

# Revisions to the Sport Psychology Service Delivery (SPSD) Heuristic: Explorations With Experienced Consultants

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Sport psychology service delivery (SPSD) heuristic (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Henschen, 1998) included key components of applied work. Nevertheless, the complexities of sport psychology consulting need an even broader representation. In individual, semistructured interviews, 10 experienced sport psychology consultants explored the usefulness of the original heuristic and newly added elements in their professional practice. Inductive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) resulted in a total of 2409 meaning units that were grouped into 127 lower-order themes and 32 higher-order themes that were used to clarify, expand, and revise the SPSPD model as interpreted by the participants. Based on the new elements (i.e., consultant-client relationship, the consultant variables, the client variables, immersion, and the goodness of fit) and two meta-themes (i.e., interrelation and person-focused values), a newly configured heuristic is proposed (SPSPD-Revised). Future researchers will benefit from different research methods and diversified conceptualizations of sport psychology service delivery to account for professional practice variables in various contexts.

The science and art of doing sport psychology has been of most importance among applied sport psychologists (e.g., Andersen, 2002, Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza, & Rotella, 1999; Hays, 2009). An open discussion on essential components of effective sport psychology practice is necessary to keep issues concerning education and training standards at the forefront of applied sport psychology and present new perspectives for academic scrutiny. Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Henschen (1998) proposed a sport psychology service delivery (SPSPD) heuristic that identified 11 elements of effective sport psychology practice (i.e., professional boundaries, professional philosophy, making contact, assessment, conceptualizing athletes' concerns and potential interventions, range, types, and organization of service, program implementation, managing the self as an intervention instrument, program and consultant evaluation, conclusions and implications, and leaving

the setting). The strength of this model lies in its unique approach to building on collective accomplishments in sport psychology and counseling psychology and emerging patterns in sport psychology consulting as all SPSD elements were both explicitly and implicitly referred to by the practitioners (e.g., see the 1989 special issue of *The Sport Psychologist*).

Because applied sport psychology draws on both science and art, its phenomenology is best captured by self-narratives and in-depth interviews (e.g., Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008). While the qualitative explorations of aspects of consulting practice embraced very specific tools (e.g., use of hypnosis, Grindstaff & Fisher, 2006) as well as more encompassing approaches (e.g., reflective practice, Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007), in-depth examinations of the entire scope of sport psychology service delivery (such as SPSD) have been limited. Thus, the purpose of this study was to add qualitative insights to clarify, expand, and revise the SPSD heuristic as interpreted by the participants. Two linked explorations were conducted: one that was focused on the original SPSD heuristic; and the second that elaborated on the added elements (i.e., consultant-client relationship, the consultant variables, the client variables, immersion, and the goodness of fit). As a result, we propose a revised structure for all elements (i.e., original and added) in a newly configured heuristic (SPSD-R [revised]). We will first review the new elements and then, present the data referring to the SPSD-R.

## **New SPSD Elements**

### **The Consultant-Client Relationship**

It appears that regardless of the consultant's theoretical orientation, the consultant-client relationship plays a fundamental role in the effectiveness of the sport psychology intervention (e.g., Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999). Andersen (2002) emphasized developing the consultant-athlete working alliance as the major goal of the initial stages of any consulting process and Friesen and Orlick (2010) found the relationship building skills to be important in holistic consulting. Sport psychology consultants have long recognized the importance of the interpersonal process in providing sport psychology services. For example, Henschen (1991) and Neff (1990), and Olympic consultants who participated in a study conducted by Gould and his colleagues (1989) emphasized that a good consultant-client relationship improves the usefulness of performance enhancement interventions. This content was absent from the original SPSD heuristic.

### **The Consultant Variables**

Sport psychology consultants have typically accounted for the role of their own personal characteristics in the effectiveness of the service they provide. Consultant variables include flexibility (Salmela, 1989), knowledge of a given sport (Hung, Lin, Lee & Chen, 2008), and ability to assert one's preferred conditions to be effective within an organization (Rotella's, 1990). One of the most comprehensive works on characteristics of an effective sport psychology consultant came from Partington and Orlick's work (1987a), and the development of the Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; 1987b). The CEF included these criteria: possesses useful knowledge and a positive-constructive attitude; individualizes the mental training program; is flexible,

trustworthy, easy to relate to; draws on strengths; fits in; helps overcome problems; and provides clear, practical, concrete strategies. These consultant characteristics were perceived by coaches, individual athletes, and teams as clearly related to consultant effectiveness (Gould, Murphy, Tammen, & May 1991). Finally, Thompson and Ravizza (1998) identified a list of factors contributing to failure in consulting (e.g., lack of sport knowledge, and following one's own agenda). The consultant variables, as a new SPSP element, embrace more aspects than just a consultant's personal characteristics such as preferences, biases, prejudices, values, and attitudes concerning their applied work. General suggestions on how to approach at least some of these issues can be found in the rapidly growing literature on self-reflective practice (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007; Knowles et al., 2007; Winstone & Gervis, 2006).

## The Client Variables

The emerging sport psychology literature on important variables of recipients of consulting services discusses primary student-athletes' expectations, attitudes, and barriers in regards to sport psychology/mental training (e.g., Martin, 2005; Wrisberg, Simpson, Loberg, Withycombe, & Reed, 2009). Wrisberg et al. (2009), summarized the important client (i.e., student-athlete) variables as follows: the ability to tolerate a "stigma" as having psychological problems, confidence in the service and the consultant, openness to the consulting process, demographic variables (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender) and perception of a consultant as having a similar background and being familiar with their sport. Skill level and nature of sport involvement (i.e., individual vs. team) may also constitute important client variables (Gould, et al., 1989). The "openness" to sport psychology consulting (Wrisberg, 2009, p. 471) has support in anecdotal data suggesting that an important client condition (i.e., both athletes and coaches) concerns (a) motivation to improve a given aspect of psychological functioning (e.g., Hung et al., 2008; Ravizza, 1990, Rotella, 1990) and (b) intelligence and willingness to tell the truth (Dan Gould as cited in Simons & Andersen, 1995). Other sport psychology practitioners confirmed gender, race, perception of practitioner's allegiance, and an athlete's investment as additional important considerations (Thompson & Ravizza, 1998).

