analysis of the NRL and JFC teams presented above was unfolded throughout this chapter to demonstrate the impact of head coaches as leaders *in* HP environments (direct leader-follower interactions). It has advocated in favour of the hybrid gains that wellbeing logics can

have in relation to performance, and in doing so, appeals to the leaders *of* elite sporting organisations (hierarchical and strategically oriented) to establish structures that preserve the place of wellbeing logics within HP systems. The following chapter continues this discussion, by evaluating how elite sporting organisations can further develop the systemic and cultural qualities of structure at the organisational level to more effectively instantiate wellbeing logics within the HP environment. Chapter 7, titled ‘Developing Socially-Supportive Environments’, is a pragmatic chapter which details two tangible intervention strategies (‘mental health literacy training’ and ‘connection workshops’) that elite sporting organisations can implement under the WCC Approach to AW&E. Primarily, these interventions focus on strengthening the psychosocial support accessed by athletes, by improving the capacity of athletes and staff within the HP environment to more effectively respond to help-seeking behaviour.

Chapter 7

Developing Socially-Supportive Environments

'It's the group that makes the biggest difference'

Athlete

This chapter reports on the two interventions delivered within The Club as part of this project's action research methodology: 'mental health literacy training' and 'connection workshops'. Beginning with an exploration of the psychosocial needs of athletes, this chapter provides an evidence-based rationale for why strengthening the presence of psychosocial supports within the HP system is the most effective approach to supporting athletes' wellbeing. Connecting this rationale to the WCC Approach to AW&E, later stages of the chapter explain how these interventions can be used strategically by elite sporting organisations to improve the systemic and cultural qualities of HP environments, remove the barriers which inhibit athletes' help-seeking, and improve the quality and accessibility of support throughout the athletes' network.

Defining Psychosocial Support

While there are an infinite number of unpredictable variables determining any individual's health, access to social connections and the support given/received through community and group networks is an undeniably significant factor (Rees 2007; Rees et al. 2015; Sheridan, Coffee & Lavalley 2014; Jowett & Lavalley 2007). So much so, that researchers have gone as far as to suggest that human beings' need for connection and group membership is *the* most important characteristic of our health (Forsyth & Burnett 2010). It is unsurprising, given our intuitive and instinctive nature, that we should seek out connection, a sense of belonging, and

shared identity from groups (Katagami & Tsuchiya 2016; Baumeister & Leary 1995). Yet, despite wide consensus on the importance of social connections for wellbeing, definitions appear to vary markedly between disciplines. As Veiel and Baumann (quoted in Rees & Hardy 2000, p. 4) state, ‘if asked, almost every researcher in the field will present a more or less precise definition of support, but, more than likely, it will be different from that of his or her colleagues’. What appears largely consistent across these variations however, are the terms used to define the constructs of psychosocial support, such as network size, social integration, quantity and quality of relationships, social resources, availability, and satisfaction with support (Rees & Hardy 2000). Through a more pragmatic approach, Sheridan, Coffee and Lavalley (2013, p. 198) promote the definition provided by Shumaker and Brownell (1984): that psychosocial support involves ‘an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or recipient to be intended to enhance the wellbeing of the recipient’.

More recent definitions however have focused on the dynamic qualities of psychosocial support as a multi-dimensional construct. Useful to the theoretical framework of this research project, Lakey’s (2010) interpretation of psychosocial support considers the structural (number and type of relationships) and individual (perceived and received support) aspects of interpersonal relationships. For the purposes of this chapter, a similarly multi-dimensional perspective of social connections assisted the project in undertaking both the *insight* (exploration into individual experience) and *impact* (interventions designed to address the cultural and systemic qualities of structure) research goals. Led by Besharov and Smith’s (2014) framework for analysing organisational logics, the theory is used to interpret existing, and to predict future barriers and pathways for more effective AW&E supports within HP systems. The following section begins this discussion by situating the need for psychosocial approaches to wellbeing support within HP contexts.

The Social Context of Elite Sport

Notwithstanding the lack of consensus between academics in defining social connections, it continues to be one of the most researched protective mental health resources, with a strong base of evidence demonstrating the essential nature of connection, belonging, and shared identity as fundamental basic human needs (Rees & Hardy 2000). As argued by Umberson and Montrez (2010, p. 54), those who are more socially connected are ‘healthier and live longer

than their more isolated peers’, and the consequences of social connection/isolation on individuals’ mental health (Chapman, Perry & Strine 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002; Thoits 1995), physical health (McEwen 1998; Seeman et al. 2002; Uchino 2004), health-related behaviour (Umberson & Montrez 2010), and mortality risk (Brummett et al. 2001; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002; Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser 2003), are well established across the literature. In fact, so significant is the value of social connection that it has long been promoted by The World Health Organisation as a priority area for global, national, and local public health policy. Yet, despite momentum advocating for socially-supportive environments as an effective early intervention and prevention approach within holistic models of health care (Rees 2007), Loughhead et al. (2016) argue that these perspectives have sparsely been considered within the context of elite sport. This is a surprise perhaps, given the over-representation of mental health issues among elite athletes, their predisposition to social isolation during periods of injury, and the short-termed, transient, and insecure nature of careers at the elite level (Du Preez et al. 2017; Rice et al. 2016; Dessauvague 2018). Martin, Eye and Spink (2016) explore these factors and argue that given the social nature of sporting organisations and athletes’ proclivity to working in groups, understanding the interpersonal and relational elements unique to HP environments is an essential consideration for practitioners and researchers working in athlete wellbeing. Discussing a range of factors linking athletes’ need to belong, perceptions of identity, and development of self-efficacy beliefs with a sense of connection and belonging within groups, an athlete participant in this research project stated:

Belonging is a big part of the team building process because regardless of our differences, at the end of the day, we’ve all got to pass that ball around with each other and pull on that same jumper. So for me, moving down here [from Brisbane], belonging was one of the hardest things for me at first, but now I’m heaps close to the boys, they’re not just team-mates, they’re like brothers to me.

[...]

It’s the group that makes the biggest difference. If you’ve got a good group of boys around you, who encourage you to talk but also notice the little changes in you, not just one or two that you can talk to, but knowing you could come out to the whole team – that’s it.

Athlete

Reflecting on their connection to team-mates and sense of belonging within their team, the athlete quoted here resonates with the protective factors associated with the psychosocial support that comes with a sense of connection and belonging to groups. Their experience comes well supported by the literature, with researchers such as Jowett and Lavallee (2007) having linked psychosocial support to individual and group outcomes, citing evidence of improved group cohesion, coping with competitive stress, managing and preventing slumps in performance and burnout, and resistance to injury distress. As stated clearly by Haslam (2014, p. 13, cited in Slater, Barker & Mellalieu 2017), ‘there is now a colossal literature that speaks to the importance of internalised group memberships for peoples’ sense of self, for their psychology more generally, and for their behaviour’. Given the consensus regarding the value of psychosocial support, the next steps into progress will undoubtedly come from developing best-practice standards and interventions that can support elite sporting organisations in strengthening these qualities. Although this is sparsely explored within an elite sporting context, Slater, Barker and Mellalieu (2017) suggest that the sector should take confidence from the successful application of such approaches within health, clinical, and organisational contexts, and should expect no different results in HP settings. Findings from this research project support this view, with socially-supportive relationships and the value of connection identified as the most frequently cited mental health and wellbeing protective factors. For Slater, Barker and Mellalieu (2017), this relates to the linkage between individuals and groups as a core feature of wellbeing, and implies that stronger individual connections within, and to groups, improve measures of self-efficacy and protective mental health resources by improving an individual’s ability to manage stress (Haslam et al. 2005), vulnerabilities to burnout (Haslam et al. 2009), and capacity to manage mental health issues such as depression (Cruwys et al. 2014).

Crucially, the value of connection and psychosocial support applies not only to wellbeing, but has also been linked to increases in team performance, functioning, cohesion, collective efficacy, and individual and group cognition (Haslam 2014; Anastasio et al. 1997; Fransen et al. 2014). As stated by an athlete and AW&E Manager, these are critical factors supporting the hybridity of wellbeing and performance logics:

When a team’s clicking on the field, they’re usually clicking off it too – anyone can see that.

Athlete

We need players coming into the game feeling like they've got the right kind of supportive people around them, if we want these blokes flourishing on the field and off it.

AW&E Manager

In these statements, the athlete and AW&E Manager highlight the hybrid gains that can occur between wellbeing and performance logics through psychosocial support and team connection. The WCC Approach to AW&E represents this view, by recognising the contribution that connection has on performance and how this can be achieved through a holistic approach to AW&E. Underpinned by foundational theories from ecological psychology (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 2005), systems theory (Lewin 1936), and cultural psychology (Hofstede 1997; Lee 2007), such holistic approaches blend wellbeing with performance by utilising a diverse range of psychosocial factors, including the need to train groups with supportive relationships, enhancing athletes' proximity of role models, supporting sporting and non-sporting goals, facilitating the development of psychosocial skills, creating training programs that allow for inclusion and diversification, communicating visions for long-term development, maintaining strong and coherent organisational cultures, and the effective integration of multi-disciplinary professionals (Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler's 2010). However, for participants in this thesis, tapping into these strategies and the performance gains associated with connection was considered largely dependent on how socially supportive a HP environment is. As the bridge between the individual and structural conditions which inform perception and action, an AW&E Manager argued that having a positive wellbeing culture in elite sport is critical, albeit rare:

It's about having people who can be there in a supportive role when it's needed and having people around who understand why it's important. And I don't think everyone understands that because usually, they see wellbeing as something different, something separate. But if you've got that kind of culture, it's gold.

AW&E Manager

Here the AW&E Manager suggests that organisational culture is at the centre of effective AW&E support systems. True, according to Kuettel and Larsen's (2020) comprehensive literature review of risk and protective factors affecting athletes' mental health, where

organisational culture and sport-specific environmental factors were recognised as some of the most consequential factors impacting upon the successful integration of AW&E supports into HP systems. There they cite mental health literacy (Breslin et al. 2017), trust in relation to help-seeking (Gulliver et al. 2012), and the nature of social supports within a sport-specific context (Lundqvist & Sandin 2014) as leading protective factors; while low support from team-mates (Gouttebauge et al. 2015), low support from the environment generally (Prinz et al. 2016), and stigma of help-seeking (Biggin et al. 2017), are detrimental risk factors.

Consistently across the literature, stigma was identified as the most dominant barrier affecting the help-seeking attitudes and behaviours of elite athletes (Souter, Lewis & Serrant 2018; Castaldelli-Maia et al. 2019). For Gulliver et al. (2012), this is of major concern, considering athletes' over-representation in mental health issues (46.4% of athletes experienced symptoms of at least one mental illness) such as depression (27.2%) and eating disorders (22.8%). More troublingly still, even these figures may be under-reported, given the impact of stigma on athletes' willingness to disclose mental health issues (Bauman 2016). For participants in this research project, concerns over the impact of stigma within the culture of elite sports remains an unresolved issue for the sector and one that is difficult to resolve, given the intense pressure on athletes to consistently exhibit mental and physical resilience. For elite-level rugby league athletes, these forces are particularly strong, given that a commitment towards athlete wellbeing is still struggling to find its place within the norms of rugby league culture. Kola-Palmer et al. (2020) have conducted one of very few studies specifically focused on the help-seeking behaviours of professional rugby league athletes in Australia and found issues related to stigma as contributing to their participants' common experiences of embarrassment, fear, and shame during periods of mental ill-health. Discussed by an athlete, the stigma impacting rugby league athletes is an ever-present and visceral discourse within HP cultures:

The stigma around males having to be tough is a difficult one, especially when you're a footy player. You know, we're thinking that we have to be tough and personally, I think a lot of the boys don't speak up about things because of it.

Athlete

Dessauvagic (2018) provides some explanation for these circumstances, stating that in the context of Australian professional sports, the perception that athletes are immune to, or protected from poor mental health, underpins harmful taboos preventing help-seeking

behaviour. Shared by an athlete, they recall the familiar trope that ‘*rugby league is a hard sport played by hard men*’ and believe that these attitudes manifest into beliefs that mental health issues and help-seeking behaviours are a sign of weakness. Problematically, according to a S&C coach, these are cultural norms which are conditioned into athletes from a very young age, long before they enter the HP system:

I think that for rugby league in general, you're growing up at a young age where from your under 10s, under 11s, under 12s, you know, you're told not to hurt, just get up and be tough. And that's not necessarily the right way to be but I think, well, that's just the reality of rugby league. Even now, we tell the boys that when they're on the football field, they don't show when they're tired or when they're hurting. We'll say, 'get your hands off your hips, stand up straight, don't fucking bend over' and that then probably carries over into their personal life.

S&C Coach

In this statement, the S&C coach reflects on their observations and experiences of rugby league culture and how those experiences shape athletes’ identity and self-concept. Their example captures the conflict between the role of sport as a protective factor in the development of young peoples’ lives and the values of aggression and toughness that are common to rugby league cultures, where at the centre, exists a harmful status quo. Fortunately, a progressive exploration of a range of intervention methods has emerged, to challenge these issues. The following section investigates these strategies, before comparing findings from the literature with an analysis of this project’s action research interventions.

Elite Sport-Specific Intervention Methods

As psychosocial support becomes increasingly recognised as a vital protective resource for athletes’ wellbeing, so do trials and evaluations of environmental interventions designed specifically to improve athletes’ sense of connection within socially-supportive environments. Gorczynski et al. (2019, p. 715) advocate for the benefits of these forms of support but caution that collective action is required to ‘not only develop and use knowledge, but also change attitudes, overcome stigma, and provide and take opportunities to get help’. This is because, as Moreland et al. (as cited in Kuettel & Larson 2020) highlight, AW&E support systems are most effective when the many stakeholders (athletes, coaches,

administrators and managers, etc.) of HP environments exhibit attributes (attitudes and behaviours) which work as facilitators of that system. Put simply by Gulliver et al. (2012, p. 12), facilitators involve ‘positive attitudes from peers, and positive relationships with providers’ and this, according to O’Connor and Cavanagh (2013), informs how positive and negative attitudes, opinions, and behaviours towards wellbeing are predictive of athletes’ flourishing or languishing at the individual level (Fredrickson & Losada 2005; Waugh & Fredrickson 2006), dyadic level (Gottman & Levenson 1992) and team or group level (Losada & Heaphy 2004). Importantly, as Henriksen & Stambulova (2017, p. 279) argue, interventions designed to increase ‘facilitators’ must be implemented, with the view of improving sporting cultures holistically across all levels. They provide the following guidelines to doing so:

- Conduct the intervention inside the athletes’ natural setting rather than in an office.
- Involve the entire environment (e.g., coaches, managers, teammates) in the intervention.
- Aim to optimise the entire environment around the athlete or team.
- See the athletes as whole human beings and to facilitate the development of a holistic package of psychosocial resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, attitudes, network) that will be of use for the athletes both in and outside of sport.

