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“Caught in the headlights”: A reflective account of the challenges faced by a neophyte practitioner
working with a national squad

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Abstract

This article provides a neophyte practitioner’s account of providing psychological support to a national team for the first time. The practitioner felt “caught in the headlights” due to their lack of preparation for the range of organizational issues they encountered. In this confessional tale, experiential knowledge gained by the practitioner is shared through the presentation of self-reflections from the 6-month period they supported the squad. While the practitioner’s time with this national squad was limited, it gave him a sense of the micropolitical landscape of the sporting organization and illuminated some of the complexities and dilemmas that characterize applied sport psychology practice. These reflections are offered to guide other aspiring professionals during their initial training experiences.

Key words: training and development, micropolitical landscape, preparation, national team, organizational stress.

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Context

41 This case study presents an account of the sport psychology support delivered to a
42 national team over the course of six months. At the time, I (the First Author) was a neophyte
43 practitioner, a few months into my supervised practice following the British Psychological
44 Society (BPS) Stage 2 route to accreditation. While I had initial experiences working in
45 collegiate sport, this was my first exposure to a national-level squad. Throughout this
46 process, I was guided by BPS code of conduct and ethical standards and engaged with regular
47 individual and group supervision.

48

Consulting Philosophy

49 My consulting philosophy in the early stages of practice was heavily influenced by
50 my academic experience. During the completion of my Master's degree in Sport and Exercise
51 Psychology, I placed an emphasis on the importance of understanding and developing a
52 philosophical approach to being an effective practitioner. As outlined by Poczwardowski,
53 Sherman and Ravizza (2004), understanding personal and professional philosophy is among
54 the essential prerequisites to effective and ethical practice. Having gained applied experience
55 working in collegiate sport, I had begun to experience greater efficacy in adopting a role as
56 the sport psychologist whereby my focus was understanding, assisting, and supporting the
57 development of the whole person and not just the athlete (cf. Rogers, 1951). I centred my
58 approach on the relationship I could develop with my client(s) and aimed to provide a service
59 characterized by authenticity, demonstrating unconditional positive regard, and showing
60 empathy (see Rogers, 1951; Mearns et al., 2013). I deliberately focused on developing
61 relationships that were collaborative, accepting, genuine, and honoured the unique world in
62 which my client(s) lived (Ivey et al., 2013). With this, my consulting philosophy aligned
63 closely with person-centered principles, which had shifted from earlier in my training, when I
64 would experience a sense of competence and satisfaction from adopting a more direct

65 approach and felt anxious to provide client(s) with solutions to demonstrate my knowledge
66 and worth. At the time of this case, I found greater satisfaction in acting as a facilitator,
67 following the clients higher order directions, on a journey towards self-actualization. The
68 challenges faced as the practitioner in this case led me to question my person-centered
69 professional philosophy.

70 **The Case**

71 I was asked to provide psychology support to a national team in a relatively new
72 discipline within the sport. The coaches had recently formed a skeleton support team, which
73 they sought to expand to include “performance psychology” support in their hope of
74 “creating a more holistic coaching structure”. I was initially very surprised to be given a
75 chance to lead the sport psychology support to national-level athletes given my lack of
76 experience in this setting, yet I was eager to develop and felt competent enough to work in
77 this setting under supervision. Moreover, the embryonic stage of development within the new
78 discipline of the sport meant the work was only appropriate for neophytes given the limited
79 funding available to the team. I met the coaches and athletes for the first time during a
80 selection weekend, where the head coach invited me to “get a feel” for the new discipline.