## Immersion

Both the reflections of individual consultants on their multiyear intense involvements with specific teams (e.g., Vernacchia, & Henschen, 2008), practitioners' reflections on consulting failures and their careers (Simons & Andersen, 1995; Thompson & Ravizza, 1998), and empirical data (e.g., Gould et al., 1989) strongly indicate that the consultant's immersion into the setting, the sport, and the athlete or team issues is critical to the effectiveness of the intervention. Further, recent reports on using a periodized approach to psychological skills training (e.g., Holliday, Burton, Sun, Hammermeister, Naylor, & Freigang, 2008), clearly suggest immersion as an important diagnostic, implementation, and evaluative tool. Immersion can be translated into a number of behaviors, for example, being present before, at, and after practice time, attending sport camps, traveling to the competition, getting familiar with athletes backgrounds, and attending social events. Gould and his colleagues (1989) reported that when asked about their worst experiences, the

Olympic consultants indicated “not enough time” as the first in ranking of negative factors (five out of all 14 generated responses). In particular, consultants who work with elite athletes thrive on immersion; “making a difference in Olympic success requires deep immersion with a team’s coaches and athletes” (McCann, 2008, p. 271), “it is essential to be seen by the athletes as an integral part of the supporting staff” (Bull, 1995, p. 158).

## **Goodness of Fit**

The way the consultant enters the setting, assesses and conceptualizes the issues, implements the intervention, and builds and maintains the interpersonal relationships can be congruent with, or disconnected from the needs and wants of the clients. Partington and Orlick (1991) discussed consultant fit into the situation as a major theme in best-ever consulting experiences. An important component of the fit is fairly extensive and detailed knowledge of a given sport (e.g., Loehr, 1990, McCann, 2008; Ravizza, 1988). Having the “right” personality for a particular situation and experiencing “translation difficulty” (Thompson & Ravizza, 1998, pp. 249–250), a need for “match” (a group of consultants cited in Simons & Andersen, 1995, p. 456), and “goodness of fit” (Neff, 1990, p. 384) were also reported while addressing the major components of successful consulting experiences. Gould and his colleagues (1989) found not getting along with coaches (or not fitting in) to be the third leading category of concerns as voiced by 9 Olympic sport psychology consultants. In a follow-up study, Gould and his colleagues (1991) found that “fitting in with the team” was an especially important characteristic (among the 10) of effective consultation as reported by both the coaches and athletes.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

An interpretive, qualitative research design was selected to conduct the study. Ten accomplished consultants (three female, seven male) voluntarily participated in individual semistructured interviews, during which they offered narrative explorations of SPSD elements. Permission to use their names in the subsequent reports was obtained and all relevant ethical and institutional procedures were carried out. The participants were: Gloria Balague, Cal Botterill, Burt Giges, Dan Gould, Kate Hays, Keith Henschen, Bob Nideffer, Kirsten Peterson, Ken Ravizza, and John Silva. They were purposively selected (Patton, 1990) based on their unique value to the study. The purpose was to include a selection of active, experienced, and nationally and internationally recognized sport psychology consultants whose scope of practice allowed for an in-depth exploration of SPSD heuristic along with the newly added elements (“information-rich cases”, p. 169).

At the time of the interviews, the consultants had an average of 21 years of sport psychology practice (and over 25 years of experience as a helping and teaching professional). Five held their doctoral degrees in kinesiology/physical education, three in clinical psychology, one in counseling psychology, and one in psychiatry. Collectively, they had consulted in a variety of sport settings with children, youth, recreational, college, professional, and Olympic athletes (both able-bodied and with disabilities) as well as with exercisers. The consultants also worked in business, performing arts, medicine, and military.

## Procedures

Each participant approached agreed to be interviewed. Consultants were given the choice of being interviewed at a conference site ( $n = 6$ ; [Skiathos, Greece, May 2001; Orlando, Florida, October 2001]), or a location of their choosing (the participant's home,  $n = 2$ ; the participant's office,  $n = 2$ ; through January 2002). Before the pilot study, the Institutional Review Board approved all procedures. A pilot study conducted with two early career consultants tested the utility of the interview protocol and led to improvements to the proposed procedures.

## Data Collection

An interview guide approach (Patton, 1990) was used to structure the interviews around SPSP elements. For each element, after the participants read the two-sided card containing a bullet-type description of a given SPSP element (these descriptions are available from the first author upon request), an open-ended probing format encouraged interpretations of their professional experiences, insights, and examples in relation to the specified SPSP element. The interviews ranged in length from 90 to 135 min with an average duration of 113 min. All interviews were videotaped and subsequently transcribed. Each interviewee was then contacted to verify the correctness of the raw data (i.e., verbatim transcript of the interview). Three participants returned feedback on their transcript and all their comments were integrated into the data set for the analysis.

## Data Analysis

In these linked studies, the content of verbatim transcripts from the videotaped interviews was analyzed (an average length of a transcript in 12-point font was 26.6 single-spaced pages with a range from 21 to 30). The first step of the analysis included reading the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data. Second, from each transcript the most representative statements were extracted and given a code; thus, creating meaning units. Next, within each SPSP element inductive content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used. In the comparing and contrasting procedure, higher levels of abstraction (i.e., meaning units, lower-order- and higher-order themes) were identified until the potential for reduction was exhausted. Each higher-level theme became more analytic and interpretive. The qualitative data analysis software (i.e., the Nonnumerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, & Theorizing [NUD\*IST] Vivo) was used to facilitate data reduction, retrieval, and analysis.

The second author served as an audit throughout the entire data analysis process and challenged the primary analyst's analytical decision-making where interpretive questions surfaced. This process continued until agreements on all analytical issues were negotiated. The two-person team approach was used to enhance validity of the current study. Further, a few techniques described by Patton (1990) were used and contextually grounded to further add to the meaningfulness of the results (Sparkes, 1998). These techniques included: (a) incorporating findings from a pilot study, (b) assuring appropriate training in qualitative research, and (c) providing thick description of the procedures and results.

## Results

The interpretive, inductive content analysis for both original and added SPSD elements yielded 2409 meaning units that were further grouped into 127 lower-order themes (LOTs) and 32 higher-order themes (HOTs). Figure 1 offers a summary of HOT's and LOT's and the reader will benefit from the actual language preserved from the interviews. The following paragraphs focus on: (a) essential narrative highlights that add to the theoretical descriptions of the SPSD heuristic (Poczwardowski et al., 1998) and the elements added to SPSD (presented above); and (b) data that contributed to the proposed revised heuristic (SPSD-R).