Henriksen and Stambulova’s (2017) recommendations are a useful guide for environmental interventions designed to improve the accessibility and quality of support within the natural moments of athletes’ day-to-day lives. The interventions delivered through this project’s actions research methodology embed these recommendations as part of the over-arching WCC Approach to AW&E, which adds to the existing AW&E Framework through the strengthening of primary (targeting the organisational environment and the conditions which impact athletes), secondary (focusing on supporting athletes’ response to organisational stress), and tertiary (concerned with minimising the impact of stress and improving athletes’ capacity to cope) levels of support (Fletcher & Arnold 2016, p. 92). The remainder of this chapter evaluates how ‘mental health literacy training’ and ‘connection workshops’ can do so, to support elite sporting organisations’ efforts in realising the WCC Approach to AW&E.

Mental Health Literacy Training

As reviewed in Chapter 4, a growing body of evidence points to the fact that a career in elite sport exposes athletes to a number of unique vulnerabilities (Bauman 2016; Donohue et al. 2007). According to Evans et al. (cited in Breslin et al. 2017, p. 2), these pressures often include, but are not limited to, extended times being separated from family, negative emotional consequences of injury, increased risk of substance and alcohol abuse, and concerns relating to the pressures associated with media coverage and general reactions from the public. Bauman (2016) believes that despite awareness of these vulnerabilities, sporting cultures are ineffectively managing the wellbeing risks associated with these factors, leading to the overrepresentation of athletes in regard to certain mental health issues (Du Preez et al. 2017; Rice et al. 2016; Dessauvage 2018). For participants in this research project, this was considered to be due largely to the stigma associated with mental health help-seeking and the pressure to present as '*mentally tough*'.

Gorczyński et al. (2020) suggest that mental health literacy training programs could play an important role in challenging and combating these issues. Mental health literacy training, an education-based intervention used to increase the individual's ability to identify the signs and symptoms of mental illness, knowledge of positive mental health management and preventative measures, treatment options, and appropriate crisis response actions (Jorm et al. 1997; Jorm 2000; Gorczyński et al. 2020; Breslin et al. 2017; Sebbens et al. 2016), has been shown to improve athletes' trust in the environmental conditions within which they operate, and the quality of support available to them within these spaces (Kuettel & Larson 2020; Ivarsson et al. 2015; Verner-Filion & Vallerand, 2018). This is because, as stated by Gorczyński et al. (2020, p. 715), mental health literacy involves not only developing and using knowledge, but also 'changing attitudes, overcoming stigma, and providing and taking opportunities to get help'. In this way, mental health literacy programs play an important role in the WCC Approach to AW&E, as a mechanism for developing socially-supportive environments. Highlighting why mental health literacy is such a necessary and valuable asset for HP members, a S&C coach explains how, due to their consistent exposure and access to athletes, they are often in positions to facilitate their help-seeking behaviour:

Yeah, they definitely do [help-seek]. Usually it's instances where they're asking for advice, where you know, I guess they look to you to sort of say 'this is what's happened'

or 'what can I do about this situation'. And I think it's a good thing. It's definitely a good thing that they feel like they can come and talk to you about those things.

S&C Coach

As another example of the ways in which athletes frequently seek support from within the HP network, this quote demonstrates why it is important to strengthen the psychosocial support available to athletes within these spaces. In order for these supports to be effective however, it is necessary that members of the HP environment be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to facilitate athletes' help-seeking appropriately. This is critical, considering that within an Australian elite sporting context, it is expected that only 24% of coaches and staff have had prior mental health training (Sebbens et al. 2016). In the context of this research project, while the mental health literacy of athletes and staff was not explicitly quantified, numerous interview participants discussed the significance of mental health literacy in creating a socially-supportive environment. As shared by a S&C coach, their teaching background had provided them with prior experience with psychosocial support to students, which prepared them to undertake similar responsibilities within their current sporting role:

I worked in schools for quite some time. About six years. And I've worked in behavioural schools, to support units, to mainstream classes. So I've had a lot of interactions around mental health and had to get comfortable with that. So I think that helps. Especially working in the behavioural schools and that kind of stuff, there is quite a bit of mental health stuff there. So I've had some experience that is useful in my current role at [The Club], but it's definitely an area that I think everyone can get better at.

S&C Coach

A number of research participants made similar connections between a prior professional role and their level of mental health literacy. For example, the head coach of the JFC squad related their mental health literacy to work experience in the social work sector, an AW&E Manager of the ARL discussed the relevancy of their post-graduate psychology degree, while a PDM of The Club discussed their years working in the police force. In each case, they felt their past experiences had empowered them not only to be effective psychosocial supports for athletes but also to act as agents of change in resisting the traditionally stigmatising discourses that are common in HP systems. In fact, it was feedback from these participants, in addition to calls

throughout the literature, that motivated the decision to facilitate a mental health literacy training program at The Club as part of this project's action research methodology.

The program, delivered organisationally wide to athletes and staff, involved three two-hour workshops focused on improving participants' ability to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental illness, to understand protective and risk factors unique to elite athletes, the common mental health disorders among elite athletes and the evidence-based (medical, psychological, and social) treatments used to support them, in addition to practical modules designed to improve the facilitation of help-seeking and appropriate crisis response actions (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description of connection workshops). The following quotes from a PDM and two athlete participants in the mental health literacy workshops, describe some impressions of the program's value and impact:

The presentations were about real serious issues, mental health, and saying that mental health is real. This is how you can identify it and this is what you can do to fix it. To me we're talking about life and death, that's how seriously I see it, right? So yeah, it's definitely important.

PDM

Yeah, real good. Like just knowing what the right thing to say is and what to look out for. Talking about mental health and footy specifically too, that makes it more relatable to us boys.

Athlete

I feel like more time should be put into like workshops or things you can do to build more mental health, or like being able to cope with adversity because me personally, I didn't really have someone when I was doing it tough and I've seen what happens when boys don't know what to do and they fall down the wrong path. It's super common.

Athlete

The three participants here highlight the importance that psychosocial support has on the wellbeing of elite athletes and the role that mental health literacy training can have in increasing the quality of support available to them. These experiences come well supported by the literature, with evidence demonstrating the impact of mental health literacy on the

improvement of wellbeing cultures within HP systems (Gorczynski et al. 2020, p. 715) and with positive impacts cited in relation to levels of negative affect (Longshore and Sachs 2015), knowledge of mental health disorders (Pierce et al. 2010; Sebbens et al. 2016), levels of stigma (Bapat, Jorm & Lawrence 2009), confidence to support others experiencing poor mental health (Breslin et al. 2017; Pierce et al. 2010; Sebbens et al. 2016), and confidence to seek support from a mental health professional (Bapat, Jorm & Lawrence 2009). The only study exploring mental health literacy within an NRL context, Ravulo's (2015) mixed-methods evaluation of the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)²² course delivered to 120 participants (made up of PDMs, coaching staff, and select athletes from across all 16 clubs) between 2013-2015, reiterates the improvement in provision of support produced through mental health literacy training but also highlights how these programs facilitate consciousness raising and self-reflection at the individual level. As one of their participants shared, 'Having lived with mental illness for the past 16 years, the MHFA Instructor has shed a lot more light on my problems I face on a daily basis' (Ravulo 2015, p. 8).

Prochaska and DiClemente's (1984) transtheoretical model of behaviour change²³ is a useful tool for understanding this relationship, where through psychoeducation athletes are able to self-identify mental health issues, understand treatment responses and, in turn, seek appropriate support. In this way, mental health literacy training has the potential to normalise mental health, challenge the stigma present within HP cultures, and promote norms of behaviour which better facilitate help-seeking and access to support. In effect, mental health literacy training, as an intervention utilising the experiential and behavioural processes outlined by Prochaska and

²² Considered the 'gold-standard' for mental health literacy training programs in Australia, the MHFA (Kitchner & Jorm 2002) is a 2-day program designed to teach members of the public mental health first aid strategies to assist a person who is developing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis.

²³ Summarised by Park, Tod & Lavalley (2012, p. 445) in their analysis of elite athletes' transitions into retirement, the model consists of five key stages: pre-contemplation (individuals do not consider any change in behaviour), contemplation (individuals are aware of a need to change their behaviour), preparation (people intend to take an action), action (actual changes occur), and maintenance (the changed behaviour lasts for longer than 6 months).

DiClemente (1984)²⁴, can be an effective strategy for improving the systemic and cultural qualities of structure within HP environments, as well as empowering the individual experience of agency.

Given the breadth of support for mental health literacy training programs, both anecdotal and evidence-based, leaders of elite sporting organisations should feel confident in implementing these programs under the WCC Approach to AW&E. This is important because, as stated by an AW&E Manager of the ARL, *'it takes a whole club to look after an athlete'* and *'the more people looking out for them, the better'*. Critically however, long-term organisational change-making requires leaders and group members' 'professional commitments, personal interests, and interactional, on-the-ground decision making' to reflect a broader shift in culture (Binder 2007, p. 547), where alongside mental health literacy training, 'connection workshops' can provide athletes and HP staff with the opportunity to interact in an environment unaffected by the stigmatising discourses of HP sport. The following section details this intervention and how it works in tandem with mental health literacy training programs under the WCC Approach to AW&E.

Connection Workshops

As interventions that 'promote an increased sense of unity and cohesiveness and enable the team to function together more smoothly and effectively' (Newman 1984, p. 27), connection workshops are, generally speaking, premised upon the mutual-sharing of personal life

²⁴ As a tool for intervention, the model includes ten practice-based strategies designed to motivate progress, which include five experiential processes: consciousness raising (increasing information about the problematic behaviour), self-re-evaluation (assessing one's feelings and thoughts), dramatic relief (expressing emotions about problematic behaviour), environmental re-evaluation (assessing how one's problematic behaviour or change influences others), and helping relationships (social support); and five behavioural processes: reinforcement management (rewarding self-changes), self-liberation (taking action or self-belief in one's ability to change), counter-conditioning (finding alternative behaviour), social liberation (increasing alternative external resources), and stimulus control (avoiding stimulation of the problem behaviour).

experiences to improve interpersonal relationships, adaptive cognitions (self-efficacy and satisfaction), and overall work conditions (Dryden 2006; Dunn & Holt 2004). Often referred to as ‘personal-disclosure mutual sharing’ (PDMS), these types of interventions are described by Barker et al. (2014, p. 187) as the ‘communication of morals, beliefs, attitudes, and personal motives which in turn augment perceptions, meanings, constructs, and understanding ... PDMS may augment athletes’ perceptions of closeness, similarity, and bonding which represents group integration’. As noted in Chapter 1, these relate to the ‘relative presence of five characteristics of the collective’ outlined in Martin, Eye & Spink (2016, p. 222):

- common fate (e.g., a group outcome).
- mutual benefit (i.e., participation with others is necessary and rewarding).
- social structure (e.g., presence of group norms, individual roles).
- group processes (e.g., meaningful and sustained communication).
- self-categorisation (i.e., members view themselves as a group).

In the context of this research project, connection workshops were used to strengthen the five group processes as a means of improving the psychosocial support network within the HP environments. However, unlike PDMS (which is premised upon supporting athlete disclosures and typically is used as a performance enhancement strategy), connection workshops are a strengths-based approach that provides athletes and HP staff with the opportunity to connect in an interrupted space unaffected by stigma, to develop athletes’ sense of belonging and relationship to the efficacy and shared identity of the group. As an approach to group work practice that positions each participant as both mentor and mentee to each member of the group, connection workshops explore the individual and shared lived experiences of participants, to create opportunities for peer support to take place²⁵ (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description of connection workshops and the procedure for data analysis). Reflecting on their experience of the connection workshops, participants in this research project found the program improved

²⁵ In practice, four 90-minute connection workshops were facilitated by an experienced external social work group work practitioner and an in-group athlete leader with 10 years of NRL experience. Recruitment was carried out in consultation with The Club’s AW&E Team and General Manager; in total, between 30-35 athletes and 1-5 coaching staff were present at each of the four workshops.

relationships and trust, decreased stigmatising attitudes, and increased help-seeking behaviour. The following quotes give insight into these experiences:

Myself personally, I walked away from the first one thinking 'fuck, this is massive, this is heaps good'. I do feel a bit of a change in how tight we are.

I think by showing that vulnerability it's going to be infectious. Last week, it was one or two, this week it was three or four or five, next time it's going to be six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and all of a sudden it's the norm.

What I've noticed is people asking more like, 'Hey, how you going?' The culture has changed a bit. So previously, I'll get to training and everyone will be in their different groups, but I've noticed recently that a lot more people are mixing in, hanging out, mingling, that sort of thing.

For a few weeks, I was actually keen on coming to training early just to get into that workshop.

Athletes

In these statements, the athlete participants observe a visceral shift in team dynamics and report a stronger sense of connection throughout the HP network as a result of the connection workshops. In a further evaluation, via survey, all connection workshop participants were asked to rate the perceived impact of the connection workshops on a 10-point Likert scale (0= none at all; 10 = a noticeably significant positive impact) on personal development (avg. 7.61), team connection (avg. 7.22), and playing performance (avg. 6.32). Subjective as this feedback may be, athletes and HP coaching staff confidently expressed their belief in the diverse value of connection workshops as a hybrid practice blending wellbeing and performance logics. Sharing their observations, the head coach of the JFC squad stated:

We started the year 0 in 6 [match wins] before the workshops and then after the workshops we finished 9 in 1. I won't say that it was a fluke. I think it had a lot to do with the side coming together as a group and the quality of the workshops, I think, really brought our team together.

Head Coach

While the head coach's view on the team's upturn in performance is conjecture, their belief that connection workshops can have an impact on performance is supported by an emerging body of literature (Evans et al. 2013; Woodcock & Francis 1994; Dunn & Holt 2004; Barker et al. 2014) and in particular, Dunn and Holt's (2004) evaluations of PDMS workshops, which demonstrate enhanced understanding (of self and others), increased cohesion (closeness and playing for each other), and improved confidence (confidence in teammates and feelings of invincibility). Importantly, in the view of wellbeing advocates participating in this research project, these benefits are vital, as they are the incentive that will likely earn the interest of head coaches and see wellbeing logics readily integrated into the HP system with a greater degree of centrality. As shared by an athlete, more available evidence to support the performance-enhancing properties of PDMS workshops might have kept The Club from discontinuing a similar program run prior to the commencement of this research project:

We touched on vulnerability but all we did was share three things that mean something to you, so it was only at the surface level. But even still, we had probably 85% of our players cry when they explained certain things and their significance. I just think that there is so much value in this stuff for an NRL squad. There's just so much value in that deep connection and that vulnerability.