81 At the time of my first exposure to the squad, they were halfway through the season
82 and the athletes’ collective aim was to “compete at an international level”. The head coach
83 mentioned a few of the athletes had “struggled psychologically over the first half of the
84 season”, hence his desire to “bring in a practitioner” to work with the squad. I was keen to
85 explore this further and asked the head coach to talk through what he expected from sport
86 psychology support. During this conversation, the coach named several psychological
87 concepts (e.g., resilience, confidence, managing pressure) he wanted me to “cover in some
88 workshops with the athletes”. Psychological support was something that, from the
89 perspective of the head coach, occurred away from the training environment and was

90 independent of the coach's work. I foresaw this being a problem and raised the benefits of
91 working with and through coaches as an emersed member of the coaching team, but this was
92 dismissed immediately by the head coach. This dismissal from the coach took me by surprise.
93 I felt uneasy, unsure whether to challenge this view, as I worried doing so would jeopardise
94 my opportunity to work in elite sport before it had really begun. A further problem I
95 identified was the limited face-to-face contact time with the coaches and athletes. The head
96 coach explained the only opportunity to meet with support staff and athletes would be at
97 training camps which took place once every two months. I felt this delivery structure
98 presented a challenge to me building rapport and momentum with the staff and athletes. I
99 started to feel that the attitude toward sport psychology services may have been to provide a
100 "quick fix" reflected by "token" workshops and superficial athlete screening. I started to
101 question myself, my beliefs about "good practice", and doubted the impact I could have with
102 such limited integration and time with the squad. Despite these challenges, I was "caught in
103 the headlights" of opportunity and determined to make it work and provide a service that
104 could be built around a seemingly rigid programme. I hoped to expand the sport psychology
105 service, take the head coach on a journey, and embed "good psychology" after "getting my
106 foot in the door".

107 I spent a total of six months working with the squad, and in that time, I attended four
108 weekend training camps. To appease the wishes of the head coach, for these camps I would
109 deliver a one-to-one "check-in" session with each athlete followed by a team workshop at
110 each of the upcoming training camps. The remit for the workshops was that I was to cover
111 specific topics: coping with competition anxiety, performing under pressure, resilience, and
112 leadership. Emerging from a seemingly rigid and "token" view of psychological support, I
113 reflected on my poor "contracting", low contact time, organizational demands, as well as the

114 attraction of working with a national team that led to my collusion with a limited view of
115 psychological support.

116 **Relationships, Rapport and Contracting**

117 **Phase 1. Assessment.** I was invited to attend a training weekend mid-way through the
118 season. All 15 athletes in the squad and 4 support staff attended, which represented a great
119 chance to immerse myself within the culture of the team, undertake some observations, and
120 have some conversations to support a needs analysis that could span individual, team, and
121 organizational levels. Developing an extensive assessment process allows for the collection
122 and integration of a variety of data sources that enable a thorough analysis of the needs of
123 individuals, teams, and organizations (see Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020).

124 I arrived at the camp for my first day with some eagerness expecting to familiarize
125 myself with the environment. Yet on arrival the head coach informed me that he had arranged
126 one-to-one consultations with every athlete, each lasting 45 minutes. I was immediately
127 aware that I had not “contracted” effectively, feeling like I was not in control of the service I
128 was providing, and uncertain regarding what other surprises I might encounter. I was directed
129 by the head coach to a room where I would conduct athlete one-to-ones, which was a small
130 box room to the side of the training centre, where the athletes would “be sent” throughout the
131 day “to see me”. I suggested to the head coach it would be useful for me to observe the
132 athletes in their training environment before having a session with them, but the coach was
133 sceptical about the value of me doing so. In line with person-centered principles (Mearns et
134 al., 2013), I approached the one-to-one athlete sessions with a “stripped down” aim to build
135 rapport and lay the foundations for open and honest conversations. To support the athlete in
136 exploring their own journey, I used McAdams’s (1995) life story interview method to invite
137 each athlete to assume the role of storyteller of their life up to the present moment. By doing
138 so, we were able to explore life chapters, critical events, and life challenges, and how these

139 may have impacted the athlete (McAdams, 1995). The use of life interviews is well supported
140 in the sport psychology literature (Smith et al., 2016) and I felt this method sat well within
141 my emerging philosophy of practice.