### (Original) SPSD Heuristic

**Professional Philosophy.** The consultants' exemplary meanings included: "philosophy and values underlie everything," "philosophy is linked to ethics," and "philosophy is multifaceted". Burt Giges reflected, "Absolutely the most important aspect. Compared to my philosophy and how I understand this person in their life, it pales by comparison and almost doesn't matter what technique I use." Within a clearly developmental approach (e.g., "I work for personal development, too, so performance enhancement only is shallow focus" [Ken Ravizza]), the consultants believed that "results are a bonus so we [my client and I] focus on process of performance" and "it is a kind of irony: to win an athlete needs to focus on process." Yet, while emphasizing the process, a clear and evident goal of consultation was to accomplish visible behavioral changes as explained by Bob Nideffer, "I think that's what the client wants because the client is problem-approach oriented. And they want to get from point A to point B as quickly and efficiently as they can." This concreteness in the consulting work was further illustrated by Keith Henschen who added, "I think my philosophy is really: I work to lose my job. I come to them or they come to me wanting some skills that I may be able to teach them."

**Professional Ethics.** The consultants emphasized its importance ("central," "huge role," "critical," and "essential") and pointed out the role ethics play in increasing effectiveness of SPSD through enhanced trust and improved overall professionalism. Bob Nideffer's emphasized the need to thoughtfully monitor ethical issues in applied work and offered a sobering perspective in the delicate nature of ethical issues: "I don't know how anybody feels that they have not violated ethics. Innocently, ignorantly, as well as willfully and maliciously, I think we end up violating ethics from time to time." 'Major Ethical Concerns and Issues' included confidentiality, boundaries in relationships, client welfare and interests, competence. In addition, 'Ethics in Performance Enhancement Differ from Traditional Psychology' through special ethical challenges such as "dual relationship and perspective on barter", "issues involving travel", and "some flexibility in applying APA ethical principles".

**Education and Training.** The consultants viewed 'Education as An Important Starting Point in Professional Development' (e.g., "education clarified my professional goals," "can fall back on theories to solve the puzzle [case]," "education determines professional philosophy and implementation style"). While addressing their knowledge limitations (i.e., as a generation, they received no specialized training in sport psychology), the interviewees used various resources in dealing

## **Professional Philosophy**

- Philosophy is Fundamental and Complex* (9/10)
  - Philosophy Underlies My Consulting (5/10)
  - Philosophy is Multifaceted (4/10)
  - Theoretical Paradigm Identified (7/10)
  - Behavior is Complex and Contextualized (6/10)
- Person's Growth Comes First and Leads to Performance Enhancement* (9/10)
  - To Enhance Performance I Develop the Whole Person (3/10)
  - Beyond Performance Focus I Use Growth Orientation (9/10)
  - Psychological Skills Are for Life (3/10)
- Emphasis on the Process and Concrete Behavior Change* (9/10)
  - I Focus on the Process (6/10)
  - Athlete and I Try to Accomplish Visible Behavioral Outcomes (6/10)
  - I Have Clear Behavioral Goals and Strategies JS (8/10)
- Client-Centeredness and Working Alliance* (10/10)
  - I Appreciate Person I Work With (6/10)
  - I Respect My Client's Needs and Work to Lose My Job (6/10)
  - I Believe in Working Together (7/10)
- Clients Have High Potential so I Teach and Stay in the Background* (8/10)
  - My Role is to Help and Teach (7/10)
  - I Stay in the Background (3/10)
  - People are Good and Have High Potential (3/10)

## **Professional Ethics**

- Ethics Are a Foundation to Effective Practice* (10/10)
  - Ethics are Central to SP Practice (9/10)
  - Ethics and Values Enhance SP Practice (4/10)
  - Draw on Multiple Resources to Effectively Manage Ethical Issues (10/10)
- Major Ethical Concerns and Issues* (10/10)
  - Confidentiality Is an Essential Aspect of Ethics (6/10)
  - Boundaries in Relationships (7/10)
  - Client Welfare and Interests are Primary Concerns (7/10)
  - Practice within Your Areas of Competence (3/10)
  - Ethics in Performance Enhancement Differ from Traditional Psychology (6/10)

## **Education and Training**

- Education Essential to Service Delivery* (10/10)
  - Education as An Important Starting Point in Professional Development (6/10)
  - Education Is a Foundation to My Practice (9/10)
- I Recognize My Limitations and I Learn from Various Sources* (10/10)
  - No Formal Sport Psychology Education (5/10)
  - I Am Aware of Professional Boundaries in My Competence (5/10)
  - Drawing on Sport Science and Psychology in My Practice (5/10)
  - Influence of Mentors (6/10)
  - I Continue to Learn From Various Sources (6/10)

## **Professional Experience**

- Experience is A Source of Professional Growth* (10/10)
  - Changes in Service Delivery with Experience (6/10)
  - Improvements in Service Delivery with Experience (7/10)
  - Learning from Others (5/10)
  - Learning from Doing Things on Your Own (8/10)
- Word of Caution (4/10)

## **Making Contact**

(continued)

**Figure 1** — Hierarchically organized lists of meaning units and lower-order and higher-order themes across SPSD heuristic (revised). Note: SPSD Element, *higher-order themes*, and lower-order themes (with number of consultants reporting each lower-order theme). 6/10 indicates that there is data from 6 participants (out of 10) to support a particular theme/finding.