[...]

We were as close as we've ever been as a group in the years I've been here, where guys actually got that little bit more of an understanding about people, and obviously groups still exist, they exist in society and they exist everywhere, that's just reality, but when everyone knows a little bit more intimate detail about everyone you can just feel that bond. I still scratch my head, like I'm thinking, 'there's just so much value in it'. And I get that the club wanted to see it piloted first, that's fair. And I get that off the back of the leadership workshops they felt they had dipped into that a bit already. But in the end, they went for pure leadership, performance, and that was it. They've sort of left the connection off.

Athlete

Discussing their experience of PDMS workshops facilitated prior to this research project, the athlete emphasises the perceived value of connection-based workshops and their frustration at The Club's decision to discontinue them. They highlight how the PDMS workshops were

replaced by programs based on ‘pure leadership’ and ‘performance’, reflecting the low levels of centrality held by wellbeing logics within HP systems. One solution, presented by Windsor, Barker and McCarthy (2011), was to follow the wishes of athletes to exclude managers, coaches, and technical staff from PDMS programs. However, while this may be a way of empowering the views and voices of athletes, it does not align with the WCC Approach to AW&E. As advocated by a AW&E Manager of the ARL, it is important that all HP members, particularly leaders, are involved in these kind of initiatives:

Most coaches will buy into it but don't feel they need to necessarily be a part of it. They'll understand it and go 'yeah, that's fine, you do what you need to do', but they'll want to stay outside of the room while we do it because they don't want to be a part of it. Whereas the best ones have said, 'I'll stand next to you because I support what you're saying and I want to build a good culture'. Now there's an important difference there.

AW&E Manager

By highlighting the value of the head coach’s support and their influence on the culture of HP environments, the quoted AW&E Manager reiterates the critical role that leaders *in and of* elite sporting organisations have to either lead change or to reinforce the systemic and cultural concerns of HP structures. Their point relates to key messages raised throughout Chapter 6, particularly with regard to the impact and influence of head coaches on the HP environment, and recognises the need to engage all members of the HP network in the WCC Approach to AW&E. As an intervention designed to encourage the WCC Approach to AW&E, connection workshops aim to create a platform for the exchange of psychosocial support, in a safe and controlled environment. Moreover, with the added benefit of mental health literacy training as a means of equipping participants with the requisite knowledge and skills to facilitate help-seeking, these interventions could play a significant role in shifting the discourse of wellbeing within HP systems and drastically improve athletes’ access to effective supports.

Chapter Summary

This chapter acknowledges the linkage between individuals and groups as a core feature of wellbeing and provides an alternative methodology for supporting athletes’ wellbeing. It presents two interventions (mental health literacy training and connection workshops) that elite

sporting organisations can use to develop the WCC Approach to AW&E within their clubs, and the evidence supporting their impact on the systemic and cultural qualities of structure. The following chapter continues to discuss the implementation of the WCC Approach to AW&E, at the institutional level of analysis, through an investigation into the AW&E Framework implemented by the ARL. Led by an organisational logic analysis of the blending between wellbeing and commercial logics, it highlights the limitations of a centrally governed AW&E Framework, advocates for stronger investment into psychosocial supports at the individual and organisational levels, and explores what structural adjustments need to take place in order for the WCC Approach to AW&E to be realised across the League.

Chapter 8

Centering the Athlete

'It's complex, but it's just having a system in place that understands the complexity of it and putting the athlete at the centre of it'

AW&E Manager

This chapter enters the institutional level of analysis and explores matters relating to wellbeing governance. Using organisational logic theory, it identifies the spaces of organisational stress that are produced through ineffective forms of hybridity, with the blending of wellbeing and commercial logics analysed in closer detail. In doing so, it discusses the recent 'massification' wellbeing governance (relating to the bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation of programs) and the impact that this has had on the legitimacy and success of the ARL's AW&E Framework, as it appears to this research project's participants. In response to this feedback, this chapter continues to advocate for the psychosocial approach to wellbeing support within HP environments, and details what structural changes are required by the ARL in order to see the WCC Approach to AW&E come into full effect.

The Multi-Dimensional Needs of Athletes

While much of the sports-psychology literature is interested in the individual cognitive functions and processes of athletes in managing in-game stressors and improving performance, there is growing recognition of the relevance of group dynamics as a credible component of individual and team performance (Martin, Eye & Spink 2016). As explored throughout Chapters 6 and 7, the effect of diverse personal and professional factors on team connection

and cohesion is one of the most frequently researched topics in competitive sport (Carron et al. 2002). What has received less interest from researchers however, is the interconnectedness of groups not only *within* HP networks, but *between* groups at various levels of organisational function. In the pluralistic context of elite sporting institutions and the plethora of logics that they contain, understanding these relationships and the various actions that they motivate, is essential to this research project's organisational logic analysis. For Lakey (2010), it requires a view of the research field within a multi-dimensional construct that connects the individual to the organisational, and the institutional, as each influences and is influenced by the other in shaping the dynamic structural conditions in which athletes experience their agency. Put plainly by Martin, Eye and Spink (2016) this is essential, because athletes do not operate in isolation and thus, should not be researched in this way either. Moreover, with complex networks comes specific cognitive qualities that lead to a wide range of emotions, attitudes, and behaviours that must also be taken in context. In an elite sporting context, this relates to the interconnectedness of disciplinary groups across multiple levels, given the diverse agendas of the sector and the spectrum of stakeholders that it encompasses at the individual (S&C coaches, physiotherapists, marketing strategists, investors, etc.), organisational (performance staff, medical professionals, commercial teams, etc.), and institutional levels (elite sporting organisations, governing bodies, media, government, etc.). Speaking to the interconnectedness of groups in relation to athlete wellbeing, Slater, Barker and Mellalieu (2017, p. 259) make the impactful statement that 'understanding, integrating, and enhancing these multi-level social identities is a key ingredient for effective change management'. As discussed by an AW&E Manager of the ARL, the effect that multiplicity has on athletes' experience of wellbeing are important, albeit difficult to navigate:

Well you've got all of these competing, sometimes conflicting interests in our game, and they're all trying to get a little piece of the athlete. I think as a group we have to go back to defining what wellbeing for an athlete actually looks like and have the athlete at the centre because with all these competing influences everybody has got vested interests and they don't always have the athlete's wellbeing as their focus. So it's understanding what wellbeing is in a complex system, I believe.

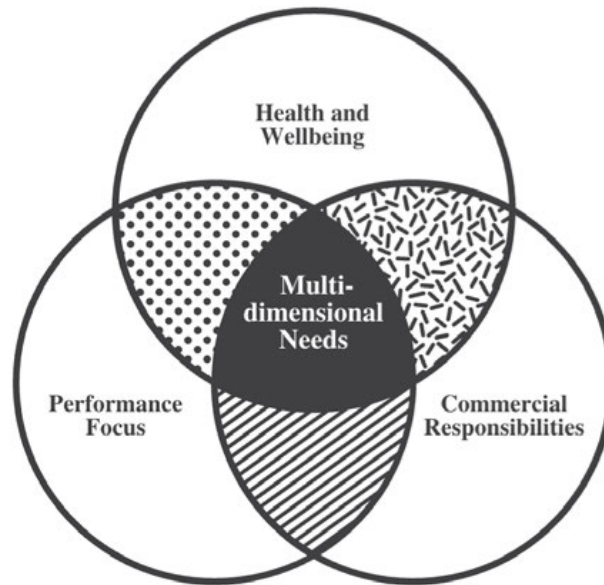
AW&E Manager

In this statement, the AW&E Manager discusses the presence of multiplicity, the complications that this creates, and the need to re-conceptualise an understanding of athlete wellbeing within

a multi-dimensional construct. In referencing 'Organisational stress', a term used to classify the influence of structural conflict, the AW&E Manager alludes to the 'complex social and organisational environments that athletes operate within' and how this impacts on the athlete's experience of wellbeing (Fletcher & Arnold 2016, p. 83). This is a critical space for inquiry, according to Jones (2002), who suggests that organisational stressors are some of the major challenges to wellbeing supports within HP systems, and the root of some of the most impactful psychosocial factors affecting athletes' wellbeing. Research gives evidence to this claim, demonstrating the impact of organisational stress on measures of environmental control (decision-making autonomy), personal growth, risk of athlete burnout, athlete satisfaction, and performance (Fletcher et al. 2012; Sohal, Gervis & Rhind 2013). What appears abundantly clear from an exploration of organisational stress literature is that these factors undoubtedly lead to a number of crucial wellbeing outcomes for athletes (Simpson, Didymus & Williams 2021; Cooper et al. 2021; Didymus & Fletcher 2014; Feddersen et al. 2014; Wachsmuth et al. 2014).

Research by Fletcher and Arnold (2011) investigates how elite sporting organisations might undertake this task and discusses the need to align members with a shared vision of success that brings the collective interests of elite sporting organisations to the fore, as opposed to organisational structures which promote the independent functioning of departmental groups. Lane et al.'s (2020) model for conceptualising the multi-dimensional needs of elite athletes is an attempt at aligning logics, where they have amalgamated elite sports diverse interests at their intersection with the athlete experience.

Figure 9: A model for conceptualising the multi-dimensional needs of elite athletes (Lane et al. 2020, p. 12)



Lane et al.'s (2020, p. 12) 'Model for Conceptualising the Multi-Dimensional Needs of Elite Athletes' reasons that by strategising to blend the varied interests of multiple logics in a way that makes them compatible, rather than in conflict, elite sporting organisations can tap into a range of hybrid benefits. They use their analysis of athletes' experiences in mainstream education programs to demonstrate this, revealing a number of systemic limitations disadvantaging athletes from achieving and succeeding in tertiary education programs and highlighting how the interconnectedness (or at times disconnectedness) between disciplinary and/or departmental groups indicates the need for greater alignment of organisations' goals. Exemplifying the organisational stress produced as a consequence of misalignment, an AW&E Manager of the ARL discussed how low levels of centrality (shared hierarchy of logics) and compatibility (mutual benefit between logics) between groups can impact upon the wellbeing experiences of retired players:

Well because we service the player, we want to give them the best experience possible when they're leaving the game. It's really important for us that they feel they've been treated well while a part of the game and that they've been acknowledged when leaving and for them, having an experience on grand final day is sort of a celebration of that. But each year, the commercial team will tell us that they don't have any space for us

and so they put us in a corporate room upstairs where there are no kids allowed, and so we'll say, 'This is their moment on grand final day and they're going to want to have their kids with him', and the response is usually, 'No, sorry, this is the only space we can give you because we've sold everything else'. So they're trying to hit their targets and make sure they can sell what they can sell to increase the profits they make from game day, and I get that, but it means that we're left without a space. From our perspective, we're like, 'Can't you see that it's important that we have a space for these guys? They've put a lot of time and effort into the game', but in the end, I'll have to remind myself that they're operating on numbers and figures and we're operating on emotion and connection. So that's just an example of that disconnect between the different parts of the organisation, and that's not just at our level, I know that's what happens out in clubs as well. There's the administration, commercial, whatever else, community, football department over the other side, and everyone is just worrying about their stuff thinking, 'let's keep it all separate'.

AW&E Manager

In this example, the AW&E Manager highlights a situation of organisational stress and the ineffective hybridity of logics that underpins that conflict which, as is often the case in elite sporting organisations, is resolved in favour of the more dominant commercial logic. For wellbeing logics, this is problematic, given the low levels of centrality that it carries (matters of centrality are explored further in Chapter 10). Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler's (2010) ATDE model looks at these concerns from a HP systems perspective and attempts to reconcile issues with an approach to organisational alignment that blends the performance with wellbeing logics. It is critical to one of their case-studies that it shows how ineffective communication between logic groups is often the cause of logic tension. Discussing the common dismissal of non-athletic pursuits within HP systems, such as education, a student-athlete participant in their research project shared the view that 'My schoolteachers ... do not know my tournament plan. And the coaches know just as little about when I am overloaded with homework. I do not have the impression that they ever talk to each other'. Central to this statement is the nature of *process* and how athletes navigate the inter-connectedness of groups, which from an organisational logic perspective relates to hybridity and the ways in which subgroups influence each other while pursuing different goals and producing different outcomes. Macintosh and Burton (2019 p. 172), considering these challenges, isolate the flow of communication and the negotiation of interests as being critical to the effective hybridity of multiple logics, and

describe four types of communication patterns that typically take place in organisational settings:

- Downward: communication occurs from an authoritarian standpoint.
- Upwards: feedback and consultation is provided to leaders from lower levels of a hierarchy.
- Lateral: communication between groups are of equal status.
- External: sending information or resources to partnering stakeholders.

Significantly for their thesis, Macintosh and Burton (2019) state that while communication patterns often develop organically and are nuanced by the complex dynamics of elite sporting organisations, there exists a need to strategically and intentionally implement systems which empower collaboration between groups. This is applicable to the example provided by the AW&E Manager in the previous quote, where hierarchical, rather than upward or lateral communication takes place, reflecting the low levels of centrality within elite sporting organisations, whereby the dominant group operates at the core of organisational functioning and less-dominant groups are pushed to the periphery. The following section, ‘centering the athlete’ explores these issues and presents possible solutions, according to the insight of this research project’s participants.

Centering the Athlete

Feedback from this project’s research participants demonstrates that the low levels of compatibility and centrality underpinning wellbeing logics are a significant producer of organisational stress for athletes. Namely, they explain that because wellbeing is perceived as having little value, athletes are rarely consulted on matters which relate to their experience of wellbeing, resulting in a loss of agency that de-values their contributions to their organisations and limits the scope for collaboration between them. For example, as discussed by an AW&E Manager of the ARL, athletes are mandated to engage in a plethora of community programs where, without consultation they become motivated by compliance, rather than a genuine appreciation for the value of their participation:

They have to do ten community visits a year, right, so then it becomes, ‘Alright what am I up to? I’ve only got seven to go. Once I get that out of the way I don’t have to do

anything anymore'. So the altruistic approach is completely gone and it's just about filling a quota.

