

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The Development of a Model to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Applied Sport Psychology Practice

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

1.1 Overview

Recent developments in U.K. sport have seen unprecedented funding made available to the development of performance and excellence (Sport England¹, 1999). Central to these developments has been the establishment of a United Kingdom Sports Institute and a supporting Network of centres around the U.K. and abroad (United Kingdom Sports Council; UKSC, 1998). In partnership with sport governing bodies through World Class Performance Programmes the Institutes aim to *'provide our best men and women with the facilities and support services they need to compete and win at the highest level'* (Sport England, 1999).

Integral to these services is the provision of sports science support, including applied sport psychology practice (UKSC, 1998). In this thesis the aim of applied sport psychology practice is defined as to provide a quality service in order to induce psycho-behavioural change in the athlete to enhance performance and the quality of the sport experience (Vealey, 1994). As sport science support in the U.K. continues to grow and sport psychologists move towards professional status, it is imperative that they accept and address the new levels of accountability that come with professional status. Smith (1989) argued that applied sport psychology had entered an *'age of accountability'* and that the need to respond to these accountability demands was primary. In order to fulfil these demands, sport psychologists must be willing and able to take responsibility for evaluating the services they provide (Heyman, 1987; Weigand *et al.*, 1999).

However, consideration of the literature and current national developments suggests that the formal evaluation of applied sport psychology practice is not customary and *'rather conspicuous by its absence'* (Hardy & Jones, 1994, p82). Indeed, Streat (1998) suggested that the need for effective evaluation was one of the *'most pressing needs in applied sport psychology... and one that is essential for the growth of the field'* (p340). There is a need for a model that will fit with the demands of practice and evaluate effectiveness in a rigorous and credible manner. Arguably, the present thesis is both essential and timely.

¹ Since the summer of 1999 the English Sports Council adopted the brand name Sport England and the U.K. Sports Council was renamed U.K. Sport. Throughout this thesis these names will be used interchangeably dependent on the time period being discussed (i.e. pre-name change will use English Sports Council).

1.2 Present research and organisation of thesis

The present research has been initiated, funded and developed by the need to monitor and evaluate the sports science services of a regional Sports Performance Centre (SPC). The SPC was funded by the English Sports Council (West Midlands) and was set up to emulate national developments at a regional level. This 'real world' need will ensure that throughout the thesis the practical implications of the findings are fully considered.

This research has four broad aims:

1. To propose and justify a model for the evaluation of applied sport psychology practice
2. To develop and pilot test appropriate instruments to measure the effectiveness indicators identified in the model and provide useful evaluative information.
3. To evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the model for evaluating applied sport psychology practice.
4. To consider and facilitate the practical application of the model and instruments to monitor and evaluate practice.

In order to fulfil these aims the research has been sub-divided into four parts. Part I aims to develop an understanding of the background to the research. Specifically, recent developments in applied sports science in the U.K. are discussed in order to fit the thesis within a national context. Secondly, the role and influence of the English Sports Council (West Midlands) as a joint funder of the research is discussed. It is important to consider this because it has implications for the methodological and philosophical decisions made throughout the thesis.

Part II aims to conceptualise an evaluative model by considering a number of issues. Firstly, in order to position the thesis within the field of sport psychology it is appropriate to explore and define what applied sport psychology practice is. From this, it is appropriate to consider the nature of practice and how it will influence the development of an appropriate evaluation model. Secondly, methods of evaluation in sport psychology practice are considered to determine the current status. Thirdly, in order to develop an understanding of the development and nature of evaluation the

field of evaluation itself is discussed. From this, consideration of how evaluation has been utilised in other applied settings is also undertaken and the implications for developing a model are discussed. Chapter 5 is the final chapter in Part II and draws from and consolidates these issues to propose an appropriate model for applied sport psychology practice.

Part III of the thesis builds on the proposed model and aims to develop and validate instruments to assess the effectiveness indicators identified in the model. In all nine effectiveness indicators are identified, however constraints of time and space results in only six being developed.

Part IV aims to consider methods of evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of the evaluation model proposed in this thesis to achieve its stated aims. Finally, the last chapter aims to conclude the research by synthesising the findings and identifying areas for further development of the model and future research and practice.