- Variety of Ways to Make Contact (6/10)
- Structure to Making Contact and Gaining Entry (5/10)
- Trying to Sell Yourself Has Limitations* (7/10)
  - Marketing Strategies Problematic (5/10)
  - Word of Mouth is Best Referral Source (4/10)
- 1st Session is Critical to Gain Entry and Determine the Fit* (9/10)
  - 1st Session is Critical and Helps Determine the Fit (6/10)
  - During Making Contact You Test for the Fit (7/10)
- Need to Build Interest, Trust, Credibility, and Motivation* (8/10)
  - Their Interest and Trust and My Credibility Are Key Factors (6/10)
  - I Can Work Out Athlete Motivational Issues (4/10)
- Assessment**
  - Assessment is Complex and Continual Process that Requires Specialized Skills* (10/10)
  - Multiple Assessment Interest Areas (Check Points): Client and Context (10/10)
  - Assessment is Complex and Continual Process (7/10)
  - Combination of Interviews, Observation, and Psychometrics (9/10)
  - Good Skills, Comfort Level, and Valid Tools Needed (10/10)
  - Assessment is Educational for the Client (4/10)
  - Assessment Assists Other Elements of Service Delivery (7/10)
- Conceptualizing Athletes' Concerns and Potential Interventions**
  - Conceptualization is Challenging, Intriguing, and Multi-Layered* (10/10)
    - Defining the Issue is Exciting and Challenging (4/10)
    - Conceptualization is Consuming but Enjoyable (5/10)
    - Many Dimensions to the Issue (6/10)
    - Developing and Testing Hypotheses (6/10)
    - Presented Issue Might not be the Real Issue (4/10)
  - Confidence in Own Insights Grounded in Theory and Collaboration with Client* (9/10)
    - Confidence in Own Conceptualizing (5/10)
    - Using Theoretical Frameworks to Guide Conceptualization (5/10)
    - Checking Insights with Client (6/10)
  - Intervention Is Based on Conceptualization (6/10)
- The Range Type & Organization of Service**
  - Wide Organization of Service* (9/10)
    - Range of Service is Wide (5/10)
    - Examples of Organization (4/10)
  - Planning and Organizing Services is Dynamic* (10/10)
    - Planning Together with Client (5/10)
    - Design and Plan in the Context Starting with Assessment (8/10)
    - New Issues Continually Emerge (5/10)
- Program Implementation**
  - Implementation is Client-Centered and Assessment-Based* (8/10)
    - Intervention Based on Assessment (5/10)
    - Collaboration with Client on Implementation (7/10)
    - Make it Simple on the Outside (4/10)
    - Managing Client's Emotional Process (3/10)
  - Consulting Draws on Variety of Tools and Has an Art Component* (10/10)
    - Art in Consulting (6/10)
    - Use Variety of Tools (8/10)
    - Information Processing and Performing (5/10)
  - Implementation is Contextualized So I Use Adjustments* (7/10)
    - Implementation is a Function of Context (3/10)

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**Figure 1** — (continued)

- Adjusting Meeting Format and Consulting Style across Situations (6/10)
- Follow-up on Applying Behavioral Change (4/10)
- Managing the Self as an Intervention Instrument**
  - Intra- and Interpersonal Challenges in Self-Management* (10/10)
    - Performance Aspect in Consulting (7/10)
    - Relationship Issues Challenging (6/10)
    - Other Challenges (6/10)
  - Intra- and Interpersonal Self-Management Strategies* (10/10)
    - Outermost Importance (4/10)
    - Self-Awareness (7/10)
    - Peer Support and Consultation (7/10)
    - Knowing and Improving Self (6/10)
  - Coping Tools* (9/10)
    - Dealing with Fatigue and Managing Life Balance Issues (9/10)
    - Using Social Support (4/10)
    - Other (7/10)
- Program and Consultant Evaluation**
  - Triangulation of Evaluation Measures* (10/10)
    - Formal Assessing (5/10)
    - Visible Behavioral Change in the Client (8/10)
    - If Clients Come Back for More and Referrals (5/10)
    - Evaluation is an Ongoing Process (6/10)
  - Subjective Measures* (9/10)
    - Feedback from the Client (9/10)
    - Feeling and Intuitive Knowing (4/10)
    - Realistic and Humble in Evaluating Outcomes (7/10)
- Conclusions and Implications**
  - Growth and Improvement Includes Reflections and Drawing on Lessons Learned* (10/10)
    - Always Lessons to Get Better (8/10)
    - Informal Self-Reflections (6/10)
    - Formalized Tools for Reflection and Planning (5/10)
    - Involving Others in Drawing Lessons (5/10)
- Leaving the Setting**
  - Appreciate Need for Closure as Useful for Both Parties (7/10)
  - Difficult to Predict the Time of Closure (6/10)
  - Serve Client's Needs and Leave (4/10)
  - Relationship May Still Continue (7/10)
  - Follow-Up (7/10)
- Consultant-Client Relationship**
  - Working Alliance is a Foundation to Consulting Effectiveness* (10/10)
    - Trust is Essential to Good Relationship (7/10)
    - Working Relationship is a Foundation to My Work (10/10)
    - Deciding about Interpersonal Fit (4/10)
  - Relationships Need Continued Skilled Efforts* (8/10)
    - Relationships Need Understanding, Attending, and Nurturing (8/10)
    - Boundary Issues Recognized and Managed (5/10)
    - Some Relationships Last Years and Extend Consulting Issues (4/10)
  - Relationship is an Enjoyable Aspect of Consulting (6/10)
- The Consultant Variables**
  - Ability to Invest in Consultant-Client Relationship* (9/10)
    - Caring, Listening, and Liking Your Client (5/10)

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**Figure 1** — (continued)

- Interpersonal Style and Qualities that Are Easy to Relate To (6/10)
- Professional Skills and Abilities* (9/10)
  - Level of Comfort with Professional Skills and Defined Tasks (8/10)
  - Self-Reflection and Awareness (3/10)
  - Intellectual Ability and Creativity (6/10)
  - Reputation and Perceived Competence (3/10)
- Personal Qualities, Style, and Enjoyment* (8/10)
  - Your Unique Style, Personality, and Gender (6/10)
  - Enjoyment (4/10)
- The Client Variables**
  - Personality and Personal History (6/10)
  - Maturity, Age, and Expertise Level (5/10)
  - Ethnicity and Gender (10/10)
  - Intellectual Abilities and Learning Styles (6/10)
  - Invested and Willing to Work on Issues (8/10)
  - Types of Issues They Bring In (4/10)
  - High Degree of Disclosure and Honesty (3/10)
  - Interpersonal Fit (5/10)
  - Subculture of Sport (3/10)
- Immersion**
  - Immersion is Multifaceted* (6/10)
    - Lots of Face Time (6/10)
    - Observing Practice and Competition (4/10)
    - Traveling with Teams (4/10)
    - Immersion is a Desirable Tool in Consulting (7/10)
    - Other Immersion Tools (3/10)
  - Immersion Needs Time and May be Problematic* (7/10)
    - Immersion Can Be Problematic (5/10)
    - Immersion is Time Consuming (5/10)
- The Goodness of Fit**
  - You Can Help to Create Fit but Let Go if You Can't* (10/10)
    - Strategies to Create (10/10)
    - Fit May not Happen so Let Go (7/10)
    - Being Reflective and Realistic about the Fit (6/10)
  - Client and Consultant Variables Co-Determine* (9/10)
    - Fit in Personalities and Relationship with Client (9/10)
    - My Interests and Style Count (6/10)
    - Knowledge of Sport Is Helpful but Not Necessary (5/10)

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**Figure 1** — (continued)

with these issues: building on sport science and psychology, using lessons with their mentors, and constantly learning.