AW&E Manager

The AW&E Manager here observes the disenfranchising effect that downward patterns of communication have on athletes' engagement in community programs, reflecting the ineffective hybridity between wellbeing, community, and – crucially – *commercial* logics. Because The Club's community partnerships are primarily led by commercial logics under the premise of corporate social responsibility (discussed further in Chapter 9), they do not service the community to their full potential, nor do they tap into the interests and passions of the athletes who represent The Club at those occasions, leading to the manifesting of a view among athletes and PDMs that these programs are tokenistic and disingenuous. What this means is that, similarly to what was discussed during Chapter 6, where athletes of the NRL team were seen to diverge from the HP environment to seek support from outside of the organisation's core, the same patterns of divergent behaviour occurred in relation to community programs, where athletes, supported by PDMs, intentionally disassociated themselves from the organisation's community programs to instead engage independently with community on the basis of their interests and passions, despite their contractual obligations and the financial penalties that nonconformity incurs. Recalling an experience shared with an athlete of The Club, a PDM tells the story of a private visit to the local children's hospital:

Honestly, it was just amazing. And there were no cameras. There was no one around. He went because he actually wanted to go. It was absolutely beautiful mate.

PDM

Despite the heartening actions of the athlete demonstrated in this anecdote, their actions reflect the sense of distrust held by athletes in relation to community programs, and the ineffective logic structures which cause their divergence from them. From an organisational logic perspective, circumventing these issues requires more effective ways of blending the diverse interests of elite sporting organisations with higher levels of compatibility and centrality, through lateral forms of communication with athletes. As Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 368) state, this begins by improving the interconnectedness of the organisational network, given that 'when members have close relationships to one another or are more interdependent, they are motivated to develop more compatible ways of enacting multiple logics (Smets et al. 2012).

This enables efficient and effective organisational action, and fosters group cohesion (McPherson & Sauder, 2013). To example what this means from a practical standpoint, a PDM of The Club explains that by engaging with athletes through lateral forms of communication, they develop more collaborative relationships and compatible ways of working together:

It's not revolutionary. Like some people are interested in such and such and some people are interested in others. And that's just getting to know them. So like [athlete] is the ambassador with the children's hospital and [athlete] is the ambassador at the McDonald House. So if ever there's something at those places, they're the ones that you grab. They're the ones that have got an interest in that. And you know what, if they do, they'll walk around grabbing blokes to go with them as well. I've seen it, it's lovely, it's really nice. I've seen guys walk down the decks asking, 'Does anyone want to come with me?'

PDM

In this statement, the PDM addresses issues associated with the systems that facilitate community programs and advocates for greater alignment between the interests of athletes and elite sporting organisations. Relating to athletes' sense of agency, they explain how collaborative relationships are an important and empowering element of an athlete's wellbeing (Kuettel & Larsen 2020; Lundqvist & Sandin 2014; Martin, Eye & Spink 2016). One interview participant used a phrase linked to the philosophy of the WCC Approach to AW&E, 'centering the athlete' to promote decision-making processes which further recognise athletes as primary and critical stakeholders. By allowing athletes to contribute to the decisions that affect them, elite sporting organisations are more able to improve the levels of centrality and compatibility that exist across logics, and in doing so, are more likely to produce successful hybrid outcomes. Further explaining what this looks like in relation to commercial partnerships, an AW&E Manager explains:

I think sometimes the staff at clubs get it wrong. They're competing because they're all under pressure to perform themselves – I need this guy to do this for me, or go out with this corporate for their event, or go to this golf day – but it doesn't fit in with their interests. If the people orchestrating this all understood their athletes, they could sit around a table and negotiate what they're involved in. I think it'd be much better. Look, corporates are important to the game, sure, but why can't we meet their needs and still

have the athlete at the centre? That means asking, 'What's best for him?', because if he's got an interest in a particular business and you've got corporate partners from that industry, why wouldn't you align them? Suddenly the athlete's got buy-in. So it's complex, but it's just having a system in place that understands the complexity of it and putting the athlete at the centre of it.

AW&E Manager

Explaining what it means to 'centre the athlete', the AW&E manager conceptualises a system that connects athletes to their organisations as equal collaborators, through hybrid practices and services that bring athletes into the core of decision-making processes, and exploring what is beneficial to both agendas. In many ways, their vision aspires towards Besharov and Smith's (2014) 'aligned' organisational model (high centrality; high compatibility), whereby all organisational members experience a degree of collective agency through a unified set of goals, values, and systems accommodating to multiple logics. Asked whether they had ever observed an elite sporting organisation where athletes are willingly contributing towards, and benefiting from the businesses' commercial operations, an AW&E Manager replied with the following anecdote:

One of the clubs I worked at, or two of them actually, were very good at having management meetings where you'd get to hear what other parts of the business needed and that. And the commercial teams would come to us and say, 'Hey, we've got this thing coming up, is there anyone that we can tap into?', and if you've got a good understanding of the athletes and what they're looking for, or what gets them interested, then you've got an opportunity to go and talk to them and say, 'Hey mate, you know there's this business thing on Friday and I know you like playing golf and I know you've got an interest in this kind of industry – would you like to go?', and nine times out of ten if you approach them in the right way, they'll say, 'Yeah, absolutely'.

AW&E Manager

In this quote, the AW&E Manager reiterates the need to centre athletes within the intersection of elite sporting organisations' pluralistic interests, by amalgamating athletes' commercial responsibilities with their individual personal and/or professional interests, to the reciprocal benefit of both parties. Critically, they highlight the need for increased wellbeing centrality, as relating to the agency of athletes, and advocate for improved process, premised upon patterns

of lateral communication. While these are not ‘revolutionary’ ideas, their experiences reflect the lack of collaboration and athlete-empowerment that is common within elite sporting organisations. The following section, ‘AW&E Governance Structures’, explores how these same issues are produced in relation to the AW&E Framework and what is required to correct them. In doing so, it moves on from the kind of interaction between groups *within* elite sporting organisations, to evaluate the levels of organisational stress that exist *between* organisational levels. It supports this research project’s participants’ advocacy for ‘centering the athlete’, as an important element of the WCC Approach to AW&E.

AW&E Governance Structures

Across a number of interviews, participants from this research project (particularly PDMs) directed their concerns for athlete wellbeing towards the AW&E Framework²⁶ and the systems that regulate the provision of support. Systems considered to be responsible for significant levels of organisational stress, participants spoke candidly about the patterns of downward communication from the ARL, the impact that this has on their capacity to undertake their role effectively and the vicarious influence that this has on the discourse and culture of wellbeing within HP systems. For PDMs in this research project, the rigidity and de-personalisation of the AW&E Framework were seen to limit the autonomy that they are able to exercise, their ability to work meaningfully within the natural moments of athletes’ lives, in a way that is reflexive to their individual and collective needs. While having some scope to tailor programs internally within clubs, PDMs reported feeling pressured to impose themselves as agents of the ARL, and frequently reported their dissatisfaction with the need to conduct survey-based

²⁶ As noted in Chapter 1, the ARL oversees the implementation of the AW&E Framework across all NRL clubs and is responsible for (but not limited to): the training and qualifications of AW&E staff, distributing grants to athletes (e.g. education scholarships) and clubs (e.g. wellbeing budget), stipulating mandatory programs (facilitated externally and/or manually prescribed), implementing routine psychological surveying (referred to as ‘flourishing scales’), and supervising AW&E staff’s compliance to the AW&E Framework, including the Career Wise, Character Wise, and Health Wise programs.

‘flourishing scales’²⁷ and the requirement to co-ordinate mandatory education programs which, in their words, are overly ‘clinical’ and ‘restrictive’. Moreover, because the AW&E framework operates in a downward chain of communication, it negatively limits their sense of agency and the opportunity for elite sporting organisations to develop genuine wellbeing cultures. Expressing their frustration, a PDM of The Club stated the following:

I reckon we as a game can be a bit sterile with it. Like we say we've got a wellbeing officer, so that ticks that box, and we say we've done a workshop, so we've ticked that box. It's a wank mate. And people say 'Culture, what's the culture of your club?', and I think, well if we're just ticking a box and saying 'Yeah we've done this workshop and we've done that', then that's not a culture.

PDM

In this statement, the PDM expresses feelings of ‘culture fatigue’, as relating to compliance (‘tick a box’) and the constant efforts to curate organisational cultures. In doing so, they highlight how a ‘vibrant, positive, self-regulating wellbeing culture’ develops over the long term and ‘lies in day-to-day conduct and behaviour’ (AIS 2020, p. 13). According to organisational logic literature, these tensions relate to what Woodman and Hardy (2001, p. 208) define as ‘the stress that is associated primarily and directly with an individual’s appraisal of the structure and functioning of the organisation within which he/she is operating’ and can be understood as a product of the increasing *massification* of wellbeing governance (relating to the increasing bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation of contemporary commercial sport) that is used by elite sporting organisations in relation to ‘notions of ethical responsibility, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder representation and participation’ (Lang 2020, p. 41). However, as alluded to by the previously quoted PDM, the massification of wellbeing governance and the prescriptive approaches to support that it promotes, prevents them from fostering holistic models of care within their organisations and reflects governing bodies’ constant need to regulate and quantify the impact of their work. An AW&E Manager of the ARL sympathised, explaining that:

²⁷ Flourishing Scales are a form of psychological surveying that measure an athlete’s subjective wellbeing across self-reported notions of positive and/or negative thinking in relation to the domains of wellbeing, including: relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism (Diener et al. 2009).

I've got to report back to the higher ups about how many flourishing scales and wellbeing plans have been done and how many courses the players are doing, all that sort of stuff. But players are taking the approach of, 'I'm just doing this because I have to'. Even the wellbeing managers²⁸, they'll say, 'I'm gonna put all these players into these courses so then I'll tick that box and I've got 90% of players engaged and I've hit my target'.

AW&E Manager

In this quote, the AW&E Manager discusses how the massification of wellbeing support fosters the need to quantify wellbeing outcomes, and how subsequently, the requirement for mandatory programming and reporting motivates action through compliance, rather than a genuine concern for wellbeing outcomes. Questioning how effective this kind of support can be and/or whether it is simply used as a 'proxy for ulterior means and ends' (i.e. good governance accountability, monitoring and evaluation maxims, or to achieve funding imperatives; Kohe & Purdy 2020, p. 38), an AW&E Manager of the ARL stated the following:

There's a lot more pressure on wellbeing managers around reporting these days, you know, meeting the compliance stuff that we put in front of them. Which I don't necessarily agree with sometimes, some of the stuff we ask them to do, I think doesn't really help them in their roles. In fact, it's almost like we're trying to justify why they exist to their club and to the game itself. But I think if we get back to understanding what the role is and asking ourselves what's the best we can do with that role, we might get happier people.

AW&E Manager

Going on to make important commentary on the motivations behind compliance and mandatory reporting, the AW&E Manager highlights the pressures that this places upon PDMs and how these measures are designed to meet the needs of the ARL, rather than the athletes that they work alongside. This is problematic, according to Kohe and Purdy (2020, p. 38), because 'welfare is not just something that is 'done' by an organisation to athletes ... Welfare, for

²⁸ 'Wellbeing managers' are to the ARL what the literature refers to as 'player development managers' (PDM).

example, should be part of an organisation-athlete state of relations, embedded in the ethos, as opposed to something that is ‘done’ to athletes as part of organisational bureaucracy’. Recognising these tensions, an AW&E Manager of the ARL gave some insight into how the interests of the ARL do not align with realities of the PDM role:

We’ve got our markers around engagement levels and completion of education, all that sort of stuff, the nuts and bolts. But if we’re talking about the feeling-wise stuff, it’s all in the conversations. Which is why so many wellbeing managers are so anti-reporting and ticking boxes, because they know that their work is all in the face-to-face. Their work is putting out fires, helping players through difficult periods, whether that be with their relationship or family, whatever it is.

AW&E Manager

This is an important quote, in that it captures the essence of this research project’s key findings and its main critique of the current AW&E Framework: that effective wellbeing support systems must reflect the help-seeking actions of athletes and respond to them with strong psychosocial supports within the natural moments of their day-to-day lives. Concerningly however, pressures on governing bodies to comply to elite sports’ rigid business-like structures mean that the supports available to athletes are often limited by the shortcomings of the AW&E Framework. This is of crucial concern, given that athletes do not seek support exclusively through the AW&E Framework, but feel most supported when the strength of their relationships reflects a climate of uninhibited help-seeking within the individual and organisational parameters of the HP environment. Therefore, shifting from the institutional level towards an approach focused on developing socially-supportive environments, should be at the forefront of the ARL’s future wellbeing agendas. And while the WCC Approach to AW&E provides leaders of sporting organisations with the language, evidence, and strategies to support these changes, it will require brave efforts to de-construct existing perceptions of wellbeing and re-structure the systems of support provided throughout the league. The following section explores what these structural adjustments could look like.

Institutional Level Adjustments

In responding to the challenges of organisational stress, it is useful for organisational logic theorists to investigate the factors relating to structure (the efficacy of environmental conditions) and agency (an individual's sense of control within that environment). This research project has undertaken this task to show that there is significant incongruence between the structures of the AW&E Framework and the agency experienced by athletes and PDMs within those systems. In response to these concerns, this chapter highlights the need for more collaborative processes between PDMs and athletes as a means of empowering their agency through later communication, and using their feedback to inform appropriate structural adaptations through upward communication. Because wellbeing requires positive experiences of agency and an integrated sense of self within structures (Gagne 2003), it is important that the voices of athletes and PDMs are heard. As a careers coach of The Club states, not doing so risks producing the same inertia currently displayed by athletes and PDMs:

I know wellbeing managers in clubs are choosing not to do it because they don't think there is enough evidence to show that all those heat maps and surveys and everything measure what it's supposed to measure. If they do it, they're doing it because they have to, not because it helps them in their role.

Careers Coach

The views of this research project's participants considered, a shift towards empowering socially-supportive environments, in such a way that governing bodies are reflexive to the help-seeking actions of athletes and the day-to-day needs of their supports, elite sporting organisations can more effectively increase centrality from the low levels that have inhibited wellbeing logics from becoming effectively integrated into HP systems. The next task then, is for the ARL, with the support of athletes and PDMs, to re-imagine the way that wellbeing support can be provided in elite sports. And while establishing what this looks like in practice may be beyond the scope of this research project, on the basis of its findings, governing bodies would do well to focus their efforts on supporting elite sporting organisations to develop positive wellbeing cultures and consult with them on the ways in which their resources can be made most useful. These might include, but are certainly not limited to, upskilling HP staff's ability to facilitate athletes' help-seeking with basic mental health literacy training, developing clear processes relating to appropriate referral pathways, and establishing mandatory reporting.

These are particularly important steps to progress, given that athletes and PDMs will continue to engage in the ways that they believe work best for them, regardless of whether those actions fall within the AW&E Framework. Therefore, the ARL might consider foregoing their role as arbiters of massified practices (particularly given that these practices often go ignored within clubs) and establish themselves as a primary support for NRL clubs to develop their own wellbeing cultures and programs. No doubt, such significant structural change will present a difficult challenge to elite sports' governing bodies, though if they are to prioritise the wellbeing of their athletes, then the leaders *of* sporting organisations need to 'learn to identify and evaluate the values related to the bureaucratic and business aspects of sport' and 'seek to evoke positive change so ethical behaviour and practices are championed' (DiSensi & Rosenberg 2010, p. 128). Ideally, this would create space for the WCC Approach to AW&E to be realised across the league, by connecting the governing body to the real-world lived experiences of athletes, PDMs, and the extended HP network.