142 Reflecting on the assessment phase, I felt I could have contracted more effectively
143 with the head coach on the importance of a thorough needs analysis. Not wanting to “rock the
144 boat”, I went along with what the coach had planned and his vision for psychological support.
145 As I did not challenge the head coach, I experienced feelings of inauthenticity in our early
146 exchanges and felt discomforted trying to “fit” myself into their environment. I experienced
147 similar feelings to those reported by Wadsworth et al. (2021), where I experienced a sense of
148 wearing clothes that do not fit, that my work just does did not feel right, with these thoughts
149 being accompanied with symptoms of anxiety and frustration. At this time, I recalled
150 literature reporting trainee experiences of working in elite sport, and the many practitioner
151 accounts relating to knowing when and how to appropriately challenge others in sport
152 (McDougal et al., 2015; Champ et al., 2020). I share the reflections of Cruickshank et al.
153 (2013), where elite sport organizations can be asserted as ruthless, totalitarian, with unique
154 distributions of power, so practitioners must carefully consider when to challenge and when
155 to refrain. I felt frustrated with myself and I became hesitant to ask for support and I avoided
156 challenging the head coach. I did later raise this challenging relationship in supervision, but
157 on camp I felt I had to “crack on” and “get stuck in”. Indeed, I was never able to establish a
158 good rapport with the head coach because our conversations were brief, formal, and task-
159 focused, and despite my attempts, the coach was not open to working collaboratively to build
160 a more meaningful working relationship. I was – and remained – an outsider.

161 Reflecting on the process of meeting athletes back-to-back, I was mentally and
162 emotionally fatigued, especially as I had no time in between meetings reflect on the previous
163 consultation and write up notes. Feeling drained, I questioned my own self-care and was later

164 disappointed that I prioritized the wellbeing of others before looking after myself. I felt the
165 quality of the sessions deteriorated as the day progressed, and by the last few, was simply
166 “getting through” them with my ability to actively engage in the session compromised and
167 resulting in a lack of individuality. I was frustrated with myself for allowing this to happen
168 and resolved to change approach. First, I attempted to observe the athletes in training, aiming
169 to further develop my nascent relationships and build an understanding of their individual
170 needs (Fifer et al., 2008). Second, I strove to engage in informal conversations with athletes
171 throughout the weekend. What I craved was to be meaningfully embedded within the system
172 I was supporting and the opportunity to establish credibility and effective relationships. Yet,
173 this may have been an unrealistic expectation given the lack of contact time with the squad,
174 my ‘outsider’ status, and the difficulties encountered when contracting with the head coach.

175 **Phase 2. *Mutual Sharing with Athletes.*** During our initial one to one conversations,
176 athletes raised with me concerns relating to the culture and the environment of the team.
177 Some athletes described feeling “disconnected” from the sport and experienced moral
178 disengagement due the behaviours of the staff (Guvendi & Isim, 2019). The athletes
179 continued to raise issues relating to the structure of sessions, which they perceived to be
180 wholly coach-led and “incompatible” with their own desires and beliefs (Jowett & Cockerill,
181 2002). I explored these themes with the coaches in a sensitive manner, seeking their
182 perspective and conscious of managing any countertransference given my own personal
183 uneasiness with the head coach. Contrary to the athletes’ opinions, the coaches were adamant
184 that there were no issues with the team culture and no need to pay attention to these concerns.
185 Collectively, the coaching team insisted I should deliver the workshop on “coping with
186 competition anxiety” and as I felt I had not built a close rapport with coaches, and in a
187 position of subordination unable to challenge their position, I proceeded to deliver the
188 session.