**Professional Experience.** Consultants reported that ‘Experience is A Source of Professional Growth’ and included extending services to new performance domains (e.g., business, arts), enhancing elements of practice (e.g., changing how notes kept, liberating from pressing self, and blending of different theoretical perspectives). Beyond a general sense of overall betterment, some improvements in service delivery were: quicker case conceptualization, better self-management (e.g., better handling of fatigue and sickness), increased effectiveness in solving ethical issues, developing contingency plans, and more comprehensive contracts. Reported lessons were learned in multiple interactions with others (coaches, athletes, performers, mentors) in different situations and contexts (practice, games, conferences, informal encounters). Four participants offered a ‘Word of Caution’ as “experience can lead to assumptions” and “more experience does not prevent from mistakes.”

**Making Contact.** Consultants reported several ways to make contact: requests from high schools, parents, and individuals through university, referrals from colleagues and coaches of the same and different sports, presentations during coaching clinics, and published work. The structure of making contact could involve meeting the coach before meeting the team, offering workshops as a form of soliciting the clients, studying the sport, and attempting to gain support from all levels of the team/organization. However, ‘Trying to Sell Yourself Has Limitations’ so “eventually, word of mouth has been the main source of referrals” (Gloria Balague). Importantly, the ‘first Session is Critical to Gain Entry and Determine the Fit’ and there is a need to excite the athlete, to be concrete, to empathize, and to help tangibly even during the very first encounter. Determining the potential fit includes elements such as finances, time, location, and occasional “trust tests” from coaches. Being patient and honest, and not imposing ideas and not promising too much were hints on how to gain entry in a rather quick, yet not rushed fashion.

**Assessment.** Assessment is ‘Complex and Continual Process that Requires Specialized Skills’ and addresses the client as a person, recognizes his or her relevant current experiences, and incorporates both the sport and nonsport contexts (e.g., athlete needs, values, beliefs, feelings and emotions, strengths, weaknesses, immediate goals, history and childhood, academics or work related issues, family issues, team issues, subculture of the sport, and potential clinical issues). Consultants reported that complexity of assessment reflects the dynamic nature of human behavior in an ever-changing context; thus, more information unfolds with time, growing consulting relationship, and the client’s new experiences. Further, consultants indicated combining (triangulating) different assessment techniques as standard practice, although opinions differed on the use of psychometric testing. The consultants argued that assessment is also an intervention in itself, occurs simultaneously with gaining entry, helps to build the relationship and is a communication tool, connects the intervention and conceptualization, and assists in progress evaluation. These findings supported the notion of SPSP element interrelation, which was classified as one of the underlying threads (meta-findings) in this study and will be presented later.

**Conceptualizing Athletes' Concerns and Potential Interventions.** Working on defining the problem is difficult and may require peer consultation in case formulation. Issue conceptualization involves both "what athletes do and do not talk about." The challenge arises when various issues are considered: multiple contexts (e.g., interpersonal, both sport and nonsport aspects), cognitive as well as emotional aspects, multilayered nature of the performance breakdown, current features of the behavior versus more persistent life patterns and values, the athlete's level of self-awareness and self-knowledge, and the consultant's knowledge of past (similar) cases. Although conceptualization is time consuming, it can be rewarding, especially when a consultant "gets to the real issue." Finally, 'Intervention Is Based on Conceptualization' reflects the rigor in the consultants' use of the psychology and sport knowledge developed over decades of practice. Although each consultant emphasized the uniqueness of each client, the same could not be said about performance issues. The issues might be the same or very similar, but they played out in different contexts: "Through years of experience, I've found a lot of issues are very similar. They just have different decorations" (Keith Henschen).

**Range, Type and Organization of Service.**

Examples of services included "assisting in arousal, emotion, and attention control," "goal setting," "general coping," "planning for recovery," "team building," "educating about sport psychology," and "working with the entire organization." A clear thread of being "more than a technician" was evident in that pretty much "everything but pathology" was a topic of consultation, including issues involving sexual orientation, family deaths, dating (romance), and wishing to quit a team. Depending on the consultant's educational background, the consultants used referrals to address clinical issues.. Consultants reported that 'Planning and Organizing Services [are] Dynamic' because sometimes "the athlete will have come up with a totally different issue, so it would be reacting to them on an ongoing basis to a number of things" (Kirsten Peterson) and also pays off with some types of clients, "I build systems, and if I leave, the system stays. And I think it's helped me with the Olympic Committee" (Dan Gould).

**Program Implementation.**

The consultants consistently spoke about designing and implementing their interventions based on the assessment. Further, the client-centeredness in implementation was reflected in collaborating with the clients (e.g., "it's a joint venture of two experts"); translating the complex knowledge of sport psychology into accessible language and techniques (e.g., "try not to make it too complex"); and assisting their clients in emotional management (e.g., "can use urgency as energy"). 'Consulting Draws on Variety of Tools and Has an Art Component' built on numerous meaning units such as "there is a lot of art to consulting," "both science and art," "I value and use intuition," and "implement in innovative way." The tools mentioned were humor, role playing, written notes or taped notes for clients, individualized handouts, modifications of breathing techniques, instilling hope, involving athlete in behavioral monitoring, crisis interventions, and supervising implementation of own program.