Chapter Summary

This chapter applies organisational logic theory to identify the spaces of organisational stress produced through the current AW&E Framework, and presents a number of structural changes for the ARL to consider in addressing them. In doing so, this chapter appeals to the leaders *of* elite sports' governing bodies, who are best positioned to rectify the ineffective forms of hybridity that contemporary, massified wellbeing programs are based on. Moreover, this chapter has explored what integrating the WCC Approach to AW&E looks like within a multi-dimensional understanding of the elite sports sector, reiterates the need for psychosocial approaches to wellbeing support, and explains how athletes can be more accessibly involved in the decisions that affect them through collaborative, lateral forms of communication. Chapter 9, the final analysis chapter of this thesis, returns to formative discussions regarding duty of care. Predominantly interested in the nature of centrality, it investigates the hierarchy of values within the elite sports sector and the influence that those values have on decisions relating to AW&E. Concerned with the dominant impact of commercial logics, it explores how duty of care practices are often engaged in as a performative act of 'good governance', and highlights the ways in which those efforts are primarily in service of sporting organisations' commercial interests, rather than the wellbeing needs of athletes. In response to these issues, Chapter 9 advocates for a multi-dimensional concept of success and explains why the WCC

Approach to AW&E can more effectively tap into the shared value and synergy that can be found between elite sports' core and peripheral logics.

Chapter 9

The Value of Wellbeing

'I think our club is stuck. I don't think it knows what it is – is it a football club or is it a business?'

PDM

This chapter continues to explore the intersection between elite sports wellbeing and commercial logics. It advances on the previous chapter, which is primarily concerned with the AW&E Framework employed by the ARL, to investigate the hierarchy of values across the sector more broadly, in relation to patterns of centrality. It asks a number of important concluding questions, such as whom does the AW&E Framework really serve and to what extent does the 'business' of elite sport impact these values? Critiquing athlete wellbeing as an internal act of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), this chapter argues that the prioritisation of commercial logics is a significant inhibiting factor to wellbeing outcomes. To resolve these tensions, latter stages of this chapter emphasise the need to correct imbalances of centrality and promotes the compatible qualities of wellbeing logics through the shared value of the WCC Approach to AW&E.

Athlete Wellbeing & Corporate Social Responsibility

Elite sport is a pluralistic and dynamic institution which contains a complex set of interests and agendas. In the context of this research project, it is important that the values of elite sport are evaluated in order to fully understand the organisational context in which it is situated. More pragmatically still, these considerations provide a lens through which to view both the structure

of organisational logics and the primary motivators which underpin their power and influence over organisational action. This is important because sports are social constructions and as such are vulnerable to the values, ideas, interests, and experiences of those who have power (Coakley et al. 2009). In the contemporary age of commercial sport, there can be little doubt that this power is used for the benefit of financial profit, which for many observers of sport, underpins a begrudging and resentful belief that the virtues and values of competition and community have been replaced by the capitalistic ventures of individual leaders. For these critics, their interests largely relate to discussions regarding elite sporting organisations' social responsibilities which, broadly defined, are based on the assumption that individuals, organisations, and institutions have a duty to act in the best interests of their communities and society at large (DeSensi & Rosenberg 2010). However, there is a counter-argument which suggests that the ever-expanding revenue streams and reach of elite sports only enhances their platform to do 'good' in society under the veil of CSR, which allows organisations to implement initiatives that use sport as a vehicle to facilitate social change while simultaneously accruing positive reputational gains for their business. As Babiak and Wolfe (2009) explain, elite sporting organisations often go to extraordinary lengths to employ reputational management tactics by increasing their social responsibility output, both internally (within the organisation) and externally (engagement with community), under the premise that they can 'further their strategic interests while expending resources with nothing apparent or obvious in return'. Therefore, doing 'good' for the business, while doing 'good' for society, is generally what constitutes critical discussions surrounding CSR (Babiak & Wolfe 2009; Aguilera et al. 2007; Barnett 2007; Waddock & Post 1995).

Carroll's (1979, 1999) definition of CSR appears to be the most influential work relating to CSR, where they compartmentalise its many arms into four clear categories:

- Economic: the basic responsibility to make a profit and, thus, the need for community-based programs to be financially viable (typically with the expectation of an indirect returned benefit).
- Legal: social responsibility is legislated onto organisations, and as such, their activity stems from their duty to obey law.
- Ethical: motivated by a responsibility to act in a manner consistent with societal expectations.
- Discretionary: philanthropic acts that go beyond societal expectations.

Put succinctly however, others have defined CSR as ‘the extent to which an organisation meets the needs, expectations, and demands of certain external constituencies beyond those directly linked to the company’s products/markets’ (Ullman 1985, p. 543), and as ‘practices that improve the workplace and benefit society in ways that go above and beyond what companies are legally required to do’ (Vogel 2005, p. 2). Yet despite the altruistic tone of the definitions provided by Ullman (1985) and Vogel (2005), there is a general understanding that acts of CSR are primarily designed to strategically advantage organisations from an economic standpoint, albeit not always in ‘tangible, explicit, or discrete exchanges of value’ (Babiak & Wolfe 2009, p. 719). These intangible strategic assets are summarised by Babiak and Wolfe (2009) as intending to generate reputational capital, retain employee commitment, maintain acquiescence among key regulatory institutions or legislative bodies, develop organisations’ business and institutional environments, and/or help mitigate negative media scrutiny. Speaking about these intangible strategic assets, an AW&E Manager from the ARL stated that:

It's a bit of a risk management for the business as well, to protect the brand. You know, if we can get them engaged in things, we're less likely to be reading about them on the front page of the paper and more likely to read about them in the sports section.

AW&E Manager

In this statement, the AW&E Manager understands the league’s social responsibility activities within an over-arching commercial logic, where it is used as a function of reputational management, image enhancement, and improved public relations. As Sheth and Babiak (2010) suggest, it is common among elite sporting organisations for socially responsible practices to be motivated by the economic impacts of athlete indiscretions, which have significant consequences for their relationship with current and prospective commercial partners. Under this influence, elite sport has expanded its jurisdiction far beyond the boundaries of the field, where today, athletes’ personal lives are accorded very little privacy, with their off-field activity often consumed by the media and public with equal attention to their on-field performance (Giulianotti & Robertson 2004). In this contemporary era, new expectations around what constitutes an athlete as an off-field ‘professional’ has created an additional set of demands. This is predominantly a result of the ever-expanding commercial reach of sport, which for elite sporting organisations, like any other for-profit industries, means managing a brand in a marketable manner. Athletes’ personality and performance are exceedingly valuable

assets to elite sport, and have consequently both have become commodified and regulated in such a way as to enhance the public image of their employers (Smart 2005). For most elite sporting organisations, this requires a significant investment into the ‘personal development’ of athletes (Hickey & Kelly 2008) through initiatives which are diverse, though typically they involve a combination of preventative workshops targeting risk behaviours (such as gambling and substance misuse), education on diversity and difference (such as gender inequality and cultural competency training), and information seminars addressing sport-specific issues (such as corruption and doping). At the other end of the spectrum, reactionary processes, which include public displays of discretionary interventions and punishments (such as fines and suspensions), aim to reprimand harmful behaviours. Yet while these interventions are often presented and advertised as important acts of social responsibility, they undoubtedly also serve commercial sports’ ongoing agenda of risk management and public relations, that are designed to curate the off-field identities of athletes in their role as brand ambassadors. As part of this process, elite sporting organisations typically monitor their athletes’ personal lives in intimate detail, determined to instil a version of ‘professionalism’ that stipulates what attitudes and behaviours are considered acceptable in both on- and off-field contexts. No doubt, these initiatives contribute towards improving the relationship between sport and society. However, according to Lane et al. (2020), these efforts are more often motivated by elite sporting organisations’ commercial interests, rather than a genuine sense of social responsibility. Discussing the strategic motivations of athlete wellbeing, an AW&E Manager of the ARL commented on the sector’s over-arching commercial agenda, and the influence that this has upon their role:

We talk about social responsibility stuff too, which in this last 12 months has become a high priority area just because, well it's always been a priority, but we've had to react to what's happened off the field as well. So it's kind of been a bit consuming of our time having to do that and making sure that we're appeasing the people that pay our budget.

AW&E Manager

Here the AW&E Manager alludes to the responsibilities of sports managers, who mindfully manage the reputation of their organisations and the risk imparted by athlete indiscretions. The hope, they suppose, is that by investing in the personal development and wellbeing of athletes, through the preventative and reactionary processes highlighted previously, athletes will be less likely to bring their employer’s brand, and their associated commercial partners’ brands, into

disrepute. Therefore, while CSR in sport is typically understood as the *external* relationship between elite sporting organisations and their related communities (for example, the financial-social relationship that often underpins elite sporting organisations' strategic engagement with community programs), programs categorised under athlete wellbeing can be understood within the context of the far less frequently discussed *internal* orientation of CSR. As Chelladurai (cited in DeSensi & Rosenberg 2010, p. 136) states, 'Organisations as agencies of society are beholden to society, which includes the human resources of organisations. Thus, when an organisation institutes effective human resource practices to enhance the quality of life for their human resources, they also are contributing to the society as a whole. Hence, in the context of athlete wellbeing and this research project, conversations about internal acts of CSR are primarily concerned with the experiences of athletes and the ways in which they impact upon a broader social context. With this in mind, perceptions of CSR become an important amalgamation of wellbeing and commercial logics, whereby better supported athletes (internal orientation) produce more positive social outputs, which results in greater reputational gains (external orientation).

As an avenue for developing more compatible hybrid systems reconciling elite sporting organisations' commercial aspirations with a genuine investment into AW&E, there may be space within each of the domains identified by Carroll (1979) – economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic – to further develop an understanding of AW&E from a CSR perspective. Yet when exploring this idea within the research site of this project, interview participants took an overtly critical view of using AW&E as an internal function of CSR. The following quote from a PDM gives some insight into these concerns:

I think, and well, this may be cynical, but maybe they do it because they have to. Like do we do stuff as an ass-covering exercise? Like if I go in any organisation and say, 'Do you care about your employees?', they have to say 'Yes', whether they do or not. They've got to say, 'Of course we do, yeah'.

PDM

In this statement, the PDM raises important questions over the intentions of The Club's AW&E practices as a form of human resource management and commercially motivated internal act of CSR. Their scepticism reflects that of Kohe and Purdy (2020, p. 38), who state that while it may be possible for elite sporting organisations to appreciate that care ethics matter in their

work, as far as current programmes suggest, it remains uncertain as to how genuine this care is or whether care is used as a proxy for ulterior means and ends (i.e. good governance accountability, monitoring and evaluation maxims, or to achieve funding imperatives)'. Considered against the previously quoted PDM, this shows that while AW&E is viewed as an important element of human resource management, it is also used as a public relations tool, underpinning significant distrust between elite sporting organisations and those they involve in their programs. Therefore, by blending wellbeing into an over-arching commercial logic with low levels of shared centrality, elite sporting organisations contextualise their responsibility to do 'good' within their business-like structures, rather than wellbeing outcomes. In many ways, these discussions reflect what was previously explored throughout Chapter 8 as the incompatibilities produced through the massification of wellbeing governance, where the conflation of wellbeing logics with elite sports' commercial structures relies on the bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation of practices (DeSensi & Rosenberg 2010). For DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010, p. 10). These are crucial considerations when discussing the provision of support within elite sporting organisations, given that the 'types of activities offered, the quality of instruction and supervision, and the ways programs are funded fall within the realm of social responsibility'. With this in mind, it is vital for sports managers to evaluate the hierarchy of values circulating through their sector, which are, according to the consensus of this research project's participants, primarily occupied by commercial logics. The solution, as suggested by a number of interview participants, is to move subordinate logics from the periphery of organisational practices into its core functions through hybrid practices. However, in order to engineer an 'aligned' organisational logic structure (high levels of compatibility and shared centrality), a significant degree of reciprocity between logics is required. In relation to CSR in sport, Porter and Kramer (2006, p. 163) articulate this position clearly with the following statement:

'The fact is, the prevailing approaches to CSR are so disconnected from strategy as to obscure many great opportunities for companies to benefit society. What a terrible waste. If corporations were to analyse their opportunities for social responsibility using the same frameworks that guide their core business choices, they would discover, as [others] have done, that CSR can be much more than a cost, a constraint, or a charitable deed—it can be a potent source of innovation and competitive advantage.'

Reflecting the points raised by Porter and Kramer (2006, p.163), findings emerging from this research project suggest that greater organisational alignment and more effective hybridity of logics can produce mutually beneficial outcomes for the diverse interests of elite sporting organisations. For Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 6), this is achieved through the process of Creating Shared Value (CSV), as the ‘policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing social and economic conditions in the communities in which it operates’. In this way, the ability to re-imagine an organisation’s sense of purpose in such a way that it is not solely dependent on one interest but instead premised upon the shared value of all its parts, is critical to the effective hybridity of logics and the WCC Approach to AW&E. In turn, trust is likely to improve through stronger and more collaborative relationships, reducing the impact of organisational stress produced through the blending of logics. As an AW&E Manager of the ARL states, ‘*Someone’s always looking to get some type of transaction*’, and therefore, identifying and communicating the creation and exchange of value that is generated through internal acts of CSR, as an investment into the competitive content of each intersecting logic, will likely increase groups’ ability to recognise the compatible qualities with wellbeing logics, which will in turn improve members’ readiness to correct the low levels of centrality that inhibit the AW&E Framework. This approach, one that calls for greater centrality by advocating for the compatible qualities of each blended logic, is the incentive that is most likely to inspire elite sporting organisations to implement the WCC Approach to AW&E. The following section discusses how this might be achieved.

Correcting Centrality

For Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 369), analysing centrality is an investigation into the division of logics between an organisation’s core and periphery, and is primarily involved in how organisational members attribute value and perceive the relevancy of logics to organisational functioning. In this way, centrality is considered to be high when multiple logics are instantiated into the goals, values, and systems of organisations, and lower in instances where a single logic leads organisational functioning. What appears clear from the analysis of data collected for this research project, is that wellbeing logics, with their low level of centrality, are often ostracised to the periphery of organisational functioning in response to the impact of logics holding greater influence and power at their core. Commercial logics, for example, which promulgate a bureaucratised, standardised, and institutionalised system of wellbeing

practices, and/or performance logics, which dictate access to athletes and control the culture of HP systems, have been seen throughout this research project to reinforce and perpetuate elements of structure, strategy, and process that are in service to these dominant logics.