189 At the start of my workshop on “coping with competition anxiety” with the athletes, I
190 perceived some unrest and palpable tension among the athletes, with one individual declaring
191 he was finding it hard to focus on the content when there was a “cloud hanging over the
192 group”. The athlete continued, stating that he believed there had been a breakdown in
193 communication between the athletes and coaches over the last few months. These disputes
194 were not only caused by unmet expectations and disagreements about training content
195 (Kristiansen et al., 2012), but also by individual behaviours, such as coaches’ rigid and
196 autocratic leadership (Gearity & Metzger, 2017). These views were shared by most of the
197 athlete group and they expressed collective difficulty in focusing on the topic of the session. I
198 felt ethically compelled to provide a space for the athletes to talk to the issues they disclosed.
199 From my philosophical stance, the client is a person first and athlete second, so I used the
200 session to listen to their concerns regarding the coaches, rather than delivering what I now
201 felt would be a superficial, misaligned, and ultimately incongruent workshop. While there is
202 evidence in the current literature to indicate that conflict is likely to occur at some point
203 within the context of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2003), there is only little
204 evidence-based information available on how coaches and athletes practically approach
205 interpersonal disputes (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). Exploring interpersonal strategies, I felt an
206 appropriate first step would be to create a space where the athletes could begin to self-
207 regulate by offering time and opportunity to vent their frustration (Wachsmuth et al., 2018).
208 Undertaking two-chair work; with one acting as the coach and the other the athlete, I asked
209 the athlete to pose concerns and questions to each other to help look at the challenges from
210 different perspectives. The aim of this task was to create a space where the athletes could
211 ‘feel heard’, and gain perspective on the situation (Bell et al., 2020). Concerns were shared
212 in this task regarding transparency, trust, support, people management, organization,
213 feedback, and lack of positive reinforcement from the coaches.

214 Having facilitated an ad hoc team self-disclosure session (Holt & Dunn, 2006), and
215 not delivered anything on “coping with competition anxiety”, my concern was what to do
216 with the information I had been given and my anxiety heightened with the thought that I had
217 potentially “fanned the flames” of discontent between the coaches and athletes. I did try to
218 anonymously share with the coaches a few of the points raised by the athletes, hoping that
219 this honesty and openness would resonate with them and they might experience greater
220 empathy with the athletes (Jowett et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the coaches were dismissive of
221 the athletes concerns and in response placed the blame for such sentiments on the athletes.
222 One of the technical coaches stated, “that’s typical of them, they can’t be trusted”, with the
223 head coach adding in response, “if they took more control nothing would get done”.

224 On reflection on this phase of the programme, I became increasingly frustrated with
225 the coaches’ lack of receptivity to my challenges or ideas, and there were times when I
226 questioned whether they took me seriously. Specifically, I ruminated over whether my
227 “trainee” status meant they saw me exclusively as an inexperienced, novice practitioner who
228 they could dictate to. I started wondering if my presence was exclusively a symbolic attempt
229 to show care for the athletes. I felt in a difficult position, attempting to appease the head
230 coach who had provided me with the opportunity, while recognizing the ethical obligation
231 and duty of care to respect the athletes’ concerns and advocating for them. There were times
232 when I questioned my worth and the impact I could have without greater traction with the
233 coaches. Throughout this process, I felt I was prioritizing the squad’s needs and neglecting
234 my own self-care in this experience. At no point did I reflect on my own emotions and how
235 the situation was impacting my wellbeing. With the support of my supervisor, I reflected on
236 these events which led to some normalizing of my concerns and taking ownership of my self-
237 care. We debated whether I should continue with the opportunity, but I was determined to try
238 to make progress and remained drawn to the opportunity. I redesigned my next workshop for

239 the following training camp, which was intended to support athletes and coaches in
240 constructively sharing emotions (Evans et al., 2013).