**Managing Self as an Intervention Instrument.** Delivery of sport psychology services is a challenge in itself and can be viewed as performance (e.g., “I perform every day I am with a client”, “I practice and use psychological skills myself”). Consultants reported an awareness of interpersonal issues in relationship power management; transference and countertransference (e.g., an athlete reminds the consultant of his or her daughter); focus on the client needs versus advancing one’s needs agenda (e.g., need to feel needed); and managing physical, sexual, and intellectual attraction to some clients. Other challenges of consulting work were overextension resulting from long work hours; need to maintain appropriate life balance; being released from working with a team; dealing with national governing bodies; being on the road; and, previously discussed, ethical issues. The consultants used different coping skills in the spirit of both protecting their own resources (personal and professional) and their effectiveness in serving their clients. These included, getting away from the competitive venue to rest and relax; using recovery time in tough situations (e.g., sleep); maintaining personal space, exercise, and good nutrition; and recreating (e.g., gardening, theater, music). Trusted groups, spouses, and families were the major sources of social support. Finally, other coping skills included not taking oneself too seriously, nonperfectionistic perspective in self-management, learning to enjoy stressful settings, deciding the amount of immersion in advance, and anticipating and planning for emotional reactions before the consulting session.

**Program and Consultant Evaluation.** Evaluation is an ongoing process rather than a one-time procedure upon the termination of the relationship. Using existing psychometric measures and the consultants’ own (specially designed) evaluation forms were reported. Other evaluation methods were visible behavioral changes in the client and included client solving the problem, body language and facial expressions, application of learned techniques, reduction in the number of sessions requested, client successes, coaches’ comments on the athlete-client, and relapses. Client request for additional consulting sessions (when new issues arise) and getting referrals were additional indicators of consulting effectiveness. Importantly, Dan Gould’s observation captured the essential meaning behind the realistic outlook on effectiveness of one’s work: “Sometimes you just don’t help them. Baseball hitters don’t get hits all the time. You didn’t click with them. You didn’t give them the right thing. I hate that but it comes with the territory.”

**Conclusions and Implications.** The consultants indicated that ‘Growth and Improvement Includes Reflections and Drawing on Lessons Learned’, and specifically, “every [client] gives me some lesson,” “learn lessons of other peers during conference,” “improving never ends,” “memory can fail so I write down my reflections,” and “I look for new things in other fields.” Kate Hays summarized these techniques in a very concise statement: “I think about it. I write about it. I talk with other people about it. I listen to other people about similar kinds of issues. I read about it.”

**Leaving the Setting.** In short, the consultants emphasized the need for a sense of closure that the client receives at this stage of the consulting relationship. Effective procedures of leaving the setting also serve the consultant (e.g., debriefing meeting with the national team to receive feedback). Often, the termination of the relationship

in some situations is difficult to predict: “can have from just one session to eight year long consulting,” and “client can leave in any imaginable way: after a heart breaking loss, or after winning the championship.” According to the consultants, a natural yet planned time for leaving the setting coincides with having served the client’s needs, but at times, the relationship may continue in the future in a renewed professional capacity. Some consultants reported staying in touch with some of their former clients as the relationship continued in a different fashion (e.g., “we stay friends”). These scenarios were distinguished from a follow-up that is a consulting technique within the original relationship (e.g., “I follow up for six months monthly,” “to ensure they continue the program,” “when you call, it’s a reminder”).

**Meta-Themes.** *Actualizing person-focused values* dealt with the consultants’ ongoing focus on their clients: their freedom, autonomy, and rationality in decisions and actions; respect for truth, privacy, and commitments; and concern for human dignity and equality. These values were reflected in the themes that emphasized: client personal growth, client-centeredness and working alliance, client welfare and interests, and ethics as a foundation in effective practice. To actualize these values, the consultants strived to be competent tools in the consulting process. They approached their services with caution, flexibility and creativity (as reflected in some of the themes; see Figure 1): recognizing their own limitations and learning from various sources, realizing there were always lessons to improve consulting effectiveness, and understanding that consulting draws on a variety of tools and has an art component. *Additional elements in effective sport psychology service delivery.* Another meta-finding indicated that the SPSPD heuristic warrants an expansion. For example, ‘Their Interest and Trust and My Credibility Are Key Factors’ (LOT) suggested that the personal characteristics and processes of both the client and consultant need further examination. Similarly (on the level of LOT’s), ‘I Believe in Working Together,’ ‘Checking Insights with Client,’ and ‘Planning Together with Client’ clearly indicated that a good working relationship is needed for successful service delivery. Finally, the notion of a good fit was shown in ‘First Session is Critical to Gain Entry and Determine the Fit’ (HOT).

## Newly Added Elements

**Consultant-Client Relationship.** An illustrative summary of this new SPSPD element through a reference to the art component in consulting follows:

What I create must have you [the client] in it. Otherwise I wouldn’t consider it that artistic in the consultant’s sense. My analogy may not be a good one because a painter might create something by himself or herself. But the consulting artist must evolve with the person they’re consulting with. So I am doing something to you but you’re the artist and I’m participating in my own creative way by giving you some components that you didn’t have. (Burt Giges)

‘Working Alliance is a Foundation to Consulting Effectiveness’ because the consultants “need to have mutual trust to be effective” (e.g., “relationship improves athlete disclosure of information.”) Furthermore, relationships need work: “expecting trust from start is a fantasy,” “understanding human differences helps building

relationship,” “they need to see that you care,” “it takes two to create consulting” and the consultants were also “aware of and handled attraction.” The long term nature of some if these commitments were emphasized: “I have lifelong relationships with some clients,” “we can be friends and associates,” and “I play roles in weddings and funerals”. Finally, the consultants talked about the fact that ‘Relationship is an Enjoyable Aspect of Consulting’ (“I enjoy the relationship and interactions” and “friendship with former clients are most rewarding”).

**The Consultant Variables.** The consultants emphasized their ‘Ability to Invest in Consultant-Client Relationship’ through empathetic interpersonal style, liking the client, and being easy to relate to. Other important qualities and skills are: “genuine interest in sport and competition,” “ability to observe and read people,” “awareness of own needs” “being aware of consultant and client factors,” “critical thinking in direct application,” and “sense of my creative abilities,” Importantly, as the nature of the sample indicates, “reputation helps get clients” and “one needs to be perceived as competent”. Unique professional style and enjoyment were also frequently emphasized: “the real secret is yourself,” “each of us brings unique style,” “I love every bit of being with clients,” and “have drive to do many things and enjoy them” Keith Henschen offered another insight that emphasized the importance of consultant variables:

I think it’s all in your personality. That’s the art. Almost any intelligent person can do the same things that I do. There’s no secrets in consulting. The art of how you apply the techniques and interventions. It’s not the amount of skills themselves. So, I just think that when you establish those relationships, you’re successful.