As a result, wellbeing logics are either ineffective within the core of organisational functioning, or intentionally separate themselves from the core in an effort to preserve and protect what semblance of centrality is available to them, producing a superficially harmonious system in which all organisational members are complicit but not benefiting equally. This is what Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 367) refer to as ‘fragmented centralisation’, whereby in instances of high multiplicity and low centrality, clusters of organisational members will operate independently while pursuing their own goals and limiting the possibility for productive forms of hybridity through shared value. As noted by an AW&E Manager of the ARL, fragmentation is a major obstacle in the pluralistic institutional environment of elite sporting organisations, made more difficult by the physical embodiment of segregated logic-based groups:

It's funny with clubs right, we have this overall values system that sifts from the top and covers the whole organisation, but we sit over here and we do it our way and they sit over there and do it their way. Why wouldn't it be all together?

AW&E Manager

In this statement, the AW&E Manager comments on the ‘constellations of interconnected elements within organisations’ (Besharov & Smith 2014, p. 378) which, according to Fiss, Marx and Cambre (2013), can be best understood through the notion of ‘configuration’: a systems approach to research which considers the functional dynamics of a network’s interconnected elements and involves ‘any multi-dimensional configuration of conceptually distinct characteristics that commonly occur together’ (Meyer, Scott & Strang 1994, p. 175). Taking a configurational lens to the previous quote and reflecting upon athletes’ experiences of the disconnection between logics and the impact that this has on their wellbeing, it is clear that the conflict between logics is generating significant organisational stress and barriers to the instantiation of wellbeing logics within HP systems. The WCC Approach to AW&E is an attempt to rectify these issues and considers how wellbeing logics can be integrated into the configuration of logics at the core of organisational functioning through a shared set of values that can be ‘articulated, understood, and respected in a meaningful way’ (Kohe & Purdy 2020, p. 38). Problematically however, within the complex logic structures of elite sporting

organisations, a shared set of values is not easily recognised. As explained by a PDM, such is the case at The Club:

I think our club is stuck. I don't think it knows what it is – is it a football club or is it a business? Because I don't know if we're excelling at either one of those.

[...]

Look, it's when being a business and being a footy club collide that the problems start. Being a business, it's the bottom line and getting back into black, but being a footy club, it's about the people and it's surviving and all that sort of stuff. So is it lip service? Well while we say we're a holistic club, when it affects the bottom line, well, there's a conflict there.

PDM

This sentiment reflects discussions in previous chapters that critique the ineffective hybridity of logics and fragmented organisational identity that lead to significant organisational stress for athletes and PDMs. Moreover, as alluded to in the second quote, because the practices and goals of commercial logics are in ‘*conflict*’ with wellbeing logics, the values, motivations, and intrinsic worth of cultural resources that drive holistic wellbeing support systems are forfeited. This reiterates issues explored during the previous chapter, where the dominant influence of commercial logics has forced the AW&E Framework away from effective relational means of support into a model premised upon the massification of wellbeing governance, which according to research participants in this project, undermines their core work practices. Expressing their frustration at the state of the AW&E Framework, a PDM shared their somewhat forlorn hope for change:

I don't think wellbeing's that important at our place mate. I think people say it is but I don't actually think it is.

[...]

Do I have hope? Well, obviously I hope it gets better but do I believe it will, I just don't know mate. I wouldn't bet my house on it. I just don't think they see it as important enough.

PDM

In these two statements, the PDM comments on the imbalance of centrality that disadvantages wellbeing logics, and their frustration about The Club's position on its perceived irrelevancy. According to organisational logic theory, these tensions illustrate what is commonly found in 'estranged' organisations, whereby the hybridity of multiple logics occurs through low levels of centrality and low levels of compatibility (Besharov & Smith 2014). Previous chapters have explored the impact of the 'estranged' logic structure held within The Club, with Chapter 5 investigating the grey space between athletes' personal and professional spheres, Chapter 6 investigating the influence of head coaches and a dominant performance logic on athletes' help-seeking behaviour within the HP context, Chapter 7 focusing on the presence of stigma within HP environments and presenting a number of possible intervention strategies, and Chapter 8 assessing the organisational stress produced through the influence of commercial logics on the AW&E Framework. Culminating at these final stages of this thesis, this chapter contributes a blueprint for greater organisational alignment, to create a context in which a recognised/recognisable shared set of values can be embedded into the WCC Approach to AW&E, by advocating for the reciprocal benefits of wellbeing (high compatibility) and having it recognised as an integral and central component (high centrality) of elite sporting organisations. It is an idea that 'flows from the holistic nature of configurations, which holds that the configuration should be viewed as a whole, not as a collection of elements' (Fiss, Marx & Cambre 2013, p. 6) and implies the need to re-imagine the logic structures common to elite sporting organisations and their governing bodies, and argues that doing so would improve wellbeing outcomes on two levels: through improved agency, where the proximity and exposure of wellbeing logics increases opportunities for collaboration, leading to more effective hybridity; and through improved structural conditions, where each logic is integrated into systems which pursue a collective shared vision of success. Ultimately however, for each of the strategies promoted throughout this thesis, improving the power of wellbeing logics within elite sporting organisations is the only way that positive change can occur. This is because, as Besharov and Smith (2014, p. 370) state, 'A logic is more likely to be embodied in core organisational practices when members carrying that logic have more power within an organisation (Kim et al., 2007). It follows that when representatives of multiple logics have equal power, this increases centrality, whereas differences in power decrease centrality'.

And yet, however intuitive these solutions may appear, this chapter has shown not only how wellbeing logics are consistently being failed by the logic structures of elite sports, but that because of those structures, there may be little interest from elite sporting organisations in

making such changes in the future. In the everyday language of this research projects participants, these structures reflect elite sporting organisations' narrow concept of 'success' (how it is defined, measured, and by whom), which they argue fragments groups into the competitive pursuit of independent interests rather than nurturing a collective vision for success. Asked to elaborate, a PDM of The Club stated:

What do I honestly believe our club would say is success? I think there's two sides to it: There's the business side, which is the side of 'If we're making money, that's a successful year', and then there's the football side, who are saying 'If we win the comp, that's a successful year'. But I just think we're all worried about our own individual roles, we're not worried about the whole picture.

PDM

In this statement, the PDM identifies the fragmentation of logics within The Club and how it is reinforced by the physical structure of groups (*'We sit over here and we do it our way and they sit over there and do it their way'*). This divide which manifests into a range of incompatibilities and unequal levels of centrality places logics in competition with one another and means that wellbeing logics are often *'The first thing that falls over in their planning because they don't see it as a priority'*. Therefore, the need to bring wellbeing into a multi-dimensional concept of success is premised upon the alignment of compatible and mutually beneficial values. This is because, as explained by an AW&E Manager of the ARL, diversifying definitions of success is not only imperative for the integration of wellbeing logics, but is likely to lead to greater collaboration and stability of success:

How do you measure success? Because of it's only one team that wins a premiership and that's a successful team, then that means there's 15 other failures. It really can't be just that one measure. Everyone strives for that, everyone wants to win the premiership and that's what puts bums on seats, but what makes a successful club? I think that conversation is one worth exploring because if you came down towards the bottom, does that mean you're a failure? In a performance sense, maybe, but what's the club itself like, because it could have the best culture ever and have really engaged people. It could have great staff. It could be financially secure. So again, it's this notion of what is success and having everyone to buy into it.

AW&E Manager

In this statement, the AW&E Manager discusses the need for diversified measures of success and the risks of becoming dependent on any one logic. Those risks, they suggest, lead to a greater probability of ‘failure’ and make organisations vulnerable to fragmentation. These are important criticisms, as they reflect the sentiment shared by athletes related to their own multi-dimensional measures of success which, reflecting the three themes of success highlighted by Carless and Douglas (2012): controllable and sustainable stories of effort and application (referred to by participants as ‘*individual and team performance*’), stories where success relates to embodied experiences of self-discovery (‘*personal development through sport*’), and stories that value relationships and connection between people (‘*the brotherhood*’). This is captured in the following statement by a PDM of The Club who explains how, when asked to reflect on success, athletes don’t immediately identify with sporting performance; rather, as highlighted during Chapter 5, they refer to ‘*the brotherhood*’ and the valuable bonds developed through elite sporting careers:

I know that when we talk to the players and ask them to put down, ‘What are the most important things in your life?’, some of them don’t put footy down. It’s not always at the top of their radar. They talk about each other instead.

PDM

In this statement, the PDM highlights how success, in the eye of the athlete, exists as a ‘multi-dimensional concept, broader than the singular conception encapsulated within the dominant performance narrative’ (Carless & Douglas 2012, p. 387) and shows how discourses denoting success strictly from a performance logic should only be considered a *version* of success, in lieu of a multi-dimensional concept of success that finds synergy from a shared value perspective. Importantly, that means reflecting on the logic structures which underpin the AW&E Framework, and considering what version of success those methods are working towards. This is because, as Besharov and Smith (2014) suggest, an organisation’s values are revealed by those goals that they believe to be most consequential in shaping organisational activity and capable of generating conflict throughout an organisational network. With this in mind, this chapter speaks largely to the leaders of elite sporting organisations and their governing bodies, whose own goals and agendas are most tangibly embedded into the structures of elite sport.

Moreover, ‘if sport and all involved are to truly take the welfare of athletes and their duty of care to them seriously, everyone involved needs to adjust the focus to one that puts the athlete and their experiences first’ (Lang 2020, p. 21). Sports managers then, as some of the most influential agents on elite sporting organisations, must critically reflect on what sport represents to *all* stakeholders and consider the economic, political, and social implications of their decisions, within the unique context of elite sport (DeSensi & Rosenberg 2010). This is because, from the perspective of athletes and the staff who have participated in this research project, not doing so risks reproducing the same ineffectively bureaucratised, standardised, and institutionalised wellbeing practices that will only continue to inhibit the relational forms of support that athletes value and rely upon most.

Chapter Summary

Having discussed holistic approaches to wellbeing as an act of CSR *in* sport, rather than *through* sport (as it is more conventionally understood), this chapter began by exploring athlete wellbeing through an organisational logic analysis of the ‘business’ of sport. It argues that athlete wellbeing is too frequently made subordinate to commercial logics, which makes internal acts of CSR another example of how the ineffective hybridity between logics produces unproductive wellbeing support systems and significant organisational stress for athletes. Later stages of this chapter took these concerns into a discussion regarding the broader values of the elite sports sector and their disassociation from athletes’ multi-dimensional concept of success. Appealing to the leaders *of* sporting organisations, it encourages those in positions of influence to reflect upon their internal values systems and exercise their ability to identify and evaluate the numerous interests circulating through their sector, to understand how these impact upon athletes’ experience of wellbeing. In doing so, it hopes that the centrality of wellbeing logics will be increased and promoted within the WCC Approach to AW&E, which this chapter argues must be motivated by a sense of duty of care, as well as an opportunity for competitive and commercial gains. It reasons that while a performance and commercial focus will always remain central to the core functions of elite sporting organisations (and for good reason), this focus does not need to be at the detriment or expense of wellbeing; rather, legitimising the shared value of wellbeing will allow elite sporting organisations to tap into a plethora of hybrid gains. To begin however, it is imperative that they actively work towards centering athletes within their core functions through meaningful consultation over the decisions that affect them,

as by doing so, they will begin to support the personal as well as the professional, and step away from bureaucratic systems of support into more humanistic and relational modes of engagement focused on improving wellbeing outcomes.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Setting out to address both *insight* and *impact* research goals, this project has investigated a number of athlete-specific risk and protective factors, trialled two intervention strategies (mental health literacy and connection workshops), evaluated the ARL's AW&E Framework, and presented the WCC Approach to AW&E. Through an inductive action research methodology, this project is unique in not only documenting and contributing original knowledge to the literature, but serving the emancipatory objective of creating change through the application of organisational logic theory. Organisational logic theory, used to navigate the pluralistic institutional elements of The Club, guided this project through its elucidation of the structural conditions that shape athletes' experience of wellbeing, the systems which facilitate their support, and as a tool for further developing those systems to more effectively blend wellbeing with performance, commercial, and community logics. In this way, this research project has assessed the dynamics of intra-organisational practices and identities, as relating to the context-specific logics of elite sports, and the types of multiplicity their interactions produce. It assumes that with greater *insight* into the individual, organisational, and institutional levels of analysis, researchers and practitioners can actively address the drivers of variation that determine compatibility²⁹ and centrality³⁰ to activate the morphogenetic sequence

²⁹ Logic compatibility: the extent to which multiple logics offer compatible/incompatible qualities and prescriptions for action.

³⁰ Logic centrality: the extent to which these logics are central to organisational functioning.

and *impact* structure³¹ through agency³². What has emerged from this analysis is several key contributions to the literature, not just another project which gives insight into the distinct ways in which multiple organisational logics manifest and interact within organisations, but advancing the theory by charting the transition from *insight* into *impact* as a practical model for change. Combining elements of critical realism with a theoretical framework that is similarly focused on the relationship between structure and agency, within a methodology enabling action, this research project makes the journey from knowledge generation to practical application, evaluation, and documentation. This conclusion summarises the key findings of this project across the three levels of analysis into which this thesis was divided (individual, organisational, institutional), before finishing on a set of implications and recommendations, a discussion of relevant limitations and future research opportunities, and a final concluding statement.

Individual Level of Analysis

Beginning at the individual level of analysis, Chapters 3-4 set the context of this research project by first outlining how wellbeing is understood by athletes and their supports within the HP environment, before identifying the risk and protective factors that most significantly impact upon athletes' experiences of wellbeing. Spanning both the personal sphere (relating to what is private, typically across the non-sporting domain, including factors such as relationships and emotions) and the professional sphere (relating to occupational expectations, typically within the sporting domain, including factors such as team selection, contract security, and injury), these chapters highlight what is unique about the athlete experience and their common vulnerabilities. These chapters demonstrate how, for athlete participants in this research project, the amalgamation of the personal and professional spheres is a common and normalised experience that comes with significant lifestyle adjustments that are hugely consequential to athletes' experience of wellbeing, including the physical (e.g. maintaining a disciplined diet and managing the long-term consequences of high-impact sport),

³¹ Structure: the cultural elements of structure that influence attitudes and behaviour, as well as the more systemic elements of structure that guide action.