241 **Phase 3. *Team Reflections and Mutual Sharing with Coaches and Athletes.*** Despite the
242 challenges faced during the first camp, I was optimistic that bringing the athletes and coaches
243 together for a session would be beneficial, to begin to clear the air rather than cover over the
244 emerging cracks. With athletes and staff sharing their concerns with me separately, I reflected
245 on the complexity of my role in the system and noted several areas such as the need to shape
246 interpersonal processes, enhancing communication skills, increasing coaching effectiveness,
247 promoting intra-team/-organization relationships via conflict management as possible areas to
248 explore (Langan et al., 2013). Regarding the most pressing concern of athlete-coach conflict,
249 I reflected on my role in the process, and considered the strengths of third-party interventions
250 to manage this conflict (Wachsmuth et al., 2020). Guided by academic literature on managing
251 conflict, I sought to use my role as the practitioner in the system to enhance open channels of
252 communication and honesty, as well as providing support and offering assurance (Vealey,
253 2017; Wachsmuth et al., 2020). To enhance communication between athletes and staff, I
254 utilised a personal disclosure mutual sharing (PDMS) approach to enable athletes to have a
255 voice and share their thoughts and feelings (Holt & Dunn, 2006). When used judiciously, a
256 PDMS approach can enhance team closeness, understanding appreciation, and ultimately
257 foster increases in friendship identity (Dunn & Holt, 2004; Evans et al., 2013). Nevertheless,
258 adopting a PDMS approach with a group of individuals with strong views and limited trust
259 was a challenge. The athletes saw this session as an opportunity to vent, but the coaches
260 reacted to this and there was a battle for “airtime”. This session evidenced some of the
261 micropolitical issues and social fractures present throughout the squad, with athletes and
262 coaches lacking congruence and empathy, and no sense of shared purpose or identity. What
263 surprised me was the lack of emphasis on enhancing self-awareness, ownership, and

264 responsibility, with the vision of the head coach focused on the “how”, rather than the “what”
265 and ‘why’ (Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

266 Reflecting on my position and status as s a neophyte practitioner, I found it difficult to
267 manage so many different perspectives and opinions, and while the experience gave me a
268 sense of the micropolitical landscape of working in elite sport, I was overwhelmed. On
269 reflection, I perhaps should have foreseen how the disconnect between the athletes and
270 coaches would “play out” and might have undertaken the PDMS with smaller groups,
271 allowing one person to speak at a time. Towards the end of the session, I felt frustrated as the
272 session hadn’t gone the way I had hoped. I started ruminating over the impact I could have
273 with a squad that was divided and questioned whether they needed someone with more
274 experience in elite sport. The period between this training weekend and the next camp was
275 challenging. On some days I wanted to call the head coach and say, “I’m sorry I’m going to
276 have to step away”, and other days wanted to meet the challenge.

277 I took my experiences to my one-to-one and group supervision. The group helped put
278 the situation in perspective and while I felt permission to step away from the work, I decided
279 I would continue with the work, and that I would attempt to encourage the squad to reflect on
280 team values. I planned a session with the goal of developing a charter that both coaches and
281 athletes could refer to with general agreement on shared values, beliefs, and norms, while
282 acknowledging that subgroups existed (Wagstaff et al., 2017).

283 **Phase 4. *Team Values, Identity, and “Crisis”***. On arrival to the next training
284 weekend, I was anxious about how the session would go. For this workshop, the aim was to
285 identify and build from a common ground between the athletes and coaches by exploring
286 their perceptions on team values. From the earlier needs analysis, many of the athletes didn’t
287 feel “connected” to the squad and felt isolated at training weekends. Hence, there was a
288 collective support for the squad creating a team charter (Byrd & Luthy, 2010), identifying

289 what values the team might embrace, standards they would expect of each other, and what
290 behaviors needed to be shown to demonstrate these values. Considering a third-party
291 perspective on the system (Wachsmuth et al., 2020), I was conscious to facilitate without
292 imposing to ensure the charter emerged from the squad. Working together, athletes and
293 coaches identified numerous values, including respect, honesty, be the best you can, and have
294 fun. I felt they responded well to the session, and for the first time I left the weekend content
295 with the progress made and confident valuable changes could materialize. Unfortunately,
296 before I could attend another training camp, I was informed the team had been disbanded due
297 to a range of organizational and funding issues. During this abrupt ending I noted two
298 important reflections on this work: 1) the reality of working in elite sport is characterized by
299 high levels of intentional change due to stakeholder demands for sustained success (Fletcher
300 & Wagstaff, 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2015), and; 2) the precarious nature of sport psychology
301 work (Gilmore et al. 2018).