**The Client Variables.** In Figure 1, we listed important client variables as discussed by the consultants. One clear thread in reflecting on these client variables was their impact on the consulting process and effectiveness: “best work with smart athletes,” “more effective if they are ‘verbal’,” “cross-gender leads to fewer big ego issues,” “least effective with African-American females, which may be issue of perceived power,” “handle well men’s jokes as I am drawing on experiences with brothers,” and “ball players probably wouldn’t listen to a female.” Interestingly, there was a clearly articulated preference for working with motivated clients and clients with ‘High Degree of Disclosure and Honesty’. Regardless their preference, however, the consultants as a group reported that they could work out initial motivational issues (“if skepticism, I have to work harder” and “coach helps to sell sport psychology to the team”). Finally, the client variables alone do not determine the consulting relationship as the consultants are open to each new person they work with:

Every client is different. I never really go into the intervention with any pre-conceived notions that I know what they need or what their “problem” is. Even if I have a little bit of insight, I try to go in with a sort of “tabula rasa” and let them do the inscriptions and then I try to read them. (John Silva)

**Immersion.** The data indicated that the amount of face time (e.g., “being in locker room before and after the game,” “hanging out for one year”), observing

practice and competitions, and traveling with the teams were important immersion techniques. In addition, the consultants reported immersion as a desirable tool in their professional practice as captured by the following meaning units: “the greater involvement with the client, the more I like consulting,” “needed in long term consults,” “to understand and connect with clients,” “easier for athletes to set appointments,” “so they see you as a part of the team,” and “so you understand the system.” Some of the immersion tools identified for working with a client from a new sport or performance domain were: “reading,” “contacting people,” “trying the new sport,” “through watching a video,” “through a sport simulator,” and “through TV broadcasting.” A word of caution from Kate Hays, “That one [immersion] raises certainly a variety of the potential ethical issues that have to do with how one keeps the parameters straight of who one is, and how one is in relation to the particular performer.”

**The Goodness of Fit.** The fit was described on a number of dimensions: “[fit] if a team needs psychometrics and I can do that,” “create fit through responding to their needs,” “find situation that plays to my strengths,” “educate the athlete to create a better fit,” “dress to fit sport,” “knowing the sport is a better fit,” and “meet them at their vocabulary.” The consultants reported that “if no fit with me, I refer the client,” “lack of fit it’s nobody’s fault,” “no fit should not be your ego issue,” and “fit can depend on the amount of immersion.” ‘Client and Consultant Variables Co-Determine Fit’ is an additional example of interrelation of SPSP elements.

**Interrelation of SPSP elements.** As illustrated above and in the preceding themes describing both the original and newly added SPSP elements (e.g., ‘Assessment Assists Other Elements of Service Delivery,’ ‘Implementation is Client-Centered and Assessment-Based’, ‘Boundary Issues Recognized and Managed’), consultants’ repeating of some of the content across different questions was not redundant but was interpreted as evidence for interrelation of SPSP elements. Statements such as “and maybe this is more relevant to the earlier question” were common during the interviews. This interrelation was captured on all levels of data analysis (i.e., meaning units, LOT’s and HOT’s) and, as such, constituted an underlying thread (meta-theme). At the level of meaning units a few examples are: “education determines philosophy and implementation”, “clinical education very helpful in managing self”, “implementation is mixed with assessment and conceptualization,” “relationship improves athlete disclosure of information,” “handle yourself ethically to build trust,” and “immersion over years helps competence.” Relying on the most concrete level of the data (direct quotations), interrelation is evident in Ken Ravizza’s reflection (relevant SPSP elements were identified in the brackets):

I remember, working with water polo the first time [making contact]. I even told the coach, ‘I don’t know anything about water polo [professional experience; consultant variables]; you could get other people that know more about water polo [professional ethics/competence, the value of protecting the client interests].’ And it was interesting because, the more I was trying to get out of the job [managing self; leaving the setting], the more he wanted me.

## **Sport Psychology Service Delivery: Proposing a Revised Heuristic**

Based on in-depth interviews with ten accomplished consultants, two linked explorations were conducted: one to clarify and expand the original SPSP elements and the second to elaborate on the added elements. Previously, Van Raalte (2003) suggested usefulness of the original SPSP heuristic in consulting with elite athletes and Visek, Harris, and Blom (2009) used SPSP as one of starting points to develop their Youth Sport Consulting Model. In an effort to better represent the challenges of practice in sport psychology, this present study grounded the expanded features of the evolving SPSP heuristic in empirical and practice-based literature and provided qualitative data to support the new features. For example, the content of the themes in professional philosophy and the meta-theme of ‘actualizing person-focused values’ aligned with the model proposed by Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Ravizza (2004). Namely, the fundamental importance of professional philosophy, as shaping all aspects of applied work and its multilayered structure (i.e., personal core beliefs and values, theoretical paradigm, models of practice and the consultant roles, intervention goals, and intervention techniques) were supported by the data. The person-focused values as applied to all processes and phases in consulting and the thematic features of professional philosophy such as a belief that a person’s growth comes first, which next leads to performance enhancement, client-centeredness, and developing a working alliance, clearly indicated that consultants do address the whole person, not just their client performing roles, and were gauged as critical to overall consulting success. Similar qualitative support for the important guiding role of professional philosophy and a developmental view of the client was reported by Friesen and Orlick (2010) who interviewed four, as they called them, “holistic” sport psychology consultants. In addition, in the current study, participants also emphasized the process in their work while concurrently pursuing behavior change in clients (product). In their model of Professional Judgment and Decision Making, Martindale and Collins (2005) argued for the “intention to impact” (p. 308), which clearly echoes the process-outcome balance expressed collectively in our sample.