³² Agency: the individual's awareness and experience of those structural factors and the level of autonomy held in resisting, reinforcing, or reflecting them.

psychological (e.g. constant pressure to perform and the stress of contract insecurity), and social (e.g. relocation, loss of social ties, deferring of education degrees/vocational apprenticeships, etc.) burdens that come with the pursuit of a career in elite sports. Contextualised under sport's 'duty of care', these chapters were used to reiterate current academic discourse advocating for increased wellbeing supports for athletes as both a social responsibility of elite sporting organisations and as a necessary measure of workplace health and safety. It reasons that if athletes are required to manage a set of risk factors unique to their profession, it is important that they are provided with the appropriate supports to manage and overcome those challenges without harm.

Chapter 4 evaluated the patterns of help-seeking action taken by athletes and revealed that both sporting (coaches, trainers, and teammates) and non-sporting (partners, family and friends) psychosocial supports were the protective factors most relied upon by athletes. These chapters in particular highlighted how, on the individual level, athletes find great value in the informal supports (e.g. incidental help-seeking of a personal nature) available to them, as opposed to the formal supports (e.g. mandatory education programs and compulsory psychological surveying) required of them. With this in mind, it was important to identify the key members within athletes' psychosocial support network before building on strategies to strengthen and adapt systems to utilise those supports effectively.

Analysing the engagement between athletes and two members of staff (strength and conditioning coach and house parent), organisational logic theory was used to assess the implications of logic multiplicity on actions relating to wellbeing. For S&C coaches³³, with their role defined almost entirely by performance logics, it was unclear to what extent wellbeing logics were perceived to be a relevant responsibility of their role, particularly when a range of factors, such as sleep and stress, required them to exchange information related to the personal sphere of athletes' lives. Yet from the athletes' perspective, the nature of these conversations, in addition to the regularity of their daily contact, made S&C coaches trusted confidantes and important psychosocial supports within the HP environment.

³³ S&C coaches are a permanent fixture within HP environments and regularly present at training, on match day, and during periods of injury rehabilitation. Their role involves any S&C training related to improving performance, managing injury, and increasing fitness and movement skills.

However, despite the deeply personal relationships that S&C coaches shared with athlete participants in this research project, because their roles were largely defined by their primary performance logic, they often lacked the confidence and clarity to navigate the ambiguities and ill-defined boundaries which underlie the provision of their support. This analysis shows how athletes' patterns of help-seeking typically occur outside of the systems of support established within the HP systems, and suggests ways in which the structures of wellbeing support need to adapt to include integral psychosocial supports such as S&C coaches. To further evidence this claim, an analysis of the support provided by The Club's house parent³⁴ provides another curious case where, despite holding a role that is clearly positioned within the personal sphere of athletes' lives, the house parent operated under a professional remit that did not clearly stipulate what was required from them in a wellbeing capacity. Consistently with the descriptions provided by the S&C coach, these examples showcase the ways in which the structures of elite sporting organisations do not adequately extend into the personal sphere, and as such, do not align with the help-seeking actions of athletes. Elite sporting organisations would do well then to provide members of staff with greater clarity relating to expectations within the personal sphere, by legitimising the wellbeing support that they provide as a critical component of their role and 'supporting the supporters' to do so effectively with adequate process and training.

Fundamentally, this is what the WCC Approach to AW&E aims to achieve, by articulating a philosophy of care that recognises all members within the athletes' network as integral protective resources. Because athletes' personal and professional spheres are unavoidably intertwined to such an extent that they are one and the same, elite sporting organisations have a duty of care to step across any imagined divide between these spaces, to provide care across all contexts. To do so requires inclusive, collaborative, and supportive relationships, particularly throughout the HP system, with clear process, referral resources, and appropriate training to facilitate athletes' help-seeking behaviour. From an organisational logic standpoint, this requires clear prescriptions for action in relation to wellbeing logics, regardless of their

³⁴ House parents, responsible for managing the host homes of athletes (JFC and/or NRL athletes) who have moved from interstate or overseas, provide a range of psychosocial support to athletes, including transport to and from training, preparation of meals, monitoring of curfews, social and emotional support.

role, through increased levels of centrality (weight attributed to core responsibilities) and compatibility (shared value between logics), under an ‘aligned’ logic structure that works towards establishing a unified set of values and goals, through systems which accommodate the needs of multiple logics.

Put simply, irrespective of whether a role’s primary logics are wellbeing, performance, or commercially oriented, they must associate with each other under a vision of shared success in order to address the pockets of organisational stress that are consistently generated through logic conflict. Chapters 5-6 explore what this looks like in practice, by investigating and critiquing the cultural elements of structure which stigmatise and inhibit help-seeking. Located at the organisational level of analysis, these chapters are concerned with the social ties among group members and the ways that shared attitudes and behaviours reinforce wellbeing discourses to both positive and/or negative effect. Turning insight into intervention, these chapters report on the impact of this research project’s action research methodology, reporting of the ‘mental health literacy training’ program and set of ‘connection workshops’ on the psychosocial conditions of The Club’s HP environments.

Organisational Level of Analysis

Ascending from the individual (individual and small group interactions) to the organisational level of analysis (collective characteristic of groups), Chapters 5-6 were concerned with ‘hiring and socialisation’ (impact of key leaders and diversity of disciplinary groups) as the key factor influencing logic compatibility, and the effect that ‘mission and strategy’ (hierarchy of values and organisational goals) and ‘resource dependence’ (elements required by core functions) have on centrality. To investigate these factors, the discourses of wellbeing within the HP environment of The Club and the influence that key leaders have had on establishing those discourses were analysed, before two intervention strategies were implemented in an effort to de-stigmatise wellbeing and improve the presence of psychosocial support within these spaces. Beginning with an investigation into the NRL and JFC teams, Chapter 5 focused on the impact of head coaches on the instantiation and perceived validity of wellbeing logics within HP systems.

For the NRL team, it was found that low levels of centrality (one logic is core to organisational functioning; other logics are peripheral) and low levels of compatibility (logics provide contradictory prescriptions for action) led to the development of an ‘estranged’ logic structure (group members grapple with divergent goals and seek divergent means of achieving these goals). With a head coach focused entirely on performance logics and with no recognition for the value of wellbeing logics, athletes’ help-seeking behaviour became stigmatised and subsequently help was sought instead via a divergent sub-system at the periphery of the HP system under a ‘distributed-fragmented leadership network structure’. This in turn created a pattern of ‘fragmented centralisation’, whereby performance and wellbeing logics clustered independently of one another, limiting their contact and avoiding the potential for conflict to arise. Yet, while moving to the periphery of organisational functioning was deemed necessary systemic adjustment by PDMs, it was also seen to limit the presence, accessibility, and effectiveness of support available to athletes within the HP environment. Similarly to the individual level of analysis, these circumstances demonstrate athletes’ exercise of agency and the ineffective structural conditions which facilitate their support. The JFC team provided a contrasting account where a head coach who held wellbeing in equal esteem to performance authenticated their mutually beneficial qualities with consistent messaging and clear prescriptions for action. Here, athletes were uninhibited in their ability to seek support from a diverse range of group members under a ‘distributed-coordinated network leadership structure’ (Mehra, et al. 2006, p. 235). With high levels of centrality (multiple logics are core to organisational functioning) and high levels of compatibility (logics provide compatible prescriptions for action), an ‘aligned’ logic structure (multiple logics exert strong influence over group members, who undertake the goals, values, identities, and practices associated with multiple logics) created an environment where leaders of multiple logics have a greater capacity to collaborate and take a shared role in athletes’ psychosocial support networks. In this way, the HP system operating within the JFC team contained cultural and systemic elements of structure which reflected the effective instantiation of wellbeing logics.

Chapter 6 continued to build on an understanding of the organisational level of analysis by reporting on the impact of ‘mental health literacy training’ and ‘connection workshops’, as two pragmatic intervention strategies that elite sporting organisations can implement under the WCC Approach to AW&E. These strategies, best implemented concurrently, were designed to strengthen the psychosocial support network of HP environments by developing the requisite knowledge and skills to effectively facilitate help-seeking behaviour and increase access to

personal and professional support. Based upon a synthesis of participant feedback and existing literature, both interventions were informed by the view that those who are more psychosocially supported are generally ‘healthier and live longer than their more isolated peers’ (Umberson & Montrez 2010, p. 54)³⁵.

This protects athletes from a number of elite sport-specific risk factors such as competitive stress, slumps in performance and burnout, the psychological impact of injury, and vulnerabilities to mental health issues (Rees & Hardy 2000; Rees 2007). Moreover, because stigma remains the most dominant barrier affecting the help-seeking attitudes and behaviours of athletes, normalising wellbeing within HP environments is an important step to progress (Souter, Lewis & Serrant 2018; Castaldelli-Maia et al. 2019). From qualitative evaluations of the ‘mental health literacy training’, the program appears to have met these targets, by strengthening the supportive resources available to athletes and improving organisational members’ ability to identify the signs and symptoms of mental illness (in self and others), to provide appropriate referral, treatment options, and information, and general improvements relating to an understanding of positive mental health management and illness prevention. Working in conjunction with mental health literacy training programs, ‘connection workshops’ provided athletes with an ‘interrupted space’ to exercise their knowledge with the opportunity for peer support.

Creating a rupture to the discursive norms of the HP environment, interview and survey data showed how connection workshops allowed athletes to interact in a vulnerable, but controlled and supported manner, by exploring strengths and challenges, improving a sense of connection to the collective, and deepening relationships through the sharing of stories. This chapter demonstrates then how mental health literacy training and connection workshops can be used to improve the structural conditions of wellbeing within the HP environment, in relation to both its cultural (reducing stigma) and systemic (opportunity and facilitation of help-seeking) elements. Chapters 8-9 advanced on this discussion by exploring how the approach fits into the ARL’s governance structures.

³⁵ Additional evidence demonstrates improved mental health (Chapman et al. 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002; Thoits 1995), physical health (McEwen 1998; Seeman et al. 2002; Uchino 2004), health-related behaviour (Umberson & Montrez 2010), and reduced mortality risk (Brummett et al. 2001; Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002; Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser 2003).

Institutional Level of Analysis

The final two chapters of this thesis investigated and revealed the patterns of organisational stress that are produced through the ineffective hybridity of wellbeing and commercial logics at the institutional level, which is understood to reflect the ‘massification’ of wellbeing governance and the increasing bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation of contemporary commercial sport. Participants in this research project felt that the ARL’s constant need to quantify, regulate, and report on wellbeing trends limited the opportunity for holistic approaches of care based on humanistic qualities of support. Pressures were felt most viscerally by PDMs, who argued that a centrally governed wellbeing practice framework forced them to operate as agents of control and restricted their ability to engage within the natural moments of athletes’ lives, to be responsive to the unique needs of their athletes and organisation, and to support the organic development of positive wellbeing cultures within HP environments. To address these concerns, Chapter 8 discusses the structural implications of the WCC Approach to AW&E, as a methodology for greater organisational alignment across the individual, organisational, and institutional levels. Seeing duty of care as something that is delivered in *collaboration* with athletes, rather than something that is done *by* organisations *to* athletes, these adjustments would see the role of the institutional level shift towards supporting the organisational level to improve the environmental conditions that athletes experience at the individual level, focused on the crucial role that psychosocial support has on improving wellbeing cultures.

Concerned with matters of centrality, Chapter 9 analysed the values and motivations that underpin the current AW&E Framework which, according to the view of this research project’s participants, argues that when duty of care is practised as an exercise of ‘good governance’, it becomes a proxy for risk and reputational management under the pretence of public relations, resulting in the passive participation and resistance of athletes and their supports. Requiring a correction of the centrality of wellbeing logics under an ‘aligned’ logic structure, Chapter 9 highlighted the importance for all organisational members to experience a degree of collective agency, through a unified set of goals, values, and systems. The WCC Approach to AW&E, as a means for promoting the shared value of wellbeing logics within a multi-dimensional concept of success that recognises the compatible qualities and contributions that it provides when

benefiting from collaborative arrangements, recognises the ‘transdisciplinary nature of personal, interpersonal, and cultural wellbeing in HP sport’ (Campbell, Brady & Tincknell-Smith 2014, p. 13). If elite sporting organisations are able to ‘create a context in which a recognised/recognisable shared set of values can be articulated, understood, and respected in a meaningful way’ (Kohe & Purdy 2020, p. 38), wellbeing logics can shift from their peripheral position and be regarded as a core function of elite sporting organisations. However, given the limitations highlighted by Chapter 9, only by stepping away from the commercially-oriented structures that govern wellbeing practices can elite sporting organisations engage in truly holistic approaches to athlete wellbeing and begin to re-imagine how wellbeing support can be provided within HP systems.

Implications of thesis

As the first research of its kind to apply organisational logic theory to the subject of athlete wellbeing within an elite sporting context, this project makes a valuable and significant contribution to the literature. The result is a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the relationship between structure and agency at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels and the implications for understanding and intervening in the conditions that enhance athlete wellbeing. Through an action research methodology and phenomenological perspective, the project investigated athlete experience while also promoting and amplifying the voices of athletes as subjects of research and collaborators in change. This informed the development of a set of pragmatic recommendations that can be used to support the effective integration of wellbeing logics into elite sporting organisations within an ‘aligned’ logic structure (high compatibility; high centrality):

- *Integrating wellbeing responsibilities into staff roles* will improve the quality of support provided to athletes and increase staff’s confidence to navigate the complexities of the overlapping personal and professional spheres. Currently, there is much ambiguity surrounding the boundaries that separate these spheres and a lack of clear process guiding staff in their provision of wellbeing support. Correcting these issues is important, as athletes do not seek support exclusively from their PDMs but rather, take opportunistic moments throughout their day-to-day lives to reach out to and disclose their concerns to members of staff whom they trust.

- *Training all members within the HP environment (coaches, managers, athletes, etc.) with athlete-specific mental health literacy training* will further improve the strength of athletes' psychosocial support networks at the organisational level. These programs should educate participants on identifying the signs and symptoms of mental illness, positive mental health management and preventative measures, treatment options for mental illness, appropriate crisis response actions, and skills to facilitate help-seeking behaviour (communicative aids and referral pathways). Moreover, these programs need to be sport-specific and to reflect the unique cultural conditions of rugby league. Having these programs critically evaluated should be made a priority.
- *Delivering connection workshops* can make a critical contribution to the strengthening of athletes' psychosocial support networks by normalising and de-stigmatising help-seeking behaviour. Designed to develop trust within the HP environment, increase athletes' access and opportunities for psychosocial support, and provide a dedicated space and time for athletes to communicate, connection workshops are a unique intervention that create an 'interrupted space' for athletes to interact within. Connection workshops should be implemented during the early stages of pre-season, while group dynamics are still forming, and will function most effectively when partnered with mental health literacy training (as a means of equipping group members with relevant knowledge and skills to provide support).
- *Supporting head coaches to engage in wellbeing practices* is the only way to ensure that elite sporting organisations protect the value of wellbeing and maintain an aligned logic structure within HP systems. To be clear, this is not to be at the expense of performance logics, but rather, means focusing on the compatible qualities that they share and activating them with higher levels of shared centrality.
- *Centering athletes in the decisions that affect them* will more effectively integrate multiplicity within elite sports' multi-dimensional interests. Through increased collaboration focused on lateral communication, athletes can lead improvements towards greater levels of compatibility and centrality between groups. For commercial logics, that means tapping into athletes' passions and supporting their engagement with community and/or commercial partnerships; for wellbeing logics, being reflexive to athletes' needs and tailoring support based on their feedback; for performance logics, providing decision-making transparency, particularly with regard to sporting opportunities.