302 **Reflections on consulting philosophy and challenges faced**

303 **Challenge to congruence**

304 One of the main challenges I faced in this case was a dogmatic pursuit of, and
305 adherence to, my service philosophy. On meeting the squad, I was working from what I felt
306 was a coherent philosophy and adjusted my support according to norms and interactions with
307 coaches and athletes. Yet, at this stage of my development, perhaps it was more a matter of
308 having a theoretical philosophy that had not been challenged by the realities that were
309 presented in my practice environment. I felt that to work collaboratively and across varying
310 levels of the system would enable “good psychology” service delivery to occur, but in
311 retrospect, I did not contract effectively with the head coach or fully disclose these challenges
312 in supervision. Despite adhering to my core values and beliefs, it was not enough to be
313 effective with a squad in crisis (cf. Larsen, 2017). As I experienced these tensions, I became

314 frustrated with myself, wanting to try and work through problems while ensuring I adhered to
315 a professional philosophy, but not knowing how to do this. Whenever I reflected on the
316 experience of working with the squad, I started ruminating around the idea of not being good
317 enough, being a fraud, and needing to “know” more. My own group supervision supported
318 me throughout this time with a reflective space to share this experience, and my peers
319 supported me without judgement and pointed to the importance of self-care during this
320 difficult experience.

321 At times, my stubborn desire to show the squad I could rise to the challenge moved
322 me further away from my service philosophy, as I became anxious to find solutions. While
323 difficult to admit, my focus was more “internal” and concerned with proving my worth,
324 rather than “external” and on the needs of the squad (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1995). With
325 this, it may have been an opportunity that came too soon for someone with little experience
326 of issues of organizational and team level challenges at a national level. I felt, and was,
327 “caught in the headlights”, wanting to show my worth and excited by the prestige of working
328 with a squad at national level. On reflection, I may have been better placed approaching
329 difficult conversations with the head coach, trusting my instincts and, albeit to some degree
330 avoidantly, stepping away from the opportunity. As such, knowing my limits, looking after
331 myself, and help seeking are key learning points to take away from this experience.

332 **Micropolitical environment**

333 From the outset, it was evident that social fractures were present throughout the
334 squad. Athletes and coaches did not see “eye to eye”, and I found it difficult to direct my
335 attention to several “logics” operating in the organization. The athletes mentioned a few
336 times that they felt a lack of control and would like more autonomy in planning sessions. The
337 senior athletes were more vocal on this and had asked for an athlete leadership group to
338 provide a greater athlete voice, yet this had been rejected on numerous occasions by the

339 coaches. I could begin to see the individuals in the group focused on their own interests and
340 desires, and this impacted the systems functioning when it came to collaboration and shared
341 vision (Gibson & Groom, 2018). If the coaches had transferred more responsibility to the
342 athletes, it may have helped empower them through ownership and accountability (Hodge et
343 al., 2014). Without this, the squad suffered from a “them” versus “us” outgroup approach and
344 lacked a sense of shared purpose and psychological safety. From a group dynamics
345 perspective (Martin et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2016), and particularly with regard to the social
346 environment, appropriate challenge may have been beneficial, but this was largely avoided
347 by most of the individuals in the environment in case conflict ensued.