Each new SPSP element (i.e., consultant-client relationship, consultant variables, client variables, immersion, and the goodness of fit) was convincingly represented in the data (see Figure 1). In addition, interrelatedness was vividly present in the participants’ narratives exploring both the original heuristic and the newly added elements. Such interrelation is consistent with the literature indicating that expert consultants are known to be able to operate on a number of dimensions in a circular rather than linear fashion (Brown et al., 2011; Sheth, & Sobel, 2000). Consultants also showed cycles in their work (i.e., among assessment, conceptualization, implementation, evaluation, conclusions and implications), which further supports the interrelation of the elements within SPSP heuristic and is addressed in consulting literature (e.g., Brown et al., 2011). Taken together, these findings yielded a revised conceptualization for the sport psychology service delivery heuristic.

The revised SPSP heuristic (SPSP-R; Figure 2) consists of three fundamental factors: (a) the foundation of service, (b) the process and service, and (c) the working interpersonal alliance. The foundation of service compiles professional philosophy, professional ethics, and education, training and professional experience. There are three phases that organize the remaining elements within the process and service:

(i) entry and conceptualization with three defining elements: making contact, assessment, and conceptualizing athletes' concerns and potential interventions; (ii) implementation with three defining elements which are range, types, and organization of service; program implementation; and managing the self as an intervention instrument; and (iii) conclusion and termination, again with three defining elements: program and consultant evaluation; conclusions and implications; and leaving the setting. Working interpersonal alliance is a new fundamental factor that is being introduced to comprise three new elements: the consultant-client relationship, the consultant variables, and the client variables. Immersion and the goodness of fit, as two newly added factors, appear to underlie the other factors, phases, and elements of the SPSD-R. Finally, person-focused values as another underlying factor seemed to be interwoven into all structural elements of the revised heuristic. These three underlying factors together (i.e., person-focused values, immersion, and the goodness of fit) provide a dynamic, yet a solid and impact-focused structure to the entire consulting process.

The content and meaning of the originally formulated elements of the heuristic (Poczwadowski et al., 1998) did not change. Based on informal feedback from consultants, the element called "professional boundaries" is now independently represented by (a) professional philosophy, (b) professional ethics, (c) professional education, training, and experience. The bidirectional arrows indicate the interrelation of all elements in the heuristic. The art component of consulting work

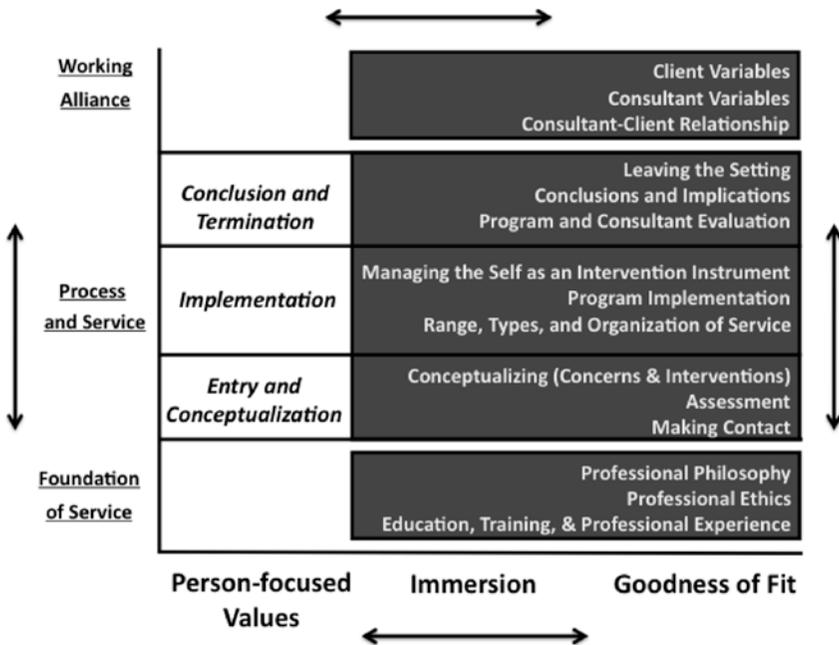


Figure 2 — Revised Sport Psychology Service Delivery (SPSD-R) heuristic.

(an evident theme in the present data) manifested in the consultants' ability to be creative and flexible and to adapt effectively to ever changing people and contexts (e.g., Halliwell, 1990, Ravizza, 1990, Salmela, 1989).

## Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

As scholars and practitioners, we believe that the realities of consulting work exceed the conceptual areas covered by SPSPD-R. Traditional views of what constitutes successful consulting (the present SPSPD-R is an example and was derived from narrative of established consultants a number of years ago) might not be an adequate conceptual framework to truly account for successful applied work, starting with the definition of successful consulting itself (Sheth & Sobel, 2000). Because of the age of the data, current issues that were not a focus of the interviews are worthy of discussion. For example, currently advances in issues of transference and countertransference (e.g., Winstone & Gervis, 2006) are unaccounted for in this study (although some consultants discussed the constructs under the management of self as the instrument of intervention). Further, mindfulness (Gardner & Moore, 2002) and multicultural issues involving the consultant's background (i.e., nationality, gender, type of training) are emerging topics of professional study and were not explicitly explored. Newly trained sport psychology consultants (e.g., 5–10 years into their careers) might offer rich perspectives on these and other elements of effective practice. Clearly, new and creative theoretical, empirical, and practical efforts are needed to represent and validate emerging factors contributing to the effectiveness of sport psychology service delivery (see Martindale & Collins, 2007, 2010).

The revised SPSPD heuristic (SPSPD-R) as a model guiding sport psychology interventions will contribute to the ongoing discussion of the competencies needed to confidently and effectively operate in the field of applied sport psychology. In this respect, SPSPD-R could also be of value in discussions on curriculum development. Although not exhaustive, SPSPD-R offers a systematic and strategic view on what consultants need to consider in both enhancing the quality of their service delivery and improving their own experiences as service providers. New elements in the SPSPD-R heuristic and the principle of interrelation account for additional factors that the consultants usually confront in their practice. Specifically, interpersonal variables, consultant variables, and client variables need to be factored into both reflective and objective evaluations of the effectiveness of sport psychology interventions. Given the importance of the working interpersonal alliance, more frequent examinations of interpersonal issues in consulting should be conducted. Taken together, continuing detailed descriptions and meaningful analyses of SPSPD-R and other sport psychology service delivery models are vital to the advancement of applied sport psychology.

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