- *Moving away from a centrally governed wellbeing practice framework*, with a focus on supporting elite sporting organisations to adopt the WCC Approach to AW&E, will reinforce protective factors at the individual and organisational levels. This is a structural adjustment of a systemic nature, in that it asks governing bodies to reduce the massification of wellbeing support (bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and routinisation of practices) and provide elite sporting organisations with greater autonomy. These changes must be primarily motivated by a stronger sense of duty of care, but can and should simultaneously be valued as an opportunity for performance and commercial gains.

Limitations and future research

As this research project unfolded, several key areas of interest arose but remained unexplored due to a range of limitations. The first and most significant limitation is the scope of participation: as the research project was concerned with athletes' experience of wellbeing, the voluntary approach to recruitment might have caused self-selection of participants who were sympathetic with the project's goals. If the sample lacked adequate representability, this in turn would prevent it from being considered a comprehensive and balanced case-study (particularly in respect of the leading commercial and performance logics), as data might have become biased by an over-representation of wellbeing advocates. Future research then might consider a similarly exploratory investigation into the practices of wellbeing support within elite sport but with a more diverse sample that includes participants from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and ideological positions. This is a space of great research potential, particularly from an organisational logic perspective, as the endeavour of achieving high levels of compatibility and centrality between all elite sports logics requires research accommodating the needs and interests of all involved.

Another major gap of this research project relates to three key areas of interest that, with great respect to their significance and importance, were considered beyond the scope of this project's theoretical framework and deserving of dedicated research. Understanding gender (in particular, the pressure to conform to hegemonic forms of sporting masculinities within HP environments), sexuality (in particular, how homophobia operates within the norms of HP cultures in men's elite sport), and culture (in particular, understanding culturally responsive

wellbeing practices in response to the high rates of participation among Pasifika and Indigenous Australian rugby league athletes). Lastly, given this is a field of research that is continuing to expand, the intervention strategies trialled under this project's action research methodology would benefit from further examination and interrogation. Research exploring whether these interventions can be replicated with equal impact, and in other contexts, would only further equip practitioners with the confidence to facilitate the WCC Approach to AW&E within their own organisations.

Concluding statement

This research project shows the ways in which athlete wellbeing suffers from ineffective forms of hybridity and the ways in which wellbeing logics are subordinate to elite sports leading performance and commercial logics. However, with an emerging evidence-base documenting the many compatible qualities of wellbeing logics, researchers and practitioners are becoming increasingly armed with the knowledge to advocate and educate on the shared benefits of effective hybrid practices. Organisational logic theory is a useful and pragmatic lens through which to hold these discussions, as it helps us not only to understand *what* these benefits are, but *how* to activate them through effective structural adjustments. The WCC Approach to AW&E is an attempt to do so that seeks to establish greater alignment between the individual, organisational, and institutional levels. Encouraging the ARL to provide stronger support to NRL clubs in their efforts to develop positive wellbeing cultures, it recognises that while the current AW&E Framework provides important clinical care, it does not reflect the patterns of help-seeking behaviour that athletes demonstrate on a day-to-day basis.

Because athletes rely most on their interpersonal relationships to interpret, share, and cope with the challenges of HP sport, elite sporting organisations need to move away from bureaucratic systems of support and into more humanistic forms of engagement. By doing so, elite sporting organisations will not only tap into the myriad of hybrid gains to be made by wellbeing's compatible qualities, but will extend their support to athletes within the personal, as well as the professional sphere. 'Mental health literacy training' and 'connection workshops' are just two intervention strategies that can add to this approach and improve the quality of psychosocial support provided to athletes, but they are only the beginning of an inquiry into more innovative and creative strategies that re-imagine the ways in which we support athletes' wellbeing. To

further explore these opportunities however, we need *all* elite sports stakeholders to recognise the transdisciplinary nature of holistic athlete wellbeing and commit to improving the centrality of wellbeing logics. For if elite sporting organisations are truly invested in the wellbeing of their athletes, and genuine about their duty of care for them, they will need to initiate action and show greater resolve as leaders of change. To be clear, this need not take away from the focus on performance and commercial logics, but rather, should reconcile the division between core and periphery that abjectly impacts wellbeing logics, and instead realise the living and thriving relationships that can be made through more effective hybrid practices. In doing so, we can make the structures of elite sport reflexive to the multi-dimensional needs of athletes; not as performers, not as business assets, but as complex *people* deserving of support. Ideally, this is what holistic wellbeing and the WCC Approach to AW&E can and should look like, moving forward.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form – Interview Participants

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Consent Form – Interview Participants

Project Title:

Crossing the Line: Balancing risk and protective factors to support athlete wellbeing on and off the field.

I hereby consent to participate in the above-named research project.

I acknowledge that:

- I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.
- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to:

- Participating in an interview.
- Having my information audio recorded.

Data publication, reuse and storage.

I understand that in relation to publication of the data:

- My involvement is confidential and any information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.
- I understand that I retain the right to review data in relation to my contributions and may request to amend and/or seek justifications over the use of my responses should I feel that they have been misrepresented.
- I may choose to withdraw my participation at any time; however, understand that some elements of my contributions up to this point will remain as part of the collected data.
- My participation in this study will have no effect on my relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University. The ethics reference number is H13172.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Appendix 2: Consent Form – Focus Group Participants³⁶

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Consent Form – Focus Group Participants

Project Title:

Crossing the Line: balancing risk and protective factors to support player wellbeing on and off the field.

I hereby consent to participate in the above-named research project.

I acknowledge that:

- I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.
- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to:

- Participating in a focus group.
- Having a note taker present.

Data publication, reuse and storage.

I understand that in relation to publication of the data:

- My involvement is confidential and any information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.
- I understand that I retain the right to review data in relation to my contributions and may request to amend and/or seek justifications over the use of my responses should I feel that they have been misrepresented.
- I may choose to withdraw my participation at any time; however, understand that elements of my contributions up to this point will remain as part of the collected data.
- My participation in this study will have no effect on my relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.

³⁶ For the purposes of remaining consistent with academic discourse, ‘focus groups’ refers to the participation in connection workshops and mental health literacy programs.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University. The ethics reference number is H13172.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet – Interview Participants



Participant Information Sheet – Interview Participants

Project Title:

Crossing the Line: Balancing risk and protective factors to support athlete wellbeing on and off the field.

Project Summary:

The crossing the line project aims to investigate the contributing factors that make up athlete's experiences of wellbeing, with its relationship to performance, and look to make a meaningful impact upon the systems that support them. Interviews provide an opportunity to the researcher to explore these experiences in focused detail, through the voices of players and their supporters.

You are invited to participate in this research study by Sam Lane, Primary Project Researcher and student in Doctorate of Philosophy, under the Supervision of Dr Neil Hall and Dr Peter Bansel of Western Sydney University's school of Social Science and Psychology.

How is the study being paid for?

This study is paid for by a joint co-sponsorship agreement between [The Club] and Western Sydney University.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to volunteer and participate in an interview with the primary researcher, Sam Lane. You will be asked questions that explore your experiences and knowledge of working as and/or with professional rugby league players. The researcher seeks to identify the various factors that impacts upon players' wellbeing and capacity to thrive within the team environment.

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?

The benefits of your participation will be seen in the following ways:

- Opportunity to reflect and share personal experiences in a secure and confidential environment.
- Building valuable knowledge that supports professional rugby league athletes.
- Informing recommendations to the club regarding the needs of professional athletes.

How much of my time will I need to give?

You will be asked to contribute 30 to 60 minutes.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?

There will be very limited risks or discomfort for you, however you may find it challenging to share your personal stories. Be advised that you are entitled to share only what you feel is comfortable and appropriate. Furthermore, you will reserve the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any stage.

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. Your identity will remain anonymous in any such publication, except with your permission. Audio recordings of discussions will be kept under password security and inaccessible to the public.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?

Audio recordings of discussions will be disposed of following the publication of results. Publications will be made available online and used as per Western Sydney University's Open Access Policy; however, your identity will remain anonymous in these documents. It is anticipated that these publications will be exchanged amongst the NRL's wellbeing community members.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason. If you do choose to withdraw, some elements of the information that you have contributed up until this point will remain as part of the collected data, as the researcher will not always be able to identify participants with each of their contributions.

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell other people about the study if you wish, however you should not reveal the identity of other participants. You may provide others with the contact details of the Sam Lane (Primary Researcher) who will provide a copy of this information sheet.

What if I require further information?

Please contact Sam Lane (Primary Researcher) should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate. Alternatively, you may consult with The Club's wellbeing manager, [PDM], who will oversee the project internally.

Sam Lane, Contact Details:

Email – sam.lane@westernsydney.edu.au

Phone – 0404 147 910

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. You may also speak with The Club's wellbeing manager, Dean Feeney, who can advocate upon your behalf.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13172.

[The Club] support staff:

If you feel like (at any time) you need to talk someone, if you are feeling down, or if you are feeling unsafe, please reach out to the [The Club] support staff available to you.

[The Club's AW&E Team's contact details]

Other support services:

Otherwise, here are some phone numbers and websites outside of the football club that you can call or search to find help or information.

Lifeline – 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636 or www.beyondblue.org.au

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Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet – Focus Group Participants



Participant Information Sheet – Focus Group Participants

Project Title:

Crossing the Line: balancing risk and protective factors to support player wellbeing on and off the field.

Project Summary:

The crossing the line project aims to investigate the contributing factors that make up athlete's experiences of wellbeing, with its relationship to performance, and look to make a meaningful impact upon the systems that support them. In group workshops, you will be invited to tell your stories and experiences of being professional rugby league athletes with [The Club], in the effort to foster collective resilience and open communication between team mates.

Facilitators:

- 1) [Athlete name]: First team player; wellbeing & education ambassador.
- 2) [Facilitator name]: Professional leadership and culture coach.

You are invited to participate in this research study by Sam Lane, Primary Project Researcher and student in Doctorate of Philosophy, under the Supervision of Dr Neil Hall and Dr Peter Bansel of Western Sydney University's school of Social Science and Psychology.

How is the study being paid for?

This study is paid for by a joint co-sponsorship agreement between [The Club] and Western Sydney University.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to volunteer and participate in a focus group interview. That is, a workshop aimed at exploring your experiences of being a professional athlete and how this impacts upon your wellbeing and capacity to thrive within the team environment.

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?

The benefits of your participation will be seen in the following ways:

- Increased connection and communication between participating players.
- Access to mentorship with players of other grades.
- Opportunity to reflect and share personal experiences in a secure and confidential environment.
- Building valuable knowledge that supports professional rugby league athletes.

- Informing recommendations to the club regarding the needs of professional athletes.

How much of my time will I need to give?

You will be asked to contribute to four (possibly six), ninety minute workshops, occurring monthly.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?

There will be a very limited risks or discomfort for you, however you may find it challenging to share and/or hear the personal stories of your colleagues. Should you find this difficult, Dean Feeney (wellbeing manager) will be present at each workshop to provide support to you during or following each session. You will also reserve the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any stage.

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. Your identity will remain anonymous in any such publication, except with your permission. Audio recordings of group discussions will be kept under password security and inaccessible to the public.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?

The researchers notes of groups discussions will be disposed of following the publication of results. Publications will be made available online and used as per Western Sydney University's Open Access Policy; however, your identity will remain anonymous in these documents. It is anticipated that these publications will be exchanged amongst the NRL's wellbeing community members.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason. If you do choose to withdraw, some elements of the information that you have contributed up until this point will remain as part of the collected data, as the researcher will not always be able to identify participants with each of their contributions.

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell other people about the study if you wish, however you should not reveal the identity of other participants. You may provide others with the contact details of the Primary Researcher who will provide a copy of this information sheet.

What if I require further information?

Please contact Sam Lane (Primary Researcher) should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate. Alternatively, you may consult with The Club's wellbeing manager, [PDM], who will oversee the project internally.

Sam Lane, Contact Details:

Email – sam.lane@westernsydney.edu.au

Phone – 0404 147 910

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. You may also speak with The Club's wellbeing manager, Dean Feeney, who can advocate upon your behalf.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13172.

[The Club] support staff:

If you feel like (at any time) you need to talk someone, if you are feeling down, or if you are feeling unsafe, please reach out to the [The Club] support staff available to you.

[The Club's AW&E Team's contact details]

Other support services:

Here are some phone numbers and websites outside of the football club that you can call or search to find help or information.

Lifeline – 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636 or www.beyondblue.org.au

University of Western Sydney
ABN 53 014 069 881 CRICOS Provider No: 00917K
Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia
westernsydney.edu.au

Appendix 5: Survey Questions

On a scale of 0-10, how much impact have the leadership workshops had on:

Team Connection



Playing Performance



Personal Development



Should we run a similar program again next year?

Yes

No

How important is the football club as a place for personal support?

A great deal

A lot

A moderate amount

A little

None at all

In your view, should football clubs take responsibility for the wellbeing of their players?

Yes

No

How much does off-field wellbeing have an effect on playing performance?

A great deal

A lot

A moderate amount

A little

None at all

What 3 supports do you believe are most beneficial to players mental health?

Formal counselling

Religious engagement

Access to wellbeing manager

Financial planning advice

Education and information on mental health

Gambling education

Family engagement

Sexual ethics

Cultural engagement

Team bonding

Other:

Appendix 6: Human Ethics Approval Letter

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

29 April 2019
Doctor Neil Hall
School of Social Sciences and Psychology

Dear Neil,

Project Title: "Crossing the Line: balancing risk and protective factors to support player wellbeing on and off the field"

HREC Approval Number: H13172

Risk Rating: HREC - Moderate

I am pleased to advise the above research project meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Approval of this project is valid from 29 April 2019 until 29 April 2022.

This protocol covers the following researchers:

Neil Hall, Sam Lane, Peter Bansel

Summary of Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.
6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.
7. **Project specific conditions:**
Approval is conditional upon the researcher providing evidence of the written agreement to access the data from The National Rugby League (the data custodian).

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au as this email address is closely monitored.

Yours sincerely

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee

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