348 Ultimately, there existed a lack of congruence between athletes and coaches and no
349 sense of shared purpose and identity. My hope that team values or a charter would provide
350 the foundation to develop a bond through the squad was misplaced without other fundamental
351 foundation stones and the team struggled to develop any continuity, meaning, distinctiveness
352 and sense of belonging (Thomas et al., 2017). Working in this system felt like a “dynamic
353 and fluid process of forging and re-forging alliances and working relationships” (Cassidy et
354 al., 2016, p. 60), and as a neophyte practitioner I found it difficult to read, initiate, and
355 respond to the inescapably political demands of the sporting workplace. Given the
356 requirements for sport psychologists to practice within such politicised contexts, it is perhaps
357 naïve to believe that they are somehow immune from the challenges and dilemmas that
358 accompany shared endeavours with others (Leftwich & Leftwich, 2005). This experience
359 has helped me reflect on the micro political components of power, conflict, and vulnerability
360 featured in day-to-day organizational life, and has advanced my understanding of some of the
361 more tacit and understated challenges that practitioners are likely to encounter working in
362 elite sport (Rowley et al., 2018).

363

Final Thoughts

364 While my time with this national squad was limited, it gave me a sense of the
365 micropolitical landscape of elite sporting organizations and enabled me to begin to
366 understand some of the complexities, nuances, and dilemmas of applied sport psychology
367 practice (Rowley et al., 2018). Before starting with the squad, I felt coherent in my service
368 philosophy, but by the end of this experience I recognized I was struggling to provide a
369 service I could be happy with. In some respect, at the start of this journey, I was putting too
370 much pressure on myself to label my practice and adhere to a “school” of psychology. While
371 having a theoretical framework to work from was important for my development, I felt I
372 needed to further reflect on my core beliefs and values and allow a philosophy and method to
373 emerge from that. Moreover, this experience reminded me of the importance of effective
374 contracting and having difficult conversations with key stakeholders, regardless of their
375 power or status.

376 My ambition when asked to provide support to this squad was to attempt to operate at
377 systemic or organizational level, with members of the whole organization rather than just
378 athletes, to attain and sustain successful outcomes (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Yet, in
379 hindsight this may have been an unrealistic expectation based on the challenges existing
380 throughout the squad and my preparedness for such work. On reflection, I may have ignored
381 some of the complexities associated with integrating myself into a high-performance
382 environment, and my eagerness to impress both parties clouded my judgement and drew me
383 away from the most pressing needs. As discussed by Larsen (2017), practitioners need to
384 integrate the notions of self-reflection and cultural sensitivity into their professional
385 philosophy when entering a professional sports organization, while keeping an eye on several
386 “logics” operating in the organization. With this, it is key neophytes do not expose
387 themselves to this type of context without clear contracting when entering a new service
388 delivery context and are clear in their approach to appropriately challenge individuals within

389 that system to avoid collusion. Moreover, it is important for practitioners to be aware of their
390 own limitations, engage in self-care, and show vulnerability in order to prioritize their own
391 wellbeing before helping others (Quartioli et al., 2019).

392 **Key recommendations**

- 393 • For practitioners early in their development, it is important to reflect on what type of
394 practitioner they want to be, focusing on their core values and beliefs and allowing
395 their professional philosophy and method to emerge from such reflections.
- 396 • Contracting effectively with the key stakeholders should be prioritized when entering
397 a new service delivery context. It is important to establish clear reciprocal
398 expectations early on between the practitioner and stakeholders and return to such
399 issues repeatedly throughout one's practice.
- 400 • Rather than trying to 'solve' problems and offer solutions all at once, practitioners
401 should incrementally build momentum after careful formulation and an appreciation
402 of the complexity of the client or systemic needs.
- 403 • Sometimes it is just not the right "fit" or time in one's development. Practitioners
404 must reflect on the suitability of the practice context for their competence and
405 development. It is an important message to know that it is okay to show vulnerability
406 and admit to not having answers.
- 407 • Practitioners should prioritize self-care. Caring for clients' needs should not happen at
408 the cost of the practitioner's own wellbeing. Practitioners are strongly encouraged to
409 look after themselves first and foremost by adhering to self-care practices.

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